



***Khrushchev's Cold War:
The Inside Story of an American Adversary***
Roundtable Review

Reviewed Works:

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Author's Response by Aleksandr Fursenko, Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg

It is an honour to receive reviews by such distinguished scholars of the Cold War. They are supportive and encouraging in spite of the fact there are sometimes serious disagreements. I can not pretend to answer all the questions posed by the reviewers and do not intend to reject the criticism. But I would like to clarify some points in my position.

First of all about access to archival materials. Owing to my long standing in the Russian academic community I really did get exclusive access to previously closed files. It was a big privilege and unique opportunity to look through earlier inaccessible documents. I tried as much as I could to open the materials not only for myself and my co-author but for other researchers as well. The main result of my efforts was the publication of Malin's notes and other documents in two volumes, *Archives of Kremlin. Presidium of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party*. The last

and third volume is almost finished and is to be published in the near future. Under the circumstances there are still some serious restrictions in the archives. In time they may be overcome but at the moment the situation does not look too promising.

Last year one of our most severe critics, Michael Dobbs of the *Washington Post* (see his review "Can't Verify, Can't Trust")¹ visited my Moscow apartment. He kindly brought a bottle of French wine. But in the whole apartment there was no bottle opener and the bottle is still laying unopened. We could not try it. In both cases it might be said we could not help it.

But seriously speaking, even such a celebrity in journalism as Michael Dobbs can not treat our book as "marred by sloppy research". As scholars and human beings we certainly were subjected to mistakes. We tried to do our best to present our readers with an adequate

Aleksandr Fursenko, a leading historian of the Cold War and one of Russia's top specialists on U.S. history, is the chairman of the historical section of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Fursenko graduated from the Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) State University in 1951, receiving his candidate's degree in 1954 (thesis topic "The Battle for the Division of China and the American 'Open Door' Doctrine in 1895-1900"). Fursenko is the co-author, with Tim Naftali, "One Hell of a Gamble": Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958-64 (1997) and Khrushchev's Cold War (2006). He has also written several major works on U.S. history in Russian, including The History of U.S. Foreign Policy and Diplomacy (1994), The Development of American Government (1992), and The Dictionary of American History (1997). He has also published on international oil politics at the end of the 19th and beginnings of the 20th centuries, most notably The Battle for Oil: The Economic and Politics of International Corporate Conflict over Petroleum, 1900-1930 (1990). He became a corresponding member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences in 1987, and a full academic in 1990. Since 1996 he has been a member of the Presidium of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

¹ [Ed. Note] Michael Dobbs, "Can't Verify, Can't Trust," *Washington Post*, 1 February 2007, C03. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/01/31/AR2007013102105.html>.

16 October 2007

narrative. But I have to confess that there is indeed a misattribution of N.S. Khrushchev's words to Anastas Mikoyan, as noted by Dobbs. The thing is that while Mikoyan's son Sergo had an exact copy of his father's dictation of 19 January 1963 I have had only brief notes of a highly classified document. Certainly this is not an excuse but a matter of fact and my own (not Tim Naftali's) fault.

Explaining this fault I must add that certain circumstances influenced my interpretation. The dictation of 19 January 1963 took place while Khrushchev was in power and Mikoyan addressed him with full respect, using Khrushchev's patronymic - Nikita Sergeevich. Later the situation changed. After Khrushchev's dismissal, he was mentioned in Mikoyan's dictations only as Chair of Government and his behavior was evaluated more critically. The late Oleg A. Troyanovskii, then Khrushchev's assistant on foreign policy who was present at Presidium during the Cuban Missile Crises, told me several years later that Mikoyan regularly opposed the military and even Khrushchev on questions relating to nuclear weapons in Cuba. The brief notes of A.K. Serov (a member of Malin's staff in the Central Committee General Department but not GRU head Ivan Serov, as V. Zubok supposed) at the 22 October Presidium meeting supported this. In his later dictation of 26 April 1974, a long time after Khrushchev's dismissal and death, Mikoyan described Presidium discussions on nuclear missiles in Cuba. He reported that Malinovskii "irresponsibly and unconditionally supported everything" that the Chair of Government was proposing. All this brings me to conclude that there was disagreement between Mikoyan and Khrushchev at the 22 October Presidium night session. However, I have to repeat there is no excuse for my misattribution.

At the same time I can not understand the brutal tone of Dobbs review. I do appreciate Kenneth Osgood's friendly words defending our research. I don't think we deserved so severe criticism because of the above mentioned misattribution, the inexact rank of the U-2 pilot shot down over Cuba or even mixing names of ships and Soviet subs around Cuba. I am looking forward to reading Dobbs's planned book on the Cuban Missile Crises and wish him success. I do hope he will himself discover some materials in the newly opened declassified U.S. files.

There are some more questions in the reviews which need to be answered. First of all they relate to the characteristics of Khrushchev. What kind of politician was he? According to my interpretation based on numerous documents, he was rather a pragmatist than an ideologue. A few years ago we attended a discussion in the Woodrow Wilson Center on the driving forces of the Soviet policy in Cold War. Then we thought it was mainly Realpolitik. We didn't change our mind after years of further study. In fact I have become even more convinced of this. In spite of all his references to Marxism-Leninism, Khrushchev was in fact pure pragmatist. He was surrounded by some dogmatists like influential Presidium member Michael Suslov. But Khrushchev himself acted in fact in a very practical way. His behavior might be often quite unreasonable from a common sense viewpoint, but that is another question.

16 October 2007

Professor Hope Harrison's long time interest to the Soviet-GDR relations deserves special attention. But to my mind she is not correct in her main concept that "the tail wagged the dog". The documents do not support this conclusion. Khrushchev had to take into consideration Walter Ulbricht's complaints and permanent demands but he made his own decisions and dictated them to the GDR leader. He was not so responsive to GDR pressure as Harrison contends. Presidium materials and accounts of the Khrushchev-Ulbricht meetings clearly prove this. Never having worked with GDR archival material, I have to say that from the Soviet corner, the picture is different than what Professor Harrison has presented.

After the publication of *One Hell of a Gamble* some critics thought we had to make wider general conclusions. The same criticism was repeated by our recent reviewers. The new book *Khrushchev's Cold War* in its character has a wider approach. But from the very beginning it was consciously decided that we were going to write a narrative. We thought the best possible narrative would show our readers the whole picture of events in full measure. I am still convinced this approach was quite justified. We widened our source base as a result of using material from British and French archives. Thanks to Tim Naftali's efforts we could include much new American material and present a considerably more complicated picture of events. Thanks to him we embraced even African affairs and more about Asia, particularly as a result of his search in Russian Ministry of Foreign affairs archives.

Our reviewers mentioned the book was well written. That is to my co-author's merit with his stylish English. We have spent almost 15 years working together. It has been an enjoyable cooperation. Sometimes on some problems we faced sharp debates but usually we could find appropriate solutions. It was a unique experience to cooperate with such a young capable scholar living in a remote part of the globe. Both of us were happy and full of enthusiasm opening new and earlier unknown pages of our countries history.

16 October 2007

Author's Response by Timothy Naftali, Director of the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum

I wish to thank Tom Maddux for organizing this roundtable and Campbell Craig, Hope Harrison, Ken Osgood and Vlad Zubok for participating. As my colleague and friend Aleksandr Fursenko has written, it is an honor that this group has taken the time to respond to our book, *Khrushchev's Cold War*. A scholar could not hope for a better response and from better experts.

I thought I'd use Campbell Craig's excellent comments about choices we made in the structure of the book to relate the story of how we got there. This book arose from our experience writing *One Hell of a Gamble*. We used many of the same techniques to structure the narrative, but there were some changes in how we researched our second book. For *Gamble*, the vast majority of the Russian research was done by Fursenko and was then shared with me in Russian note form or, in some cases, by means of Xeroxed documents. The subject areas of the second book were so immense that Fursenko and I shared duties for doing the Russian-language research. I did the bulk of the work in the Russian foreign ministry archives and did the analysis of the Malin notes and stenographic accounts. Fursenko focused primarily on materials from the Presidential archive and the intelligence community (GRU and FSB materials). The latter archives are unfortunately closed to foreigners and to most Russian scholars.

Timothy Naftali received his training at Yale University, Johns Hopkins University, and a Ph.D. in history from Harvard University in 1993. He has been at the University of Virginia and served as Director of the Presidential Recordings Program at the University of Virginia's Miller Center of Public Affairs where he directed the team of scholars and staff responsible for transcribing, annotating and interpreting hundreds of telephone conversations and meetings secretly recorded by Presidents Roosevelt, Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon in the White House. In October, 2006 Professor Naftali became the director of the Nixon Presidential Materials Project at the National Archive, and on July 11, 2007 became the first director of the new Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum in Yorba Linda, California, a nonpartisan federal institution. He is the author of numerous articles and of "One Hell of a Gamble": Khrushchev, Castro and Kennedy, 1958-1964 (with Aleksandr Fursenko) and Blind Spot: The Secret History of American Counterterrorism. Professor Naftali's latest book, George H.W. Bush, will be published in December as part of Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.'s American President Series. He is also working on an international study of terrorist organizations.

It was great fun to write *One Hell of a Gamble*. Nevertheless, the book raised as many questions for me as it solved. I was not satisfied that we had gotten to the bottom of why Khrushchev had put missiles in Cuba. I remember trying to sort out the Chinese angle—which really came from a few hints in KGB materials but nothing more—and choosing to use a metaphor from a favored movie of my childhood, *Murder on the Orient Express* (i.e. that there were many motives that led to the act). I also wondered to what extent the Cuban missile crisis was representative of superpower motives/behavior generally in the Cold War. I recalled the debate in U.S. foreign policy literature over its utility as a case study for generating grander theories or propositions. If epiphenomenal, then the crisis

16 October 2007

was of limited value as a case study. Finally, there was the question of the role of ideology. An older generation of Cold War scholars— Mel Leffler, John Lewis Gaddis, among others— had focused on the dichotomy between ideology and pragmatism. In the early post-Cold War the term “romanticism”—primarily because of the work of Vlad Zubok and Vladimir Pleshakov-- emerged as a smart variant on the role of ideas in motivating behavior, but it seemed to me that we were still stuck in a binary, either/or explanatory framework. What we needed was more data. Unlike students of U.S., British or French foreign policy, Sovietologists were not only dealing with a limited data set, but with a fundamentally different record-keeping culture that seemed to make answering those deeper questions more difficult.

This is the background to my reaction when Fursenko told me in 1997 that a collection of notes from Presidium meetings during the entire Khrushchev period existed. Made by Vladimir Malin, these handwritten notes recorded debates and decisions. Furthermore, there were even a smattering of meeting transcripts, Khrushchev employed a stenographer to record a meeting verbatim, usually whenever he was setting a new political line. The few Malin notes that Fursenko received for the Cuban crisis came to us late in the writing of *Gamble*, but were very significant. I recall getting them faxed to me in 1996 to decipher (with Fursenko's help) and then incorporate in the text. The notes we received for *Gamble* were accurate but incomplete as a record of Presidium discussions regarding the Cuban missile crisis. As we were to learn in doing the new book, there were equally significant notes from May and July 1962 that shed light on the decision and Khrushchev's whole approach to the issue. We would also learn that at the height of the crisis, there was briefly a second notetaker, Fursenko Serov.

Over the next few years Aleksandr Fursenko worked hard to get these notes processed (they were handwritten and had to be deciphered) and declassified for release in a Russian scholarly edition (which he edited and a team annotated) and for our use in the second book. This process took a lot longer than either of us anticipated in 1997. While doing that he undertook research in the Presidium archive and in the foreign ministry archive (on Egypt, primarily) and I traveled to Moscow to burrow through foreign ministry and party archival materials. Fursenko and I also added primary materials from British, French and U.S. archives. We also tried hard (and failed) to get materials from the Egyptians.

The receipt of the Malin notes determined the shape of the book. Initially we thought it would serve as a prequel to *Gamble*, providing cross-national narratives of Suez, the U-2 Affair and the Berlin crisis. Thus we might have more interesting things to say about where Cuba fit in the evolution of Moscow and Khrushchev's thinking about the world and raise some of the questions about perception and misperception that we had touched on in *Gamble*. Once the Notes came to us, it became clear to me that they told a larger and potentially more interesting story. Embedded in them was a different series of concerns than those that had typically appeared in Western narratives for those years. As Zubok noted, we noticed and then highlighted Khrushchev and the Presidium's concerns over Iraq in 1958. The notes also revealed a serious effort in 1959-60 to demilitarize the Cold War

16 October 2007

and the Soviet military's interest in arms control in 1955-1957. The notes not only filled in details about Khrushchev's struggle with Molotov over the direction of Soviet foreign policy in 1955, but showed how widespread support was for Khrushchev's assault on most aspects of Stalinist foreign policy. Finally, and most significantly, the Notes revealed the bargaining that lay behind Soviet foreign policymaking. Even after the failed coup by the old guard in 1957, Khrushchev was not alone at the top. Among his allies—chiefly, Anastas Mikoyan—Khrushchev faced significant opposition that influenced outcomes. The nature of the 1958 Berlin ultimatum, I believe, can only be understood in terms of internal Presidium politics.

In this way what was to be a series of international history case studies (Suez, etc.) with the Soviet side added evolved into a study of Khrushchev's foreign (and where relevant to international outcomes, domestic) policy making. We kept the Western and Third World perspectives in the book because Khrushchev could be reactive and was always making judgments about foreign intentions. We also kept them in because I believe that the internationalist framework reveals a lot about how international politics actually function. I'm not sure how one can evaluate a country's foreign policy without some analysis of its effect on others. Finally, I wanted to work through the effect that the new Russian data could have on the master narrative of the crisis-ridden middle period of the Cold War. But Craig is right in that this meant that the reader knew more than Khrushchev, or any of the actors, about what was going on. If this got too complicated, I can only blame myself. I wanted to give this structure a try and after several drafts (and a few cuts) this was the best I could do.

I want to differ a little with my friend Hope Harrison on the effect of this new data on understanding both the Berlin and Cuban crises. Regarding Berlin, the information bolsters and supplements Harrison's great work on the role that East Germany played in pushing for the Wall. Yet Fursenko's material from the Presidential archives also suggests that the decision still had to come from Moscow before the Wall could go up. More significantly, from the standpoint of international politics, the new information from the Notes shows clearly that the building of the Wall did not eliminate Khrushchev's obsession with Berlin. He expected a Berlin crisis in 1962 and this leads to the second big thing that we learned in the course of doing this book. In terms of resolving the question of why Khrushchev put the missiles in Cuba, I believe that we are closer to the mark now. In the Notes and in the foreign ministry archives (I found this material in the files relating to Berlin and Soviet-West German relations) there was some good evidence about how Khrushchev's ideas evolved in 1962. The missile decision, it seems, was more the product of balance of power considerations than of a perceived mortal threat to Fidel Castro's regime. Zubok's point about Khrushchev being impulsive is well taken, but his choices reflect a consistent world view, even in 1962. Indeed Khrushchev's "meniscus" speech in early January 1962 sets the tone for the entire year. Frustrated by the failure of his political offensive on Berlin 1961, Khrushchev laid out a strategy of using diplomatic and political pressure around the world to contain the United States. When Soviet provocations in Southeast Asia (indirectly, through the Chinese and the Pathet Lao) and in the Berlin

16 October 2007

corridor merely cause a firm US response, Khrushchev's frustration deepened. By the spring of 1962, the logic of Khrushchev's strategy and worldview compelled him to think of a short cut to increasing the balance of terror. Placing missiles in Cuba, imitating the U.S. nuclear ring around the Soviet empire, might just bring about U.S. respect for Soviet power. Once the Cubans accepted the missile deployment in late June 1962, Khrushchev appeared to believe that he finally had the political leverage to push for the international settlement he has been seeking since mid-1958. His foreign ministry then began what appeared to be preparation for a major demarche on removing NATO troops from West Berlin and Khrushchev himself told the outgoing West German ambassador Hans Kroll that he was planning a major world crisis in the fall in which Kennedy would either have to give in to his Berlin demands or face the likelihood of war. Khrushchev did not answer Kroll's question as to why he believed Kennedy would capitulate in November 1962 whereas he didn't in 1961, but it takes little imagination to see the Cuban missiles as the source of this confidence. As Khrushchev was hinting broadly to the West German ambassador about his plans, he was also telling high-level U.S. visitors that the USSR can now "swat your ass."

Cardinal Richelieu presented Louis XIII with a remarkable roadmap to achieving regional hegemony. Over a century later Talleyrand attempted the same for Napoleon. We can call them grand strategy though they are never quite as thoroughly worked out as one would expect. To a similar extent, Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger fashioned a grand strategy to deal with the reality of nuclear weapons and the consequences of the collapse of U.S. power in Southeast Asia. But did the Soviets have a grand strategy of any kind? I agree with Zubok that Khrushchev did not have a grand strategy. But the Notes reveal consistent streams of thought about international politics that give some coherence to Khrushchev's approach that has been underplayed up to now. Khrushchev understood that the Soviet Union was far weaker than the United States. And though he did not want to provoke or initiate a nuclear war, he was prepared to take risks to preserve the Soviet empire and extend Soviet influence. He sought to do that by building a minimal nuclear deterrent and seeking some superpower disarmament, shoring up the Soviet and Eastern European economies, making new allies abroad and pushing for a settlement of the remaining questions from World War II (above all, West Berlin and the viability of Soviet-dominated East Germany). These were core objectives from 1955 and they do not seem to have changed. What changed were his tactics.

We do not present an either/or proposition about ideology and pragmatism. Ideology influenced Khrushchev's mental filters but his Marxism-Leninism did not provide a plan of action. The Presidium discussions during and after Khrushchev and Bulganin visited South Asia in 1955 illustrate how the Kremlin in Khrushchev's era juggled ideology and pragmatism. "This creates a precedent," said the Stalinist Lazar Kaganovich in opposition to a 100 million dollar aid package for the feudal and anti-progressive government of Afghanistan. Mikoyan and Malenkov, however, carried the day by accepting Khrushchev and Bulganin's recommendation that it be done. "We should work to attract Afghanistan to our side," argued Malenkov. The debate is again neatly delineated in 1959 when Khrushchev found himself caught between the anti-Communist Gamal Abdel Nasser and

16 October 2007

the Iraqi nationalist 'Abd al-Karim Qasim. Khrushchev knew that Nasser was not a communist but he wanted to support him, so long as he stopped arresting Arab communists and ended his campaign against Soviet ally Iraq.

I agree with Ken Osgood that we did not handle well Michael Dobb's criticisms of our research methods. When the book was about to appear, Dobbs, formerly of the *Washington Post*, called to say that he was likely going to write "something about our book" [He did not mention a review] and that he had found some serious mistakes in both the new book and *Gamble*, and would we like to respond? Both Fursenko and I tried to help—indeed I sent Dobbs some information that I had to explain a few of our assertions that he called errors. He later changed his mind about those issues, or at least chose not to include them in his bill of particulars. Unfortunately for us he did find some significant mistakes. In his response to this roundtable, Fursenko has mentioned our misuse of Mikoyan's memo for the record of January 19, 1963. By far most of the documents we used for our reconstruction of the Cuban missile crisis were either seen by both of us or our narrative was based on Fursenko's very extensive Russian-language notes from the archives. The handling of the Mikoyan document was an exception to our collaboration on the Cuban missile crisis. Since that collaboration—what Fursenko calls our laboratory—has for too long had some mystery attached to it, this fact was not readily apparent. Meanwhile, I did a poor job on pinning down the movement of Soviet submarines during the crisis. In response to these errors, Fursenko and I made significant corrections to the paperback edition of our book. Relying on Svetlana V. Savranskaya's excellent work on the role of Soviet subs in the crisis, I tried to correct the sub story. I also rewrote the relevant section of chapter 19 where we drew from the Mikoyan memcon and Fursenko signed off on the changes. There is a note in the paperback edition about these changes and despite the fact that the note is not as detailed as I would have liked, it does make clear to readers that some important things have changed from the hardcover edition.

Although some of the evidence in our book comes from Fursenko's superb work in closed sources (the account of the interrogation of Francis Gary Powers, the Presidium material on the building of the Berlin wall) most of the book—and all of its main conclusions—can be checked. Fellow scholars may not agree with our conclusions but they can see how we reached them. The Malin Notes and stenographic accounts from the Khrushchev era are published and, thanks to the University of Virginia's Miller Center of Public Affairs, are available in English. I do not know the current status of the foreign ministry files that I consulted, but once I complete my move to California (I still commute back and forth to D.C.) I intend to deposit my own Moscow research materials in a library.

Again I am delighted for this opportunity to respond to this roundtable. In working through the materials, both Fursenko and I were struck by how often Khrushchev chose to alter the pace of international events. I have been in the history business long enough to have my doubts about the "Great Man" theory of history but there is little doubt in my mind that though the existence of superpower tension in the 1950s and 1960s was over determined because of developments in nuclear technology and the collapse of the colonial

Khrushchev's Cold War Roundtable

16 October 2007

world, the amplitude of those tensions reflected choices by the leaders themselves. And no one was more influential in this respect than Nikita Khrushchev.

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