



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

Reviewed Works:

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Khrushchev's Cold War Roundtable

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Introduction by Thomas Maddux, California State University, Northridge

In *The Rivals: America and Russia since World War II* (1971), Adam Ulam offered an early assessment on the Cold War that was particularly interesting on Nikita Khrushchev and his interaction with Presidents Dwight Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy. Under the pressure of domestic problems, most notably sluggish growth in the Soviet economy and failed agricultural programs, as well as difficulties within the Soviet Eastern bloc, especially with Hungary in 1956, Khrushchev, according to Ulam, developed an interest in a relaxation of Cold War tensions. The escalation of the nuclear arms race with the introduction of missile technology reinforced the Soviet leader's desire to curb the costs of Cold War competition. At the same time, however, Khrushchev came under increasing pressure from Mao Zedong in China to take a more aggressive stance against the United States and its allies particularly in non-Western areas where crumbling Western colonialism opened up a wide range of opportunities to promote nationalist movements, communist parties, and potential allies on the left.

Ulam suggested that Khrushchev failed to resolve these conflicting pressures. Internal problems with East Germany and the exodus of its most skilled residents through West Berlin prompted him to threaten Eisenhower and Kennedy with repeated ultimatums to get out of West Berlin. Opportunities to exploit Western crises at Suez in 1956, Iraq and Lebanon in 1958, the Congo, Cuba, and Laos in 1960, could not be resisted by the Kremlin since Khrushchev, even with his advocacy of peaceful coexistence, remained hopeful that communism would triumph in the long run. The rhetoric that Khrushchev used in these crises as well as the most serious confrontation in the Cuban missile crisis in 1962 made it very difficult for Western leaders to perceive a Soviet desire for *détente* and a relaxation of the tension, military costs, and nuclear risks in an escalating Cold War. Nevertheless, Ulam concluded that Khrushchev's desire for an accommodation with the U.S., perhaps an early version of *détente*, was real even if hopelessly entangled in Khrushchev's conflicting impulses, aggressive personality, and willingness to take considerable risks with his bluffs, threats, and ultimatums.

Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali have reopened debate on Khrushchev's objectives, strategy, and tactics. Unlike Ulam, they have had significant access to ex-Soviet archives including some intelligence files, Foreign Ministry records, minutes of the Presidium, and additional archival materials. They rely upon other assessments for Khrushchev's background such as William Taubman's recent biography of the Soviet leader. Fursenko and Naftali keep their focus on Khrushchev after he assumed a dominant position in the Presidium in 1955 and until his removal from office in October 1964. The reviewers are very impressed with Fursenko and Naftali's study which presents a narrative account that is difficult to put down and impossible to just skim. Several also note that the authors provide a very successful international history as they move back and forth in each of the major crises from what Khrushchev was discussing in the Presidium to Washington and the calculations of Eisenhower and Kennedy as they attempted to figure out what the leader of the Kremlin is up to in his latest demarche. Other leaders from both

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sides of the Cold War also enter the narrative at appropriate times. The reviewers do raise some important questions about the study from its sources to its general thesis on Khrushchev and the important issue of whether or not an opportunity for early détente was missed. The responses of Fursenko and Naftali also clarify a number of issues and lend additional insight into their perspectives on Khrushchev.

1.) The issue of privileged access to several of the Russian archives has raised some concerns that the reviewers address. Hope Harrison and Vladislav Zubok, who have the most familiarity with the Soviet sources, note that other scholars can not yet review these important Presidium records. Naftali indicates in his response that Malin's notes have been published in Russian and are available in English on the University of Virginia's Miller Center of Public Affairs website, and that he will deposit his notes on Soviet foreign ministry files at a library. The reviewers also point out that the authors do not discuss either the nature or potential problems with these sources or the relationship of their interpretation of Khrushchev with the existing historiography. A limited conclusion under the chapter title "Legacy" raises questions on the relationship of their views to other interpretations.

2.) The factors shaping Khrushchev's Cold War orientation and policies toward the U.S. interweave throughout the book and the reviewers' assessments. Fursenko and Naftali introduce at various points all of the considerations shaping Khrushchev's policies from his personality to domestic considerations, from realpolitik calculations of power and interest to management of the Soviet empire and relationships with major allies like China and new potential allies in the third world. One shaping factor, ideology, does emerge in Khrushchev's conversations and Presidium discussions when he and his colleagues reflect on the Cold War competition, the forces shaping U.S. policies, and longer term Soviet objectives. Khrushchev is depicted as having a faith in communism and commitment to its long term success at home and abroad. The relationship of these beliefs to specific policies such as support for Fidel Castro in Cuba or peaceful coexistence with the U.S. remains less developed.

3.) The reviewers are very impressed with Fursenko's and Naftali's skill at developing multiple perspectives on the Cold War crises within their narrative approach. They do note both agreement and disagreement with the author's interpretations. For example, in the discussion of the crisis in Berlin culminating in the construction of the Berlin Wall, the authors emphasize Khrushchev's initiative and decision-making and give considerably less weight to the pressure and policies of East German leader Walter Ulbricht as a factor forcing Khrushchev to act on Berlin.

4.) The Cuban missile crisis retains its fascination even though the authors have discussed the crisis in depth in *"One Hell of a Gamble": Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958-64* (1997). Several reviewers note that Fursenko and Naftali have shifted somewhat in their assessment of Khrushchev's objectives for moving missiles into Cuba. The earlier emphasis on Moscow's desire to defend Castro against the U.S. and keep him aligned with

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Moscow as opposed to China tends to give way to an opportunistic, gambling plan to undercut the U.S. advantage in intercontinental ballistic missiles and intermediate-range Jupiter missiles in Italy and Turkey. (pp. 430-431) As always Khrushchev discussed the Berlin issue and linked it to the missiles in the context of gaining leverage with Washington to compel a favorable settlement. (pp. 442-443) Khrushchev stands forth as the main catalyst for the crisis, leading the Presidium into the crisis without much debate, and rationalizing his retreat and removal of the missiles as a success.

5.) How well Khrushchev managed the various Cold War crises is a subject of some disagreement among the reviewers. Were the pressures on Khrushchev sufficient in situations such as East Germany and Berlin, Cuba, and the Suez Crisis, to warrant the risks that he took and the results that he achieved? Did Khrushchev perceive how far he could push the U.S. and its allies and recognize when to back off and accept a compromise? Or was Khrushchev too impetuous, erratic, and prone to brinkmanship time and time again to merit much credit as a Cold War crisis manager?

6.) One of the more tantalizing subjects raised by the authors focuses on their thesis that after the failure of the first Berlin Crisis in 1958, Khrushchev shifted more than 180 degrees to a pursuit of détente with the U.S. In chapter ten on "Grand Design," Fursenko and Naftali depict Khrushchev as significantly impressed with Eisenhower and the Camp David summit. In the context of trying to stimulate economic development to catch up with the West and achieve minimal nuclear deterrence vis-à-vis the U.S., Fursenko and Naftali present Khrushchev as preparing in 1960 for a general disarmament agreement that would reduce the military burdens on the Soviet Union and at the same time disarm U.S. missiles and military alliances and resolve the Berlin issue. In a fascinating discussion on the U-2 and Paris Summit Conference, "The Crash Heard Around the World," the authors suggest that considerations of credibility and prestige drove both Eisenhower and Khrushchev to prevent the U-2 incident from disrupting their mutual desire for a relaxation of the Cold War, if not the grand accommodation envisioned by Khrushchev. The narrative is so engaging in these chapters that it is easy to get excited about what might have happened if Eisenhower had stayed with his initial instinct to curb U-2 flights.

7.) Yet the Cold War by 1960 had clearly moved beyond a Eurocentric conflict that Washington and Moscow could manage. By the time of the Paris summit conference the Third World aggressively asserted itself onto the Soviet-U.S. agenda with bubbling crises in Laos, the Congo, Cuba, and South Vietnam. Fursenko and Naftali depict Khrushchev as having learned from his dealings with Iraq and Nasser in Egypt that he could assist efforts to weaken the West's presence in these areas, but prospects for an early emergence of communism remained remote as many communist party members in both Iraq and Egypt ended up either dead or in prison. With the exception of his enthusiasm for Castro, Khrushchev seemed to provide aid to nationalists such as Patrice Lumumba in the Congo and the Pathet Lao in Laos primarily from a realpolitik perspective of putting pressure on the U.S., maintaining the Soviet relationship with North Vietnam, and competing with China. In chapter 17 "Meniscus", the authors suggest that in the fall and winter of 1961-

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1962 Khrushchev stepped up a variety of pressures on the U.S. from a Pathet Lao offensive to take Nam Tha to support for a Cuban proposal to train Latin American insurgents for revolutionary activity with groups like the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. (428) Financial support for the latter proposal remained very limited under Khrushchev, and he continued to favor a gradual, political victory for Pathet Lao that would not precipitate a U.S. military intervention.

8.) A concluding issue is whether or not the U.S. and the Soviet Union missed a realistic opportunity for an accommodation, détente, or an end to the Cold War during Khrushchev's regime. Naftali and Fursenko suggest the real possibility of at least a relaxation of tension and reduction of the arms race up to the collapse of the Paris summit conference in 1960. In their conclusion they affirm the consistency of Khrushchev's objectives: "Khrushchev sought to avoid war with the United States while seeking American respect, to shore up existing socialist states while cultivating new allies abroad, and to provide a better standard of living to his own people while building a sufficient strategic force Khrushchev imagined a grand settlement with the United States that would demilitarize the Cold War, allowing him to redirect resources to the Soviet civilian economy and restrict the East-West struggle to the ideological and economic level, where he was convinced history would ultimately prove him right." (540-541) The authors, however, note the tremendous obstacles that the Soviet leader faced in the mistrust on both sides of the Cold War, the difficulties of the Berlin and German issue for both sides, and the challenges posed to Khrushchev by China and nationalistic challenges in the third world. Naftali and Fursenko do suggest that Khrushchev's pressure tactics and brinkmanship, and the U.S. reaction to this, seriously weakened any chances he had to achieve his objectives, and provided support for the view that he was a dangerous gambler who could not be trusted.

REVIEWERS:

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.

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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.

Campbell Craig received a BA from Carleton College, an MA from the University of Chicago, and a Ph.D. in U.S. Diplomatic History in 1995 from Ohio University. He is Professor of International Relations at the University of Southampton in England. He is author of *Destroying the Village: Eisenhower and Thermonuclear War* (Columbia University Press, 1998), and *Glimmer of a New Leviathan: Total War in the Realism of Niebuhr, Morgenthau and Waltz* (Columbia University Press, 2003). His forthcoming books include, with Sergey Radchenko, *The Atomic Bomb and the Origins of the Cold War* (Yale University Press, forthcoming early 2008), and, with Fredrik Logevall, *America and the Cold War: A New History* (Harvard University Press, forthcoming 2009).

Hope M. Harrison received her training at Harvard University and Columbia University with a Ph.D. in Political Science in 1993. She is Associate Professor of History and International Affairs, Department of History and the Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University. She is also Director, Institute for European, Russian & Eurasian Studies, at George Washington University, a Co-director of the George Washington Cold War Group, a Senior Research Fellow, Cold War International History Project, and a Research Fellow, National Security Archive. Her *Driving the Soviets Up the Wall: Soviet-East German Relations, 1953-1961* (Princeton University Press, 2003) received the 2004 Marshall Shulman prize for best book on international affairs/foreign policy of the former Soviet bloc, from the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies. She has published a number of essays in English and German on the Soviet Union and the Berlin crisis including "The Berlin Wall—an Icon of the Cold War Era?" in *On Both Sides of the Wall: Preserving Monuments and Sites of the Cold War Era*, eds., Leo Schmidt and Henriette von Preuschen (Berlin and Bonn: Westkreuz-Verlag, GmbH, 2005), 18-27; and "Driving the Soviets Up the Wall: A Superally, A Superpower, and the Berlin Wall, 1958-61," *Cold War History*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (August 2000).

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Kenneth Osgood received his B.A. from the University of Notre Dame and Ph.D. from the University of California at Santa Barbara, 2001. He joined Florida Atlantic University in 2001 and in 2006-2007 held the Mary Ball Washington Chair in American History at the University College Dublin. He is currently Associate Professor of History and Director of the Alan B. Larkin Symposium on the American Presidency at Florida Atlantic University. He is author of *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (University Press of Kansas, 2006) which received the Herbert Hoover Book Award; co-editor with Klaus Larres of *The Cold War after Stalin's Death: A Missed Opportunity for Peace?* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2006); and several articles including "Hearts and Minds: The Unconventional Cold War," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 4:2 (Spring 2002): 85-107, and "Form before Substance: Eisenhower's Commitment to Psychological Warfare and Negotiations with the Enemy," *Diplomatic History* 24:3 (Summer 2000): 405-433. His current research focuses on *The Enemy of My Enemy: The United States, Britain, and Iraq since 1958* and two edited volumes.

Vladislav Zubok earned his Ph.D. at the Institute for the U.S. and Canada Studies of the Academy of Sciences, Moscow. He is an Associate Professor at Temple University. His new book *A Failed Empire. The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* has just appeared, published by the University of North Carolina Press. His *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War. From Stalin to Khrushchev* (1996) with Constantin Pleshakov won the Lionel Gelber Prize as a best English-language book on international relations in 1996. He is also author of "Why Did the Cold War End in 1989? Explanations of 'The Turn'," in Odd Arne Westad (ed.), *Reviewing the Cold War: Approaches, Interpretations, Theory* (2000), "Khrushchev and Divided Germany, 1953-1964," in William Taubman, Sergei Khrushchev and Abbott Gleason (eds.), *Nikita Khrushchev: Fresh Perspectives on the Last Communist* (2000), and with Hope M. Harrison, "Khrushchev and Nuclear Weapons," in John Gaddis, et. al., eds., *Cold War Statesmen Confront the Bomb* (1999)

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