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"One Hell of a Gamble": Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958-1964—The Secret History of the Cuban Missile Crisis

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a remote possibility—strategic nuclear war.

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Fursenko, Aleksandr, and Timothy Naftali. *"One Hell of a Gamble": Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958-1964—The Secret History of the Cuban Missile Crisis*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1997. 420pp. \$27.50

No episode of the Cold War has captured more public interest than the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962. With the declassification of many of its documents in the past few years there has been a rush of interpretative work, documentary studies, and special conclaves of those who participated in the crisis. There appears to be a desire to gain perspective on the events of those October days in 1962 when the world stood on the edge of nuclear war. But there is also a desire to develop more sophisticated methods to deal with crises. Crisis management seeks to control the forces of emotion and irrationality within ruling circles. It is hoped that the process will offer political leadership on all sides the opportunity to consider alternatives to solely military means in their list of crisis-response options. This work is an excellent example of how a major crisis was handled without losing control.

"One Hell of a Gamble" is a unique work, because the authors were permitted access to the most secret documents from the highest levels of the Soviet government, such as the KGB (now SVR), GRU (the military intelligence

directorate), the foreign ministry, and the Presidium and Politburo, as well as other government sources. They also made use of the archives in the United States, France, and the Czech Republic. (The only critical materials still prohibited to researchers are the Cuban records.) Fursenko and Naftali have also included interviews of various officials from both the Soviet Union and the United States, such as the highly respected Soviet ambassador to Cuba, Aleksandr Alekseev; the former CIA station chief, William Caldwell; an unnamed GRU officer who was familiar with the affairs of Latin America; a longtime friend of the Cuban revolutionaries, Soviet intelligence officer Nikolai Leonov; special assistant to President John F. Kennedy, Ted Sorensen; and CIA Cuban specialist Samuel Halpern.

The authors have provided a classic intelligence primer on how the intent of one's actions is not always perceived as it was meant to be by those who are most affected. Kennedy had difficulty dealing with Nikita Khrushchev, because he had never dealt with anyone like him before in local, state, or national politics. What had worked for Kennedy in his rise to the presidency did not move Khrushchev, whose political axioms had been developed during the paranoia of Stalinism. This is an excellent presentation of the dynamics between these two leaders.

I admire Fursenko's and Naftali's portraits of Khrushchev and also, surprisingly, of General Issa Pliyev. Previous books had misled me about why Khrushchev selected him as Soviet commander in Cuba. The

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authors help the reader to appreciate Pliyev's character, military experience, ruthlessness, nerve, and closeness to the premier. Also, and although the question "Why did Khrushchev place those missiles in Cuba?" will probably always remain, this book offers a multicausal and reasonable explanation.

The strength of this book is in its presentation of the perspectives on the situation of both the United States and the Soviets. While the authors discuss the actions of the U.S. government, they also present in counterpoint the reactions of the Soviets. As the book moves from Moscow to Havana to Washington and back again, the reader is given an insight into how Kennedy, Fidel Castro, and Khrushchev worked with (and against) each other.

The authors provide as background to the missile crisis the Bay of Pigs episode and also the desire by both the Chinese and Soviet Union to befriend Castro, his brother Raul, and "Che" Guevara. The Cuban revolutionaries attempted to spread radical revolt throughout Central and South America and to manipulate the Soviets. The authors offer insight into the Soviet Union's sometimes clumsy, sometimes inspired handling of the Cuban movement. Significant attention is also given to the Vienna summit and its influence on the missile crisis.

However, there are some problems with this work. Although this text is well documented, the authors had the usual problem of accessing foreign documents: sources and their interpretations are left to other scholars to verify. Also, many questions have been left unanswered. For example, did the Soviet commander in Cuba receive blanket permission to use nuclear weapons during the crisis without

specific direction from Moscow? In a conference in Havana in 1992, General Anatoli I. Gribkov (one of the military planners of Operation ANADYR—Soviet code name for the delivery of nuclear missiles to Cuba) claimed that the local commander had been given that option. Yet in *Operation Anadyr* (by Gribkov and General William Y. Smith, 1994), Gribkov claims just the opposite. On the basis of a Soviet document written by Defense Minister Rodion Ya. Malinovsky (under Khrushchev's direction), Gribkov clearly asserts that nuclear control never left Moscow. Why is this point not clearly presented? One wonders if anything else is missing from this work. That is why this book, along with all the others, represents only a step toward continuous research. Responsible revisionism remains the essence of history.

I recommend this book to intelligence officers and to crisis managers as an apt case study in crisis management. It is a historical interpretation that challenges some widely held opinions on the missile crisis. While not definitive, this book belongs on the shelf of every military leader who deals with human behavior under pressure of chaos and uncertainty.

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Murphy, Edward F. *Korean War Heroes*.
Novato, Calif.: Presidio, 1997. 304pp.
\$16.95

Nearly a half century after the North
Korean People's Army invaded the