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THE ROLE OF NIKITA KHRUSHCHEV'S 1959 VISIT TO THE US IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOVIET-AMERICAN RELATIONS

by

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A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts
Department of History

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
June 1999
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1999
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to begin by thanking Dr. Lewis Carlson for making this work possible. He introduced me to the possibility of translating unique audiotaped interviews with Sergey Khrushchev, Alexey Adzhubey, Georgyi Grechko, Roald Sagdeyev, and other figures who were close to the Soviet Premier, Nikita Khrushchev. Dr. Carlson also showed me how the information contained in these interviews could become a basis for a Master thesis. I am also very grateful to Dr. Carlson for his extraordinary patience, support and guidance that were invaluable in my progress.

Secondly, I would like to thank WMU History Department for helping me overcome many bureaucratic obstacles and meet the necessary deadlines.

I also thank the members of my graduate committee, Dr. Lewis Carlson, Dr. Ross Gregory and Dr. James Ferreira for taking the time to review my work.

I am also very grateful to my father, Igor Puchkov, who agreed to share his insights into the era described in this paper from a standpoint of an average Soviet
citizen, and spent hours answering my questions.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my husband, Alexander, who patiently helped me struggle with the computer and format my paper, and without whom my thesis would have never met Graduate College guidelines.

Tatyana I. Puchkova
The end of the Cold War brought the uncertainty of the future relationship between the US and the countries of the former communist bloc. The major component of the prognosis is the analysis of the factors that determined the policies and the directions of the Cold War.

The visit of the Soviet Premier to the US marked a turning point in the Cold War mentality of the two nations. This paper will attempt to prove that the visit was a unique and revolutionary event in the course of the confrontation, and yet a logical continuation of earlier developments in the international arena.

This thesis is largely based on the unique interviews of people close to Khrushchev in the 1950s, who share their personal accounts of the personality of Soviet leader and its effect on the political realities of that time.
INTRODUCTION

In this day and age one would be hard pressed to disagree that the main political phenomenon of this century was the Cold War. Lasting for almost fifty years and to different degrees involving most countries of the world, it determined foreign and domestic policies, consumed enormous economic resources, created its own cultural stereotypes, and changed the balance of power in the world. In the short run it put the world on the brink of war, imposed new political orientations on the developing nations, produced the most dangerous concentration of the weapons of mass destruction humanity has ever seen and caused international paranoia of global magnitude. In the long run, it contributed to the downfall of one of the two leading political systems and ideologies, provoked a series of civil wars on several continents, opened new, challenging technological horizons for mankind, and most importantly, became a difficult lesson in preventing a global war and as such, revolutionized world political practices.
As the initiators and the main forces of the Cold War, the USA and the Soviet Union were primarily responsible for the policies, events and changes that occurred in the world during the last half century. The length of the Cold War by no means implies the consistency of these policies or of the relationship that existed between the key players. These policies and relationships made many unexpected and illogical turns due to various real or perceived factors. There were several unilateral and mutual attempts to revise the underlying factors of the Cold War and to improve the world climate. Eventually this would lead to the "global warming" and the end of the decades-long confrontation. But the first main thaw without a doubt occurred during the administration of American President Dwight Eisenhower, and Soviet Premier Nikita Khruschev.

The relationship and contribution of these two world leaders remains yet to be fully understood and evaluated. Technically speaking, their efforts to reach agreements on a number of crucially important issues of the Cold War failed. Most of the international problems they were trying to resolve remained a bone of contention long after they left the political arena. The arms race contin-
ued to dominate Soviet and American politics for several more decades. The two sides remained hostile to each other for thirty more years. Moreover, largely because of these efforts, Khrushchev himself was removed from power. Both he and Eisenhower left office disappointed with their inability to change the course of history.

And yet they did change history in ways that could seem strange and illogical at the time, inconsistent or insufficient later, but that turned out to be the main breakthrough in the US-USSR relations in the Cold War. The official visit of Khrushchev to the US in 1959 falls into this category of Cold War phenomena. The visit pioneered peaceful and even friendly negotiations between two antagonist ideological systems. The very fact that in 1959 Khrushchev, "Communist #1\(^1\) was invited by Eisenhower to come to the US to "meet America" was a revolutionary step that heralded the beginning of a new era in the World politics, even though it failed to secure immediate change. Under the circumstances both the invitation and its acceptance were courageous steps on part of Eisenhower and Khrushchev. One has to know the

\(^1\) An expression widely used in the Western press when referring to N. Khrushchev.
culture of suspicion, propaganda, fear and horrendous mutual misconceptions that existed between the two hostile systems in order to understand the value of Khrushchev’s visit to the USA in 1959. He was not only the first Soviet or Russian leader ever to visit the US, he was also the representative of the USA’s main ideological foe, the USSR, the very existence of which wasn’t recognized by the US for almost two decades.²

The role of this visit was multi-faceted. It destroyed many stereotypes that the two governments and nations had of each other, and it confirmed some of them. It gave the Soviet delegation and Khrushchev personally new technological, economic and even political ideas and it gave the US a rare glimpse into the Soviet mentality. More importantly, it provided a first real face-to-face conversation between the two mortal enemies. And it proved that enemies could converse. It also left no doubt on either side that they had to converse and that preserving peace was a task as urgently necessary as it was difficult to accomplish.

² The US recognized the Soviet State in 1933, 16 years after it appeared in 1917 and 11 years after the formation of the USSR in 1922.
At the same time, the visit couldn't have occurred without the political atmosphere being ripe for change. The gasp of fresh air the Soviet Union desperately needed after Stalin's death, the escalation of international tension over the division of Germany, the growing strength of both NATO and the Warsaw Pact, and the difficulty in financing the arms race for both sides were just some of the factors that made the visit necessary. And the personalities of the two elderly leaders, who fought in the World War II and who turned to be more insightful than most politicians at the time, made it possible.

This paper will attempt to prove that the visit of Nikita Khrushchev to the USA in 1959 was a unique and revolutionary event in the course of the Cold War, and yet a logical continuation of some earlier developments in Soviet-American relations. It will also show that the ideas and feelings born, observed, and discussed during the visit marked a significant change in the attitudes and interactions between socialist and capitalist worlds in general, and the USSR and the USA, in particular.
PART ONE

HISTORIC BAGGAGE
CHAPTER I

THE FREEZE

To understand the policies, actions and relationships of the Cold War at its peak, one has to understand the mindset of that time as well as the roots thereof. The Soviet State emerged in 1917 as a result of a major social revolution. One of the main beliefs of its philosophy was the inevitability of struggle between social classes and the consistent attempt of the "haves" to crush the "have nots" on a worldwide scale. Consequently, the main concern of the socialist state was repelling the attacks of the "world bourgeoisie" and consistently watching for treason and revolt both within and outside of the country.

Unfortunately, reality provided ample evidence for the validity of this view. Not only was the Soviet power immersed in a most bloody civil war, but the military in-

³ A cliché widely used in the Soviet Russia from 1917 until the late 1980s.
tervention of international Entente forces dissipated any doubts about the position of the Western countries.\textsuperscript{4} The response of the Soviet power was the establishment of a dictatorial regime that closed the country and invested enormous efforts into creating the powerful military and the major industries that would support it.

After Stalin assumed absolute power in the USSR in 1929 an atmosphere of overwhelming paranoia and suspicion shrouded the country. The "father of the nations"\textsuperscript{5} took several further crucial steps and added to the Marxist-Leninist doctrine his thesis that the development of socialism would be challenged by the continuously growing resistance of the opposition, the latter often elaborately concealed. This sincere belief provided the reason for mass repressions, and after becoming a doctrine, justified arbitrary abuses.

Tragically, history soon supported this view again. When in 1941 Germany attacked the Soviet Union, Stalin made the Soviet people forget Hitler’s socialist affilia-

\textsuperscript{4} The Entente forces intervened into Soviet Russia in 1918 in an attempt to crush the Socialist Revolution.

\textsuperscript{5} A cliché used in the USSR during Stalin’s rule to praise him for his supposedly wise ethnic policies within the Soviet Union.
tion and the signing of the 1939 Non-Aggression Pact. He presented Hitler's aggression to the nation as one more imperialist attempt to crush the young socialist state, and more than ever, the country had to unite and be on constant alert.

The war became an experience of tremendous importance for the Soviet Union. Among other things, it also had a significant effect on Soviet perceptions of the West. First of all, for the first time the USSR did not see Western countries as monolithic. Britain, France and the US fought against Germany on the side of the Soviet State. That in itself was a new and somewhat bewildering turn of events. Secondly, for the first time Soviet soldiers came into direct contact with the outside world. Many of them crossed half of Europe and saw both the differences and the similarities between the Soviet Union and other countries. They also met European and American soldiers and found humanity, normality, and even friendliness in many of them.

But the aftertaste of the war had many flavors. The Soviet nation was bitter about the perceived treason of the Western allies and their unwillingness sooner to open the second front at the time when Soviet soldiers were
dying in battles by thousands every day. By 1945 the USSR had lost over 20 million people in the war and more than twice that many in internal repressions. The nation was exhausted and more than anything needed peace and stability. The Soviets also believed in their blood-earned right to be major decision-makers in the post-war Europe. After freeing Eastern Europe from the Nazis and occupying Berlin, the USSR was determined to play a central role in the future of the region. At the same time, the Soviet government knew that the role would come at a high price. The announcement of the USA’s possession of the atomic bomb and the horrifying way in which the US proved it by destroying civilian targets in Japan sent a wave of shock throughout the world. This demonstration of might combined with the problems of power sharing in Europe and other historic reasons mentioned above, convinced the Soviet leaders and the nation that the West was going to use military strength as the main leverage in international politics. As far as the Soviet Union was concerned, it was facing the choice of becoming an even stronger military giant or perishing in the confron-

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6 Despite the promises of the Western Allies for an earlier invasion, the second front was opened in 1944.
Besides the objective political reasons, the personalities of the Soviet and the American leader played a great role in the unfolding policy of fear. Extremely suspicious in general, Stalin interpreted every occurrence as gravely dangerous and implemented the most inadequately serious measures to defend himself and the country.

Churchill’s speech in 1946 at Fulton, USA, calling upon the West to unite in resisting communism, was one of such occurrences. In the words of Khrushchev,

It was largely because of Churchill’s speech that Stalin exaggerated our enemies’ strength and their intention to unleash war on us. As a result he became obsessed with shoring up our defenses against the West. Stalin remembered that it was Churchill who, before World War II, called the Soviet Union a “colossus on feet of clay” and thus encouraged Hitler to hurl his troops against our country, promising him an easy victory...As far as Stalin was concerned, Churchill’s speech marked a return to prewar attitudes (Khrushchev 1974, 2:355).

The fact that Churchill chose his visit to the US to announce the necessity of resisting socialism, left no doubts in the Soviet Union that European countries were looking up to the US for leadership in the struggle with the USSR. After that speech the Soviet Union dropped all
pretense of friendship with the former allies.\textsuperscript{7} Stalin was convinced that the West was deliberately creating tensions and assumed that the war was inevitable. In addition, the personality and political line of the US President Truman contributed to the escalation of the confrontation. He was blatantly anti-communist and, unlike Roosevelt, inexperienced in diplomacy. He bluntly stated his uncompromising position towards the Soviet Union and seemed to be guided mostly by populist emotions, rather than serious long-term political calculations. The proclamation of the Truman doctrine of containment of communism "by the adroit and vigilant application of counter-force at a series of constantly shifting geographic points"\textsuperscript{8} and its practical application in the form of American involvement in the Korean war marked the beginning of open hostility between the two political systems.

The 1949 formation of NATO that included the US, Canada and ten Western European nations became a model

\textsuperscript{7} Sergey Khrushchev, interview by G. Colburn, 1991.

\textsuperscript{8} These are the words of US diplomat George Kennan who presented the idea of containment in the journal Foreign Affairs in 1947. That same year it was officially announced by Harry Truman.
for military alliances the US organized with Mediterranean nations in the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) and with the nations of Southeast Asia in SEATO. By the 1950s, the United States had a string of allies around the world that all but enclosed the USSR and its satellite nations.

However, the major concrete issue that stood between the West and the USSR at that time was the political status of post-war Germany. In accordance with the decision of the Potsdam Conference, the Allies temporarily divided Germany and Berlin, located in the Soviet zone, into four spheres of influence until the economy normalized and Germany became a viable independent country. The decision of the Western countries to unite their zones and introduce the new currency there in 1948 led to an unforeseen response of the Soviet Union. The calculation of the Western Allies' was that the USSR was too devastated in the war to get involved in another military confrontation over the division of Germany.9 At the same time, the Soviet Union well understood that by surrendering its positions in Germany to the West it would jeop-

ardize newly socialized countries in Eastern Europe and the whole idea of socialist victory in the world. The USSR responded with a blockade of the Western sectors of Berlin, which its former Allies masterfully defeated by carrying on superbly coordinated airlifts to the city. By now both sides had plenty of justifications for their actions and the reasons to accuse each other of violating international agreements.

The blockade didn't change the status quo. The two de-facto German states continued to exist, one capitalist that evolved out of the three Western zones, the other socialist that emerged out of the Socialist zone. By 1949 they respectively became the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic. In 1949 the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was formed and in 1955 FRG became a member. The Soviet Union saw the NATO military bloc and, especially, the inclusion of FRG in it as the direct violation of Potsdam agreement and one more indication of the militaristic intentions of the US-led

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11 On June 24, 1948 the USSR cut off all traffic into the Western sector of Berlin. The Western allies began an airlift of supplies to Berlin. On September 30, 1949 the USSR lifted the blockade.
By the 1950s, the tension became extreme. The Soviet Union felt especially vulnerable because it was surrounded with the Western military bases and because the USA seemed to be winning in the arms race. Soviet propaganda accused the West of inflaming military intentions and pushing the world into a new war.

In the US the situation was tragically similar. Since 1947 the Soviet Union also had an atomic bomb and was rapidly accumulating weapons. Soviet resolve in Germany and Eastern Europe made it clear to the Western powers that the USSR was preparing for the war as well. Paradoxically, as it turned out much later, neither government was planning to attack but was absolutely convinced that such was the intention of the other side. The McCarthy anti-communist paranoia and witch-hunt in the US created an atmosphere of hysteria comparable to that in the USSR. Rehearsing putting gas masks on and learning to blindly hate the other side became common features of life in both countries. The era of the Cold War unfolded and it was taking on the life of its own.

CHAPTER II

THE THAW

In 1953 Stalin died leaving not only the nation but also the world at the crossroads. The leader who had been largely responsible for the era of fear in the Soviet Union and who greatly contributed to international distrust, was now gone, leaving behind dangerous issues unresolved and paranoid stereotypes firmly implanted in the minds of both nations. Stalin’s legacy also included certain patterns of political behavior that proved hard to overcome. During the 24 years of his rule, the Soviet Union was completely closed from the rest of the world. With the exception of a small number of diplomats, few people ever entered or left the country. Stalin himself almost never traveled outside the Kremlin or his dacha. He never went abroad with the exception of the Tehran and Potsdam Conferences during the World War II. In general, he was very rarely seen by the public. He shrouded himself in a divine-like mystery, appearing on the Red
Square podium only twice a year during major national holidays. He stopped calling the Party Congresses and rarely made speeches. On the rare occasions when he did address the people, he spoke slowly with each word carrying the weight of the final and ultimate truth. He exterminated most of his former comrades in arms and created one of the strongest personality cults the world had ever known. He was seen as the "father," "the genius of all nations,"\(^\text{13}\) the savior of the nation from the Nazis, the national hero, and the ultimate authority on virtually everything. His death shook the Soviet people and concerned the rest of the world since it marked the end of an era. There could not have been another Stalin and so change was inevitable. Many Soviets felt that they had lost the ground under their feet, and it was this uncertainty that contributed to the grief over Stalin's death.\(^\text{14}\) For the world outside the USSR the question was what the new era would be like and who would be its central force.

\(^{13}\) Another cliché referring to Stalin widely used in the USSR.

\(^{14}\) I.Puchkov, Interview by T.Puchkova, 1998.
The Soviet face of this new force was as natural as it was different. The leader now was a short, fat, bold man who looked more comical than dignified, lived in a Moscow apartment rather than within Kremlin walls, loved to meet and chat with ordinary people, and made frequent and often unrehearsed passionate speeches wherever he went. He exemplified such a contrast to the stereotype of the leader that existed in the Soviet Union that the reaction of Soviet people to his personality and his policies was very complex and often contradictory. On the one hand, the nation could finally exhale after decades of overwhelming fear that filled each step and every moment. The unreachable genius was replaced with a "guy next door", accessible, simple and uncomplicated in his ways. His jokes and manners were easy to understand and identify with; his language, full of stylistic and grammatical mistakes, was the language of the majority of people in the country. He was a commoner who seemed to love and care about the concerns and well being of other commoners. He was both a peasant and a worker who used to work in the coal mines and who also knew how the crops were growing. He also seemed to exude honesty and sin-
cerity, to everyone's astonishment admitting his own mis-
takes as well as the wrongdoing of the Party. On the
other hand, the latter put many in the nation in a state
of shock. Despite the fear and repressions, the majority
of the population had no doubt that Stalin was the icon,
the National Hero who saved the country in the World War
II, "the genius of all the mankind." 15 The public expos-
ing of Stalin's personality cult by Khrushchev caused
in many pain and disbelief. 16 Those who were convinced
that Khrushchev was right about the past began to re-
evaluate their loyalties and convictions. The new open-
ness and self-criticism, as limited, as it seems now,
were both revolutionary and dangerous in the opinion of
some, and for most the change was as welcomed as it was
feared.

Unlike Stalin, Khrushchev traveled constantly both
within and outside the country. In the USSR he visited
plants and collective farms, military units and construc-
tion sites. Despite the fact that he also was a product

15 Another cliche referring to Stalin widely used in the
USSR.

16 At the XXth Party Congress in 1956 Khrushchev denounced
Stalin's personality cult and admitted that the Communist
Party made a number of mistakes under Stalin's rule.
of the Stalinist mold and time, and as such, had blood and dirt on his hands, he did have an internal sense of justice and fairness and sincerely wanted to improve the life of the nation. In his numerous travels and conversations he saw the necessity of major political and economic changes. He was a firm believer that socialism was the only fair and economically sound system and that it would inevitably replace capitalism around the world as a more progressive society. But Khrushchev also clearly saw the backwardness of the Soviet Union that, in many respects had to be overcome. The country with enormous territory, resources and human potential that emerged out of the World War II victorious, had inadequate housing, medical care, infrastructure and service sector. It had a lower standard of living than recently defeated Germany, and much lower than the Soviets' main enemy, the United States.

To overcome its ills and to fulfill its historic obligation of leading the world to communism, Khrushchev believed the Soviet Union had two main goals. One was the strengthening of its position in the world and ensur-

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ing the impregnability of its military defenses. This goal was a Damoclean sword for the USSR. Surrounded by the US military bases it was easily reachable for the American medium-range missiles and strategic aviation based there. At the same time the Soviet Union had no way of surrounding the United States with the missiles and did not have missiles capable of crossing the Atlantic. Thus, not only the position of the Soviet State was extremely vulnerable and humiliating, but also it was diminishing its power of making and enforcing political decisions in the international arena. The other goal was rapidly to develop the industrial, agricultural and service sectors of the Soviet economy, making it the model society a socialist state was meant to be. The striving towards these goals had an inherent economic contradiction.

Inevitably, the economy of any country would be forced to pursue one of these goals at the expense of other. The armaments put a great strain on the United States and other Western powers. However, the economy of the Soviet Union that laid in ruins after the war, whose

\[18\] N. Khrushchev, 1974, 11.
labor force was lost in battle and whose technology was still lagging behind the West, simply could not handle the expense of both reconstructing the economy and keeping pace with the arms race. The idea of restraining and reshaping the latter began to loom on the horizon.
Despite his often caricature image that existed inside and outside the USSR, Khrushchev was not just an impulsive fool who made serious decisions on a whim and whose mood swings determined his policies. Lacking experience and knowledge in many fields, including international politics, he had intuition that often made him more insightful than most economic, political and military leaders around him. He was criticized by many in the Party leadership for his denunciation of the Stalin's cult that was believed to split the unity of the Party and discredit it before the nation, his attempt to reorganize the economy by giving more decision-making power to regional authorities, his liberalism that supposedly led to the Hungarian revolt in 1956, and the forced resignation of Marshall Zhukov, who was most beloved by the nation and the army.\(^\text{19}\) Khrushchev was well aware that

\(^{19}\) Zhukov, the leading Soviet commander of the WWII, became a member of the Presidium in 1957. His immense popularity in the military and his assumption of too much power led his colleagues to believe that he was planning a coup d'etat. He was removed from the Presidium that same year.
the introduction of the reforms put him on very thin ice. But his intuition was telling him that the change was absolutely necessary if the Soviet Union and world socialism wanted to survive and win. Just as he realized in domestic policy that he had to end unproductive slave labor, in international politics he realized that accumulating traditional weapons in large quantities was hampering the country's development and setting it further back.

He, of course, had no doubts that the USSR had to be militarily invincible, but he was determined to accomplish it by different means. Khrushchev was certain that in case of another world war the traditional naval, air, and surface forces would be almost useless. He vividly remembered a major strategic mistake Stalin made by underestimating the crucial role of aircraft and submarines in the World War II when he counted mostly on the navy. Despite his limited understanding of many military technicalities, Khrushchev understood the trends of future military developments. In general, one of his main mer-

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21 N. Khrushchev, 1974, 19-34.
its as a political leader was having a vision and approaching all issues from a broad futuristic perspective. Even though this often led him to utopian plans and mistakes in the short run, it produced many significant initiatives and political breakthroughs, and changed history in the long run. He came to believe that the Soviet Union had to concentrate on the development of both tactical and strategic missiles that within seconds would be able to reach any part of the Globe. In his view, once the Soviet Union had a missile arsenal, it would not need most conventional weapons and a large army that would become obsolete.\(^{22}\)

It was these efforts to create a missile force that the West always threw in Khrushchev's face as proof of Soviet hypocrisy when he talked about disarmament. However, Khrushchev believed that the Soviet Union needed its missile arsenal in order to prevent the next World War. The Soviet military at that time admitted that if America attacked the Soviet bloc, the USSR could respond in Europe, but the US itself would not be harmed. Therefore, Khrushchev was sure that once the Soviet Union developed its own

\(^{22}\) Georgiy Grechko, Roald Sagdeyev, Interview by G. Colburn, 1991.
Intercontinental missiles and the US didn’t feel secure anymore, America would be much more careful and cautious deciding whether or not to start a war. This approach is one more proof of the tragic political paradox of that time – the unshakable assumption of both the USA and the USSR that sooner or later the other side would certainly initiate a war.

This need to get rid of the haunting Stalinist past and build socialism with a more human face, to improve the Soviet economy and to secure world peace that would allow socialism to prosper and prove its worth, made Khrushchev realize the urgent need of peaceful coexistence with the West. He was determined to prevent a new war and believed that any means that would accomplish that were appropriate. He was ready to apply political pressure in Berlin, confuse, threaten, or politically bribe both the foes and allies when necessary, and, most importantly, to negotiate, to open a dialog with the enemy, all of which comprised a revolutionary approach in the history of the Cold War. It is this readiness to mix and match any means necessary that provides a key to his often contradictory, passionate, aggressive, and seemingly bizarre behavior with the Western counterparts that
so often confused and aggravated them.

Khrushchev's political credo became a double-edge sword doomed to undercut the interests of different political groups both inside and outside the USSR. His simultaneous attempts to build up Soviet rocketry and to soften the international atmosphere through negotiation were an extraordinary complex balancing act that, by definition, could not completely satisfy either political force. In the West his talks about peaceful co-existence were seen as a political maneuver that would undermine American state of alert and give the Soviet Union more time to prepare for war. At home his policy alienated the hard-liners and the military. The majority in Soviet Armed Forces that remained enormous after the end of the World War II were facing major cuts in staff and expenditures with very unclear prospects about their future status, role and employment. At the same time the military staff involved in constructing a missile arsenal were eager to test it and saw the idea of promoting peace as undermining their very reason for existence.23 The hard-liners, who, as mentioned earlier, blamed Khrushchev for previous Party-discrediting policies, considered that

the idea of negotiating with the West was as ridiculous as it was criminal. In their view the West would certainly deceive the USSR, which would weaken the Soviet status in the eyes of both its friends and its enemies, loose its grip on the socialist and developing countries, and make it vulnerable. Moreover, it would shake the prestige of the Party and socialism in general within the nation, exhibiting its economic and political weaknesses.

However, the need for major changes in international situation was apparent in the US as well. Though with opposition, internal contradiction, and inconsistency, the idea of co-existence was working its way in the US as it was in the Soviet Union. When in July 1955 the leaders of the US, USSR, Britain, and France met in Geneva for the first time since the end of the war, the atmosphere of peaceful negotiation raised international hopes. Even though the Geneva summit took place only months after the acceptance of FRG into NATO and the formation of the Warsaw Pact, and even though it didn’t produce resolution to the German or any other major touchy issue that existed among the four powers, the conference was viewed as a success. The world began to talk about "the spirit of Geneva" that instilled hope in achieving political re-
sults by means of peaceful negotiations.

It was in Geneva that President Eisenhower and Nikita Khrushchev talked for the first time, although Khrushchev had seen Eisenhower at the Victory parade in Moscow in June 1945 before both of them became national leaders. Later, the Soviet Premier recalled that this first positive impression of Eisenhower never changed, despite all the tensions and incidents that happened between the two countries later.

President Dwight Eisenhower indeed deserves much credit for the turn in Cold War thinking. It is remarkable that Eisenhower, a professional military man, was one of the first politicians who not only realized the burning need to secure peace, but had the vision and courage to try unpopular and unprecedented ways of accomplishing it. In this respect, Eisenhower, like Khrushchev, was ready not only to apply military pressure, but also to find venues of cooperation through open dialog in order to achieve a larger goal. Like Khrushchev, he also felt, more intuitively than rationally, that there had to be ways of talking to the other side and finding compromises, and that one of the main obstacles was lack of information, and, consequently, understanding of each
The records of events that took place in the US and Soviet leadership in the 1950s make clear how strikingly similar the problems of understanding the opposite side were. Despite the efforts of their respective intelligence, both the US and the Soviet Union knew surprisingly little of each other’s mentality, culture, and internal balance of forces, and more often than not interpreted the information incorrectly. It was largely these distortions, combined with the long-established stereotypes and habitual reactions to any action or idea of the other side, that brought the world so close to a global war. The immense historical contribution of both Khrushchev and Eisenhower was to be among the first to understand this and to attempt to change the pattern despite the odds against them and at the cost of possibly loosing power and the trust of their followers. Such was the political atmosphere that preceded Khrushchev’s visit to the USA.

The political changes, without a doubt, had certain economic stimuli for both sides. As mentioned earlier, the financial pressures of the arms race were enormous. Besides, the economy of each country had to support po-
itical statements with practical actions. That led to economic boycotts and an embargo at the time when America and the USSR needed active trade to compensate for the costs of the Cold War.\textsuperscript{24} It also prevented the two world giants from cooperating in the field of space exploration as well as in almost any other area of science. The latter possibly slowed down the advancement of military technology, completing the vicious circle. Ironically, the two most powerful nations in the world found themselves hostages of their own policies towards each other, draining their own resources and dragging the rest of the world into the abyss.

At the same time, both the US and the USSR well realized the benefits of economic and cultural cooperation, and in the “spirit of Geneva” made remarkable attempts to enhance it. After 1955 America was flooded with different kinds of Soviet delegations. It was Khrushchev’s personal initiative to send to the US Soviet doctors, agronomists, builders, architects and actors.

As a practical economist Khrushchev was well aware of the fact that the USSR lagged behind the US in many areas. By

\textsuperscript{24} The US boycotted Soviet goods and imposed an embargo on trade with the USSR (Khrushchev 1974, 369).
exchanging specialists he was hoping to get tremendous benefits for the Soviet economy and to improve the political climate in the meantime.\(^{25}\)

One of Khrushchev’s merits was his diverse personal experience in the most practical matters of industry and agriculture. For instance, in 1934 he worked at the construction of the Moscow subway where several American engineers worked as consultants. It was then he learned to value American engineering expertise and years later encouraged engineering exchanges between the two countries. When in 1958 the World Industrial Exhibition started its work in Brussels, hundreds of Soviet engineers, economists and administrators were sent there on Khrushchev’s personal initiative.

Several critical exchanges between the two countries occurred in 1959. The most significant one was the American National Exhibition that took place in July in Moscow. The Exhibition was opened by Vice-President Nixon, and displayed a large variety of American consumer goods. Despite the image Khrushchev created in his memoirs, the exhibition had a profound effect on the Soviet public and possibly on Khrushchev himself. That was the

first time an average Soviet person saw, in miniature, the American life-style. The people, who lived in primitive communal apartments, never owned a car and couldn’t even imagine that a car could be any color other than black, saw American kitchen gadgets and household appliances, gorgeous cars and neon lights of billboards, and most importantly, were told that every American family could enjoy them. Considering the interest of Khrushchev in raising the consumer living standard, his technical inclination and practical approach to economic matters, it is likely that Khrushchev saw in the exhibition one more proof of the Soviet inferiority in consumer economy and the need for cooperation with America. Perhaps, it is this feeling of economic inferiority combined with immense political pride for other socialist advancements, that made him passionately challenge Nixon during the famous “kitchen debate.”

The other important exchange took place in the spring of 1959 when a delegation of American industrial-

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26 In the section of the exhibition that imitated an average American kitchen Nixon and Khrushchev engaged in a heated debate. The argument started with the usefulness of American kitchen appliances and proceeded to the dispute of the different roles of women in the USA and the USSR.
ists came to tour shipbuilding industries of the USSR. When First Deputy Premier Kozlov with a group of Soviet engineers went to the USA on a reciprocal visit in June, he was asked to deliver a message to Nikita Khrushchev from President Eisenhower that as it turned out, contained the invitation for the Soviet Premier to pay a friendly visit to the USA. The reaction to the invitation and the preparations for the visit are perfect illustrations of the concerns and misconceptions of the Cold War at its peak.
PART TWO

THE VISIT
THE ISSUES

The invitation came as a complete surprise for Khrushchev and the Soviet leadership. In his own admission, Khrushchev believed he had no reason ever to expect such an invitation since the relations of both sides had been extremely strained and America was boycotting the Soviet Union politically and economically. He and the leadership were now torn between several explanations of the change. One was the possible shift in the US public opinion that pushed the American President to improve relations with the USSR. The second was that the US was preparing a set up for the Soviet leader in order to somehow compromise or humiliate him in America. Another possibility was a new political game that the West was playing, the exact goals and methods of which were unclear. The idea that, like Khrushchev, the President also could be looking for the ways of cutting military spending and preventing a war was inconceivable in the USSR in 1959. The obscurity of the US motivations for
the visit led Khrushchev and his Party colleagues to have mixed feelings. On the one hand, he was extremely proud of the invitation. The fact that the President of the richest capitalist country in the world was inviting him, a son of uneducated peasant and the leader of a socialist state, to come on an official visit to the US, was a sign of the highest respect and recognition of him personally and the socialist world in general. It convinced him even more that Soviet Union had turned from a country that had not been even recognized by the West for years into a leading world power whose role would continue to increase.27 On the other hand, he was very uneasy and even afraid of the trip. This fear was twofold. Part of it was his uncertainty if such a half-literate common guy as he would be able to deal with the spoiled and polished political elite of the West without making a fool of himself.28 This was especially worrying the Soviet Premier in the light of the enormous international attention the visit would undoubtedly attract. To an extent it was the legacy of Stalin's personality cult that was responsible

27 A. Adzhubey, Litsom k Litsu (Moscow: Izdatelstvo Polticheskoy Literatury, 1960), 10-18.

for this concern. Stalin used to keep a monopoly on the international politics issues, not letting even his closest advisers to get involved. He often repeated to the rest in the Soviet leadership that without him they would never be able to stand up to the imperialist forces, that they would instantly get confused and wouldn’t be able to defend their land. Even though by 1959 Khrushchev had traveled to a number of Asian countries and to Britain, it was the pending visit to the US that made him nervous of Stalin’s prediction. The other worry was the possibility of a provocation on the part of the US and Soviet helplessness to prevent it because of the lack of information.

One example illustrates the general level of distrust, fear and misinformation especially well. The preliminary schedule of the visit that was sent to Khrushchev from the White House mentioned that for several days the two leaders would conduct one-on-one negotiations at Camp David. This caused confusion and chaos in the Soviet leadership. Incredibly, no one in the Kremlin, the Ministry of Defense, Intelligence Service and even the

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29 N. Khrushchev, 1974, 375.
Soviet Embassy in Washington knew what Camp David was. Since the word "camp" in the Soviet Union was associated with either a military station or a forced labor camp, Khrushchev and his advisors feared it could be a dump that was chosen to humiliate the Soviet delegation. It took a special effort of the Ministry of International to clarify the situation. All in all, the Soviet side made many inquiries and demands to ensure that Nikita Khrushchev would be received with respect and all official honors.  

The most important concerns both the US and the USSR had, however, were the issues to be discussed. Even though the visit had no specific official goal besides seeing the USA, both Eisenhower and Khrushchev were planning to use the opportunity to discuss a number of problems one-on-one. It was especially important in preparation for the new summit between the US, USSR, France and Britain scheduled for the following year in Paris.  

Remarkably, the approaches of the two leaders to the main political issues had many more similarities than it

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30 N. Khrushchev, 1974, 372.

31 The summit of Britain, France, the US and the USSR was planned for May, 1960.
was commonly believed. One such issue was disarmament. The idea of disarmament was raised on the international level years before the appearance there of Eisenhower and Khrushchev. The Soviet Union was the first country to propose general and complete disarmament before the League of Nations in the 1920s. However, even in the USSR the idea was generally viewed by specialists as merely a propagandist trick, and in fact, was one. But in the late 1950s it was beginning to seem more and more appealing to both Khrushchev and Eisenhower. The question was how to accomplish it without being cheated or losing prestige by "giving in" to the enemy. Like most political issues of the time, ultimately, the main problem was that of trust. Being harder pressed economically Khrushchev stood for immediate general and complete disarmament, disbandment of national armies, and the retaining of only small militia units for keeping internal order. Naturally, this would include the withdrawal of American and Soviet troops from any other countries and dismantling both the NATO and Warsaw Pact alliances. The idea was revolutionary and Khrushchev anticipated that it would not find understanding in the world. Later, in his memoirs he admitted:
“Actually, we knew that the conditions for such an agreement were not yet ripe and that our proposal was premature. In fact, our proposal was intended to serve a propagandistic, rather than a realistic, purpose” (Khrushchev, 1974, 410). Nevertheless, Khrushchev believed there was still a small chance the proposal might find approval, in which case it would have provided automatic solutions for most important US-Soviet and other international problems, including those in Europe. Khrushchev believed that if general and complete disarmament was accepted as a serious program of actions, then both sides could freely allow international inspections on their territory. He therefore was planning to voice it as an official Soviet proposal in the United Nations and in his talks with Eisenhower during the visit to the US.

The problem of disarmament was closely related to another issue vital to the USSR: US military bases in Europe. Since Khrushchev realized that complete disarmament would unlikely find support, one of the issues he was going to raise with President Eisenhower was liquidation of the US bases the existence of which prompted
the USSR to accelerate the arms race. Knowing that Eisenhower also was considering the disarmament, though on a limited and gradual level, Khrushchev was going to demand the removal of the bases as the main condition of disarmament. The argument was that it would be impossible for Khrushchev to convince the Soviet nation to disarm with American military bases surrounding the country. The other unvoiced logic in this matter was Khrushchev’s attempt to protect himself from internal opposition by pointing out that it was the US who yielded to the Soviet demands and not vice versa.

It remains unclear how well the President of the US understood the internal pressure Khrushchev faced and, consequently, the roots of his initiatives. However, Eisenhower himself was inclined if not to liquidate, then to at least limit the growth of the US bases in Europe. On the eve of the visit the President was struggling over “thinking of something that wouldn’t look as if we are giving in, but nothing comes to mind” (Grinevsky, 1998, 20). One of the ideas that the President was considering was the reduction of the number of medium-range missiles

32 A. Adzhubey, 1960, 57.
in Europe. His rationale was very similar to that of Khrushchev. Since he also believed that future wars would depend mostly on the intercontinental missiles, it seemed to be unreasonable to increase the arsenal of medium-range missiles in Europe, incurring high expenses and further aggravating the Soviet bloc. Specifically, Eisenhower wanted to prevent the tactical missile expansion into Greece and Turkey. However, this idea of Eisenhower met strong opposition from the Secretary of Defense Neil McElroy and Under Secretary of State Douglas Dillon. Both of them tried to convince Eisenhower that first of all, the USA couldn’t afford to give Soviet Union any concessions, and secondly, that the US would encounter serious problems in Europe if it treated Greece and Turkey differently than other allies. Eventually Eisenhower settled for a half-way policy of not including the issue of European missiles into possible concessions to Khrushchev, but at the same time postponing the missile stationing in Greece anyway.33

The US, however, did not oppose disarmament. But it did not believe that Soviet Union could be trusted and

viewed the suggestion of a general and complete disarmament as an empty declaration. On its part, the US proposed gradual and partial disarmament with international control on each party’s territory. Specifically, the US insisted on an agreement that would allow both sides to conduct reconnaissance flights over each other’s territories. The USSR considered this to be, first of all, a way for a legalized espionage, and, secondly, an unequal arrangement. At that time America was in a much stronger position than the Soviet Union in regards to both the number of nuclear weapons it had and also their delivery system. Besides, the USSR was surrounded with US military bases including air bases while Soviet airplanes could not even reach the US. Finally, the US could use its bases in Europe for mounting the instruments that would detect atomic testing on the Soviet territory, but the USSR had no similar opportunity. In short, this idea of an “open sky” in the Soviet view would give the US an opportunity to catch up in its less advanced areas of military technology, putting the USSR at a disadvantage, which might tempt the West to attack. The Soviet Union insisted on the large-scale international inspections only applicable to complete and not selective disarma-
ment.

Searching for the possible points of agreement, Eisenhower came to believe that the issue of Berlin was a possibility. Berlin was located on the territory of the newly developed German Democratic Republic (GDR) and remained a divided city between the Western allies and the USSR. The situation was not only abnormal but also very dangerous for both the FRG and the GDR, as well as the rest of Europe. The Soviets viewed West Berlin as a "bone in the throat" of the socialist GDR, while the US considered it a "hostage in Russian hands." The USSR and the US tried to resolve the problem differently. The US was pushing for the reunification of Germany on the basis of free elections, knowing well that the better developed economically and numerically larger FRG would "swallow" the GDR without a trace. This was also obvious to Khrushchev. The Soviet Union declared that it also stood for the unification of Germany, but on completely different terms. The USSR demanded that the GDR and the FRG form a confederation and have equal representation in the confederated government. Realizing that such posi-

tion would never be accepted in the West, Khrushchev also proposed another plan. Certainly not ready to lose the socialist stronghold in Europe, he suggested that the war allies sign peace treaties with the two de-facto existing states, the GDR and the FRG, and that Berlin would be given a status of “free city.” In reality, both sides understood that there was no room for compromise in these positions on Germany. The US knew that under no circumstances the Soviet Union would agree to unification through free elections. In fact, there are many indications that by 1959 the US leadership had almost reconciled with the fact that Germany would never be unified since the division went too far, but kept fighting this battle for obvious political reasons.³⁵

The status of Berlin, however, was a different story. West Berlin was the only outlet the three allied powers had in Eastern Europe. If the GDR couldn’t be swallowed then at least through West Berlin it was possible to gather intelligence information on the Soviet block, flood the latter with information about the West, and in general exercise some control over the Warsaw Pact

nations, breaching the Iron Curtain and undermining the Soviet position. Khrushchev also realized that the existence of West Berlin was weakening Soviet position in Europe and in general hampering the prospects of socialist expansion in the region.

In November 1958 the Soviet Union announced that if the Western allies did not sign the peace treaties with the GDR and the FRG and accept the free status of Berlin in six months, the USSR would end the four-power occupation of Berlin and would hand control of East Berlin and the routes leading into West Berlin over to the East Germans. The clear implication was that in the future free access to Berlin would require that the West powers deal directly and officially with the East German Government. That would completely squeeze the Western powers out of the socialist bloc, force them to recognize the official existence of East Germany and abandon the two million population of West Berlin that would be immediately incorporated into GDR. In turn, that would undermine the faith of Germans and other Europeans in the power of the US and its willingness to honor its commitments, and might force many of them to negotiate with the USSR as the only remaining alternative. In other words, it would mean a sig-
significant defeat for the US economically and politically both in the short and long run.

At the same time, the choice for the US response was very limited. Despite the policy of brinkmanship conducted by John Foster Dulles and the earlier threats of retaliation by Truman, neither Eisenhower nor Truman at any time intended to precipitate a total nuclear war. The original calculation was that lagging behind the West in the arms race and surrounded by the military bases in Europe the Soviet Union would be cautious in its European politics fearful of the nuclear retaliation by the US. But by the late 1950s the balance of power was altered since the USSR had both the nuclear bomb and its own intercontinental missiles. Now the question was if the United States was ready to unleash a possible nuclear war and suffer inevitable damage on its own territory just to protect its political position in Europe and keep its commitments to the Allies. Eisenhower understood that the Soviets had reasons to view Western actions in Europe as a direct threat to their survival, and, in general, had a lot more at stake in Europe than the US did. In the words of Henry Kissinger:
Every move on its [Soviet bloc's] part will then pose the appalling dilemma of whether we are willing to commit suicide to prevent encroachments, which do not, each in itself, seem to threaten our existence directly but which may be steps on the road to our ultimate destruction.\(^{36}\)

The Berlin crisis was thus the test of postwar American policy.

President Eisenhower believed that the formation of West Berlin was a serious miscalculation on part of the Western Allies. Later he would say, "The Western World made a mistake in 1944-1945 and now has to find a way to pay for it."\(^{37}\) Gradually he began to consider different options of creating a "free city of Berlin" under the aegis of the United Nations and with a guaranteed international access to it. The problem was finding a way of making concessions to the Soviet Union without making them look as such.

There are reasons to believe that Khrushchev, however, underestimated the willingness of the US to compromise or disregarded its value. Plus, he also was determined to continue making political capital by denouncing the US position as the occupant in Europe. The


same way as the White house, despite its demands for the unification, de-facto reconciled with the existence of two German states, the USSR, despite its declared goal of official recognition of two Germanies and creation of free Berlin, was ready to continue the status quo. In fact, since the Soviet demands on Germany and Berlin couldn’t be accepted on Khrushchev’s terms anyway, the existing status of Berlin provided the USSR with an ever-present leverage of pressure on the USA. Officially, of course, both Eisenhower and Khrushchev continued their uncompromising political lines, privately hoping that the visit of the Soviet Premier to the US would at least give them the chance to discuss the issues without outside pressure.

This factor, indeed, is one of the keys to understanding Soviet-American relations in the Cold War. Very often the analysis of these relations focuses on the intentions and actions of the two countries, and doesn’t give serious enough consideration to the other players in that game. The role of the latter could be less obvious but it was crucial. The policies of European countries, and especially those of Britain, France,
and West Germany, and their attitudes towards each other, the Soviet Union, and the USA, had a significant impact on the development and the scale of the US-USSR confrontation.

West Germany took the most rigid stand on the future of Germany and Berlin. Chancellor Konrad Adenauer was a clever, disciplined, and strong politician who enjoyed the overwhelming support of West Germans. The centuries-old German contempt of Russians and the historic animosity between the two nations multiplied by the humiliating defeat in the war and the expansion of the socialist system produced this uncompromising attitude towards the Soviet Union. In the view of Germans, ideally USSR had to vanish from the face of the planet, but at the very least had to be contained and constantly kept in check.

Adenauer was a loud voice for such thinking. Western Germany readily cooperated with Britain, US, and even the hated France if it meant restraining the USSR. Adenauer also was a firm believer in a unified Germany, certainly on Western terms. He immediately denied all Soviet proposals on the German question and warned the Allies that a demonstration of Western weakness in Ber-
lin would set in motion a chain of events that would be disastrous for all of Europe: the dissolution of Germany’s links to Western Europe, the disintegration of NATO, and Soviet domination of Europe.

Both the US and the USSR were especially concerned with Adenauer’s position on nuclear armament. In the late 50s, the Bundeswehr was still in its embryonic state. It consisted of slightly more than 80,000 soldiers. At the time, Adenauer clearly saw that the balance of the armed forces in Europe was not favorable to the West. The situation further escalated when in 1956, just when the USSR crushed anti-socialist uprising in Hungary, the US under the domestic pressure “to bring the boys home” in the aftermath of the World War II, announced its plans to cut the number of its troops stationed in Europe. The understandable but unexpected reaction of Adenauer put the USSR, the US, Britain, France and the rest of Europe in a state of shock. In 1957 the Chancellor announced that the Bundeswehr was planning to acquire its own medium-range nuclear weapons. Both Britain and France feared that this decision was a beginning of the preparation to a third World War started by Germany in this century. Consequently, the Allies
pressured the US to change Adenauer’s mind by promising Germany more NATO support in Europe.

Khrushchev quickly understood Adenauer’s flawless calculation, and on the eve of his visit to the US decided to use his own stick and carrot with the Chancellor. His passionate official letter to Adenauer began by stating the firm position of the USSR on confederation of the two German states and free Berlin, and the threat that if this plan were not accepted, the USSR would sign a separate peace treaty with the GDR. However, the blackmail was further sweetened with the promises of benefits. If the Chancellor agreed to the Soviet terms, Khrushchev would open the venues of economic cooperation with Germany. Besides, he added, Adenauer would go down in history as the noble and insightful leader who ended the Cold War. In his letter Khrushchev also planted a seed of distrust between the Western Allies: “We give tremendous importance to the approaching negotiations with the American President,” he wrote.

“Possibly, they will lead to breakthrough in the relations between the two superpowers.” That was a transparent hint that the German question could be solved be-
hind Adenauer's back in Camp David.\textsuperscript{38}

A similar approach was tried with France and Britain. Even though neither of the two was interested in the strengthening of Germany's position in Europe, the threat of Socialist expansion seemed to outweigh the German danger. The positions of both France and Britain, therefore, were far from solid. France had been always fearful of Germany expansion, and, to a degree, was interested in a divided, and consequently, weaker Germany. Despite that fact, however, France chose a policy of supporting German unification. President de Gaulle had a vision of a unified Europe in the future, even though in his plan it was going to be France and not Germany that would play the key role in the region. The deepening division of Europe along the socialist-capitalist line was making that future less and less possible.\textsuperscript{39}

The view of Britain was somewhat different. First of all, geographically Britain was not in such a close contact with the East as France or Germany and was not

\textsuperscript{38} Khrushchev wrote the letter in August 1959 while preparing to the visit to America.

\textsuperscript{39} Spanier, 1960, 156.
concerned with the border issues as much. But it was extremely concerned with the possibility of a purposeful or accidental nuclear war that would certainly reach Britain. Secondly, the position of British Prime-Minister Harold Macmillan at home was not similar to that of Adenauer and de Gaulle in their countries. The latter two were national heroes who enjoyed the overwhelming support of their nations and didn’t have to worry about losing power to the opposition party. Britain on the other hand was in a pre-election campaign at the time of the 1958 Berlin crisis. Macmillan had reasons to worry that if he supported French and German position on Berlin, he would be accused of political inflexibility and endangering British national security. Also, the different ideological nature of the Soviet regime didn’t strike the British with the same sense of revulsion as it did Americans. Britain had for centuries maintained diplomatic relations with nations whose form of government it disapproved. All of these factors made Macmillan advocate dialogue with the Russians and softening of international tensions. Britain thus became a middleman between the powers, encouraging Eisenhower to open that dialogue. This and the hints of Khrushchev to the Germans and the
French made the latter two increasingly distrustful of the US and fearful that while the two leading powers might arrive at a mutually beneficial agreement, the interests of Germany and France would most likely be betrayed or disregarded.

Another goal that Khrushchev was hoping to achieve during his visit was to change American economic policy towards the USSR. The Soviet Premier was looking forward to establishing contacts with the American business world, lifting the trade embargo against the Soviet bloc, obtaining American credits, and beginning cooperation in scientific and industrial fields.

But Khrushchev's main reason for going to the US was to reach out and start a dialogue, no matter how unproductive it might be at first. He sincerely wanted to establish good relationship with Eisenhower and to start cooperating. He wanted to prove to the US that he was not lying when proposing peaceful co-existence, and that the USSR would keep its word once the US gave in on German and disarmament issues. At the same time his expectations of the visit were not unrealistic. He knew that to establish the relationship of at least some mutual understanding both sides needed a lot of time. Khrush-
chev was convinced that there was an enormous gap between the two sides that had to be bridged but that nobody had yet even started building that bridge. Using the metaphor of Khrushchev’s son, “He went on the visit to find the most narrow part of the stream where the bridge was to be built”. President Eisenhower also seemed to have the same rationale for the visit. Besides, he wanted to show Khrushchev how Americans really lived. He knew that Khrushchev wouldn’t be surprised by the construction sites and industrial giants. Eisenhower wanted him to see that the living standard of an average American was much higher than that of a Soviet citizen, and that Americans freedom and democracy were real, and not just a propaganda slogan.

CHAPTER II

THE UNCHARTED TERRITORY

The visit of Nikita Khrushchev to the US lasted 13 days. It included Washington, D.C., New York, Los Angeles, Hollywood, San Francisco, Iowa, Pittsburgh and Camp David where he toured factories, farms, supermarkets, movie studios, docks and research centers. In the course of the trip the Premier met with politicians, businessmen, journalists, trade union leaders, farmers and workers and had a series of private negotiations with President Eisenhower.

In the United States the visit caused mixed feelings among the general population. For some Eisenhower’s decision to invite Khrushchev seemed outrageous. Khrushchev was seen as a dictator, a ruthless conqueror of Eastern Europe, and, most recently, a butcher of Hungary. Demonstrations protesting any negotiations with Khrushchev erupted in different areas of the country.

41 The visit took place between September 15-27, 1959.
And yet, overall, Americans welcomed the idea. Tired of fear and the state of constant alert, many were hopeful that the visit was a sign of change that would improve the international climate. But mostly people were curious to see what "real communists" looked like, how they behaved, how different or similar they were from average Americans.

Khrushchev’s behavior during the visit that ranged from openly friendly and curious to aggressive, stubborn and even provocative reflected the complex and controversial position he was in. On the one hand, he was coming to the US to promote peace and ensure cooperation. And he truly was curious about America. Now it is hard even to imagine that a major political leader who had diplomatic, intelligence, and foreign affairs services at his disposal, in reality had a very limited and largely distorted image of the other superpower. But it certainly was so. Largely because of this Khrushchev also had an inferiority complex, often not knowing how he was supposed to behave. On the other hand, he was coming to his ideological enemies believing that their system was doomed and being extremely proud of the Soviet Union’s and his personal achievements. To
him, the fact that a backward peasant country that in a span of 30 years rose to be the world’s major superpower and a poor shepherd boy who grew up to lead it were invited as equals to the world’s richest country was the best proof of socialist victory.\textsuperscript{42}

At the same time, he felt he had to exude absolute confidence in his system and defend it viciously covering up its flaws that he was painfully aware of but considered temporary. Finally, struggling with the growing opposition in his own government that saw any compromise with the West as betrayal, he had to return home a victor whose strength and resolve forced the US to back up. This balancing of pride and prejudice and playing a dual act of intimidation and trust is the key to Khrushchev’s seemingly illogical behavior during and after his visit to the US.

Ironically, the position of Eisenhower was somewhat similar. Proud of his nation’s ideology and history, and certain of the evil nature of socialism, he nevertheless considered it crucial to reach out and negotiate with the antagonist. He too was under tremendous pres-

\textsuperscript{42} Khrushchev, 1974, 374.
sure since even at the top political level in the US the
atitudes towards the contemporary international situa-
tion and the future relationship between the US and the
USSR were far from uniform. Further complicating the
situation was the frequent lack of understanding by each
side of the motives of the other. All of those factors
put Eisenhower and Khrushchev on a path of inconsis-
tency, manipulation and frequent disappointments both
during and after the visit.

It is important to remember that each side was so
affected by propaganda and ideological struggle, that
every move of the other was taken as an offense or provo-
cation. The examples of the latter can be seen through-
out the visit. For instance, American businessmen,
politicians and journalists, asked Khrushchev many ques-
tions that made him furious. Most of them dealt with
the issues of democracy, or, to be accurate, the lack
thereof in the Soviet Union. People asking were sin-
cerely indignant with the undemocratic patterns of the
USSR and certainly did not understand that the legacy of
that country made democracy impossible there in 1959.
By the same token Khrushchev could not understand that
for Americans these feelings and questions were natural,
and saw them as either a provocation or an attempt to interfere in the domestic affairs of the USSR and back Khrushchev into a corner. His reaction to them was often defensive in its motives and viciously forceful in its form. The latter often strengthened the conviction of Americans in their stereotypes of the Soviet leader and socialism in general. This pattern exhibited itself many times during the visit. One disappointment occurred at the dinner in Khrushchev’s honor given by the Economic Club in New York. Khrushchev had high hopes for this meeting with American business elite planning to interest them in trading with the USSR. But the conversation turned into an exchange of accusations that largely dealt with the question of democracy in Russia.43

The most open collision, however, took place in Los Angeles at the official dinner given by the mayor. By that time Khrushchev already had many debates with US politicians, businessmen and journalists, and explained his position on a number of issues many times. He tried to specifically clarify his earlier expression: “We will bury you” that had circled the world and almost caused

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panic in the US. Since then, Khrushchev returned to this explanation many times insisting that he did not mean it as a military threat to the US, but rather the historic inevitability of the natural degradation of capitalism on its own and its replacement by socialism as a more progressive system all over the world. When Mayor Poulson openly provoked Khrushchev by stating that the US would not let him bury it and that, if necessary, America would fight to death, the situation exploded. Khrushchev was enraged and threatened that since the Soviet Delegation was being purposely provoked despite the fact that the question of "burial" had been clarified many times, it would immediately leave the US. The incident had its development after dinner at the hotel where the Soviet Delegation stayed. There Khrushchev gathered his party and being extremely agitated began to shout that he would not tolerate such attitudes toward the leader of the country and that it, probably, was part of the US plan to put pressure on the Soviet Union and further worsen the international situation. The interesting twist of this scene was that, according to the witnesses, as soon as Khrushchev finished it, he smiled and silently pointed at the walls and the ceiling of the
room, which he was sure were “bugged”. Thus he was showing his frightened entourage that this little performance was staged not for them, but for the ears of the UN Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, the CIA, and eventually, President Eisenhower.

This incident is an important key to understanding the realities of the Soviet-American diplomacy, Khrushchev’s political line, his real character and his political persona. Khrushchev truly believed that some political forces in the US were putting pressure on him to ensure his concessions during the negotiations at Camp David and later in Paris. He also was beginning to understand that Eisenhower himself could not escape this domestic pressure. In response Khrushchev easily resorted to manipulation and blackmail using his worldwide reputation of a short-fused and unpredictable politician. He was well aware of this reputation, and according to his immediate advisers, even though he really was

44 Henry Cabot Lodge, the US representative in the UN, was Khrushchev’s official escort during the visit.

45 The incident is described by Sergey Khrushchev, N. Khrushchev’s son who accompanied the Soviet Premier to the US (S. Khrushchev, 1991).
a very emotional person, he often played that role, publicly exaggerating his true feelings.

And yet, despite disappointments, offenses and awkward situations, in general the visit was a success. Since both Eisenhower and Khrushchev had no illusions that they were taking a revolutionary step that would bring numerous difficulties, they were somewhat relieved with both the atmosphere and the results of the visit. Overall, Americans welcomed the Soviet delegation and the hope of the changes the visit brought. And overall, Khrushchev and those who accompanied him saw Americans as normal, friendly and sincere people who did not fit the image of evil militarists. It was this atmosphere of friendliness, openness and humanity in the US that affected Khrushchev the most. From that time on this image of the US became a background for his analysis of many political moves and ideas initiated by the US.  

CHAPTER III

THE RESULTS

The political accomplishments of the visit, though seemingly incomplete at the time, were significant. Soviet proposal at the General Assembly of the UN of the total and complete disarmament met unanimous approval by the representatives of all 82 of its member-countries. The role of that approval by many was considered minimal since, even though most of the countries could not vote against such a clearly progressive proposal, they were skeptical about its implementation. However, the proposal and its approval were one more push towards curtailing the arms race on a global level. It also provided new leverage that both the US and the USSR could use in applying mutual pressure to a number of political issues.

The negotiations at Camp David were also very important. The central problem discussed was the situation in

47 Khrushchev addressed the General Assembly of the UN on September 18, 1959.

48 The talks between Khrushchev and Eisenhower took place in Camp David on September 25-27, 1959.
Germany. Eisenhower and his administration had little hopes for the pending summit of the four powers in Paris. They believed it made no sense to go there unless some sort of unofficial agreement on the desired outcome was reached beforehand. This problem became especially acute in the light of Soviet ultimatum on Berlin. During the negotiations with Khrushchev, Eisenhower insisted that the Paris meeting was out of the question unless the Soviets withdrew the ultimatum. Khrushchev, on the other hand, was very interested in the summit hoping to force the three powers to sign peace treaties with both Germanies and withdraw from Berlin. After the most frustrating and seemingly hopeless talks, progress was achieved.

President Eisenhower admitted that the situation in Berlin was abnormal. He agreed to discuss with the Allies the question of reducing troops in West Berlin as well as terminating Western propaganda and espionage in the GDR. He also promised to talk France and Britain into conducting the summit in Paris if the Soviet Union withdrew the ultimatum.

Later Eisenhower wrote in his memoirs that Khrushchev left the US having understood that by bullying on the Berlin issue earlier he was asking for trouble and was relieved when found a way out without a significant
loss of prestige. According to Eisenhower, the Berlin crisis was prevented without any rights of the West being harmed.\(^49\)

However, it does not seem to be the accurate evaluation of what happened. Actually, by declaring the ultimatum Khrushchev had purposely started the crisis in order to make the West give concessions. And in his opinion (as well as of many other politicians and historians), he succeeded.\(^50\) First of all, the very fact that the Western powers were ready to stop any adversative activity against the GDR meant the de-facto recognition of the latter. Secondly, the US agreed to ensure the Paris summit without any Soviet guarantees to its outcome, which was an earlier condition of the US. In return, Khrushchev only dropped the specific term of the ultimatum, having warned Eisenhower that the issue, however, remained to be solved sooner or later. This explains the frustration of Eisenhower with the Camp David negotiations, as Khrushchev later explained in his memoirs:


\(^{50}\) This opinion is expressed in both Spanier’s and Grinevsky’s books.
I could tell Eisenhower was deflated. He looked like a man who had fallen through a hole in the ice and been dragged from the river with freezing water still dripping off of him. Perhaps Eisenhower had promised the ruling circles in his government that he would reach an agreement with us, and now his hopes were dashed. Maybe that's why he looked so bitterly disappointed (Khrushchev, 1974, 412).

Khrushchev also was far from being euphoric after the talks. The question of disarmament was discussed in the most vague and general form with no specific agreements reached. Ironically, both had reached sincere consensus on the need to curb the arms race in the nearest future. They confessed to each other that their respective militaries were using the fear of unequal balance in weapons of the two countries and the consequent danger of being attacked to pump enormous resources out of the national budgets.⁵¹ Both Eisenhower and Khrushchev were also officers who fought in the World War II and realized the dangers of the new war very well. The problem was how to turn the tide in the divided world that by then had learned to fear and distrust the other side, especially under the circumstances of unequal distribution of forces in Europe and around the globe.

There was no answer at the time. In Khrushchev’s words:

To sum up: our conversations weren’t too productive. In fact, they had failed. We had failed to remove the major obstacles between us; we’d examined those obstacles, but we hadn’t removed them. . . . We had lost all hope of finding a realistic exit from the impasse our talks had led to.\textsuperscript{52}

However, the significance of the Camp David talks is better seen in perspective from our time. Even though both leaders struggled over the final Communiqué frustrated with the absence of concrete resolutions, this document contains a very important, maybe even revolutionary, thesis for that time: “All unregulated international issues have to be resolved not from the position of force, but by peaceful means - those of negotiation.”\textsuperscript{53} This signaled a big change from the politics “from the position of power” preached by former Secretary of State John Foster Dulles.

The main result of Camp David was the psychological shift accomplished there. For the first time, the complex relationship of the two superenemies acquired a common human bond; and the first seeds of trust were planted, even though they produced seedlings only dec-

\textsuperscript{52} N. Khrushchev, 1974, 412.

\textsuperscript{53} Joint Soviet-American Communiqué, September 27, 1959, A. Adzhubey, 1960, 411.
ades later. Arguably, for the first time, the tendency was born to use the negotiation table not for bickering and propagandistic declarations, but for resolution of sharp international problems, such as Germany, disarmament, and nuclear tests.

Even though the questions of Germany and disarmament were the central ones in the negotiations, many others were discussed in Camp David. They too did not produce specific decisions but had both short-term and long-term implications. As mentioned earlier, one of the questions was the method of extracting funds by the military of both countries. This frank conversation of the two leaders largely opened their eyes to the similarity of their position at home and the pressure each of them was under.

In other words, this contributed to a better understanding of both the scale and the specifics of the international problems. It also brought the two men closer together, and gave each of them hope for a more trustful relationship in the future. With all the differences, the two leaders had a lot in common. They were two elderly men, grandfathers, well familiar with the horrors of the war, who searched for the new solutions to old prob-
lems. Despite all political maneuvers, both of them had a strong natural sense of justice and decency.

Both of them were also somewhat sentimental. Just as Khrushchev passionately wanted to convince the President that the USSR was sincere in its striving for peace and would fulfill its commitments, Eisenhower wanted to prove to Khrushchev that the US would never be the aggressor. The President also wanted to show the Soviet leader the friendly and prosperous America that desired peace. And Khrushchev eagerly responded. Later he commented that he developed tremendous respect for the President and his country, and that the US had made a big impression on him. In his own words, he was delighted when during the visit President Eisenhower referred to him as "my friend." This almost childish delight doesn't mean that both leaders overestimated their chances of friendship, but it certainly was a reflection of the change in the air.

It was largely these discussion on disarmament and


55 Khrushchev, 1974, 415.
blackmail tactics of the military that made Khrushchev determined to implement changes in his own country. Soon after his return from the US, despite the dissatisfaction of his colleagues with this idea, he convinced his cabinet to undertake a major reduction of the Soviet armed forces.

In 1960 Khrushchev announced at the Session of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union, that as a result of his visit to the US the clouds of the Cold War had begun to dissipate. He stated that while in the US he witnessed the breakthrough in the decades-old perceptions of the nature and the prospects of the Soviet-American relations. The Premier declared that because of this change the USSR would immediately reduce the size of the Soviet Army by two thirds, saving large funds that would be used for consumer needs. To a great extent, it was decisions like this, unpopular with many military and political leaders, that predetermined his downfall four years later...

It was at Camp David when Khrushchev invited Eisenhower to come with his family for a reciprocal visit to the USSR in the summer of 1960. The Soviet Premier
was very enthusiastic about this visit. He suggested that the US President spend twice as much time in the USSR as he had spent in the States. He also invited Eisenhower to visit anywhere in the USSR, including the traditionally "closed zones" of Vladivostok and Sevastopol. Khrushchev started large-scale preparations for the event. Streets were refurbished, buildings renovated, and new comfortable hotels and summer residences where Eisenhower would stay were built. Knowing that Eisenhower was passionate about golf, a game unheard of in Russia, Khrushchev ordered a large golf course to be built in the vicinity of Moscow, and began to take golf lessons himself.

The communication between the US President and the Soviet Premier in America in 1959 had other effects as well. Besides specific international issues, the two leaders discussed many other subjects that helped them better understand each other's perspectives. Khrushchev especially was curious about American approach to various political and social ideas. He was very interested in the American understanding of democracy and its reflec-

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56 Major Soviet ports where Soviet fleet was stationed.
tion in legislation. At that time, in the aftermath of Stalin’s personality cult, he was concerned with finding a way to reduce personal power of a leader in the Soviet Union. He was trying to comprehend why in the US the President himself was unable and often unwilling to invent legal loopholes in order to stay in power for life, while in the USSR the latter was always the case. It was these discussions with Eisenhower that after the visit became a source of his numerous proposals to adopt amendments to the Soviet Constitution such as the implementation of only two terms for the top leader and similar ones.  

Khrushchev’s visit to the US also had many other practical implications. No matter what he said publicly, America had made a tremendous impression on him. In general, metaphorically speaking, in Khrushchev’s soul, two men were constantly struggling with each other. One was the implacable dogmatic who memorized several central principles of Marxism and defended them with passionate inflexibility. It was he who made Khrushchev yell out the most inappropriate threats, like the famous “We will

bury you!" But the other man living inside him thought differently. An energetic pragmatist with a strong peasant common sense, he dragged to his home everything he found useful. It was he who admired American machinery, roads, houses, corn and stores. That is why Nikita Khrushchev returned to Moscow determined to implement the best of what he saw in the US into the Soviet reality. He certainly did not plan to change the political system, but to advance it by improving its economic foundation. From the US, the Soviet Premier brought new kinds of corn, secured the American shipment of a new breed of cows, and made preliminary arrangements for the lifting of the US boycott of Soviet fish products. For the first time he saw the cafeterias and supermarkets based on self-service and soon afterwards opened them in the Soviet Union. He also convinced Eisenhower to exchange specialists on a wider basis, and was planning to send many Soviet factory managers to re-train in the US. In general, both the dogmatic and the pragmatic Khrushchev were very pleased with his "discovery of America." His enthusiasm is best described with the following incident. Upon his return to Moscow, according to his daily itinerary, he was supposed to go home, change, and get ready
for his speech at the Palace of Sports that seated ten thousand people. However, when he arrived to the airport he saw hundreds of thousands of people greeting him all the way from the airport to the Kremlin gates. It was a case of sincere unrehearsed excitement of the nation that invested many hopes in the visit. After seeing that Khrushchev got so enthusiastic that he changed his plan and straight from the airport went to the Palace where he made a three-hour long speech summarizing the results of the visit and his impressions of the US. \(^{58}\) This, perhaps, was the official beginning of "the Spirit of Camp David."

\(^{58}\) A. Adzhubey, 1991.
PART THREE

THE LEGACY
Unfortunately, contrary to Khrushchev's and Eisenhower's hope the relations between East and West after 1959 did not continue consistently to improve. On May 1, 1960, only two weeks before the long-awaited four power summit in Paris and six weeks before the expected Eisenhower's visit to Russia, Soviet antiaircraft units shot down an American U-2 reconnaissance plane that was gathering intelligence information on Soviet missile sites. The incident, seen by Khrushchev as an open insult and a hostile attempt to undermine the spirit of Camp David and ensure the failure of the summit, had far-reaching destructive results. One of its most important consequences was the failure of Khrushchev's policy in the eyes of his nation, and most importantly, his advisers. It was the final proof they needed that Khrushchev was naive and foolish to trust the other side, that the idea of the military reduction was fatally dangerous, that the USSR had always to treat the West as a mortal enemy. The pressure was so great that Khrushchev, first of all, began to doubt himself and his actions, and secondly, was forced to reverse the direction of his policy. Under the circumstances, the only policy he could afford
in response to the U-2 flight was that of making propaganda capital on the incident.

The Paris summit that followed was a total fiasco. Eisenhower, Macmillan, and de Gaulle did not and could not comprehend the scale of the political change that was quietly taking place in the Soviet Union. Therefore, Khrushchev's extreme behavior in Paris and his demands there largely annoyed and surprised the Western Allies. 59 None of them knew that by the time of the summit Khrushchev could not continue any attempts to cooperate. In fact, in order to survive politically, he had to break with the West in the most scandalous and open way. Khrushchev returned from Paris largely a broken man. Soon afterwards, the Soviet Union officially withdrew its invitation to President Eisenhower and cancelled its earlier decision to reduce the military forces. Thus, the arms race got a new spin.

The Soviet Premier would later make another attempt to negotiate with an American President. In 1961,

59 In Paris Khrushchev demanded an apology from President Eisenhower for the U-2 flight and a promise that the incident would never be repeated as a condition for the summit. Eisenhower did not offer it and Khrushchev boycotted the summit.
shortly after the Bay of Pigs operation, Khrushchev met with John Kennedy in Vienna. He hoped that relatively young and inexperienced Kennedy, weakened by the failure in Cuba, could be forced to accept Soviet terms on Germany, Berlin and disarmament. By that time Khrushchev’s position in his own country did not leave him any room for compromise.

The Vienna summit ended in a deadlock. Two months later Soviet Union erected the wall that separated East and West Berlin, de-facto solving the Berlin question on its own terms. A year later during the Cuban missile crisis the world would come to the final verge of the nuclear war with both sides ready to push the button. The following year President Kennedy would be assassinated. One year after that Khrushchev would be “retired” from power by his secret opposition. The Soviet Union as well as Soviet-American relations would enter the “period of stagnation” for the next twenty years.

In the short run, Khrushchev’s policies both in domestic and in international arenas failed. In the long run, they planted the seeds of change in Soviet society

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60 The Vienna summit took place in June 1961.
and in world politics. During the reaction and stagnation they continued to grow and mature, pushing through the cracks in the system, and eventually assisted in its disintegration. The fresh winds of the late fifties and early sixties were never forgotten in the Soviet nation. It was the young people who for the first time saw foreigners and shook hands with them at the Moscow Youth Festival in 1957, listened breathless to the dissipation of the Stalin’s personality cult, and passionately greeted Khrushchev’s speech after his return from the US, who twenty years later launched the reforms that opened the borders, broke down the Wall, and finally unified Germany.

If nothing more, the role of Khrushchev’s visit to the US in 1959 was the first attempt to reverse the world’s politics of the deadly race and take a chance of talking to the enemy face to face. Just for that it deserves respect and recognition for the two leaders. But the contribution it made to the world also included the melting of stereotypes, better understanding of each other, and the possibility of sincere conversation between different sides. Perhaps, had it not been for this new possibility, the Cuban missile crisis would have ended in tragedy.
For the first time, the visit gave the enemy a human face and brought humanity into the relationship, no matter how strained. In the words of Khrushchev written about the visit shortly before his death:

We were plowing virgin soil, so to speak; we broke the ice which had held our relations in a paralyzing grip. Now it remained for our diplomats to remove the stubborn chunks of ice from our path and to clear the way for further improvement in relations. This process continues even today (Khrushchev, 1974, 415).

In the eyes of history it was the visit, the very fact of which was already an agreement.
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