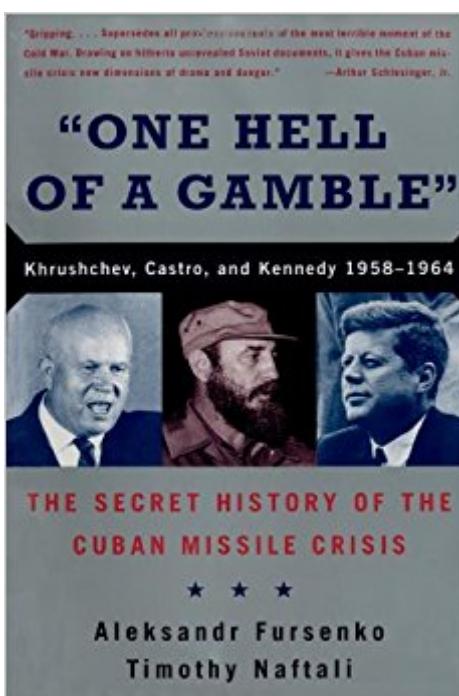


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# One Hell Of A Gamble: Khrushchev, Castro, And Kennedy, 1958-1964: The Secret History Of The Cuban Missile Crisis



## **Synopsis**

Based on classified Soviet archives, including the files of Nikita Khrushchev and the KGB, "One Hell of a Gamble" offers a riveting play-by-play history of the Cuban missile crisis from American and Soviet perspectives simultaneously. No other book offers this inside look at the strategies of the Soviet leadership. John F. Kennedy did not live to write his memoirs; Fidel Castro will not reveal what he knows; and the records of the Soviet Union have long been sealed from public view: Of the most frightening episode of the Cold War--the Cuban Missile Crisis--we have had an incomplete picture. When did Castro embrace the Soviet Union? What proposals were put before the Kremlin through Kennedy's back-channel diplomacy? How close did we come to nuclear war? These questions have now been answered for the first time. This important and controversial book draws the missing half of the story from secret Soviet archives revealed exclusively by the authors, including the files of Nikita Khrushchev and his leadership circle. Contained in these remarkable documents are the details of over forty secret meetings between Robert Kennedy and his Soviet contact, records of Castro's first solicitation of Soviet favor, and the plans, suspicions, and strategies of Khrushchev. This unique research opportunity has allowed the authors to tell the complete, fascinating, and terrifying story of the most dangerous days of the last half-century.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

The Berlin Wall has been rubble for a decade and the memories of the cold war are growing dim. And yet no one is ever likely to forget the Cuban Missile crisis of October 1962, when the world stood on the brink of full-scale nuclear war as the Soviet Union and America locked horns off the

coast of Florida. The Soviet navy set sail for Cuba loaded with nuclear warheads for their newly constructed missile bases, precipitating the crisis. After 10 days of high tension, the Soviet Union backed down and the warheads were sent back home. War was averted, but up until now, no one has ever been too certain just how close the world came to catastrophe. Kennedy was assassinated long before he could write his memoirs, Castro's lips are sealed, and the Soviet archives were a closed book. Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali have taken advantage of recent unrestricted access to Soviet records and performed painstaking detective work to fill the gaps in the historical record. Some of the tension of the narrative is lost, because we know the outcome; even so, they give penetrating insights as they reconstruct the drama step by step. We learn that the Kremlin did seriously consider launching a nuclear attack on the U.S.: the appropriate orders were discussed and Khrushchev spent the night of October 22 in his office so he could be on hand to cable his authorization. Some of the most interesting facts to emerge, however, are those concerning John F. Kennedy and his brother Robert. JFK had always previously been portrayed as something of a parochial gung-ho type, but this, it emerges, was merely a public persona designed to appease the Pentagon hawks. At the same time JFK was talking about a Cuban invasion, he and his brother were engaging in a more secret policy of appeasement through the Soviet ambassador. Fortunately for all of us, diplomacy won the day. In recent years, JFK has been somewhat discredited as a leader for his unpleasant sexual carryings-on and corruption. It may just be that this view is as incomplete as his portrayal as the saintly "King of Camelot". If so, One Hell of a Gamble could be the first stage in his partial rehabilitation. --John Crace, .co.uk

Those of a certain age well remember the fateful days in the fall of 1962 when the world stood on the brink of nuclear catastrophe. Since that time, scholars have struggled to discern how the United States and the Soviet Union could have come so close to disaster. Graham Allison's *Essence of Decision* (1971) set the standard for these queries, but his work has now been vastly improved upon by the investigations of Fursenko (history, Russian Academy of Sciences) and Naftali (history, Yale). Taking advantage of the opening of heretofore closed Soviet archives, the authors have produced a breathtaking view of the inner workings of the Soviet Politburo and its efforts to come to grips with a potentially disastrous international incident. Seldom have scholars plumbed the depths of Soviet-American relations as deeply or as effectively. The resulting tale proves once again that truth can indeed be stranger than fiction. This important work belongs in all libraries. Highly recommended.-?Edward Goedeken, Iowa State Univ. Lib., AmesCopyright 1997 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Great read if you're interested in that period of American History. Both the Russian and Cuban perspectives were new to me. The movie "13 Days", while presumably accurate, was seen more through the eyes of Kenny O'Donnell (advisor to Kennedy) and played by Kevin Costner. His name wasn't mentioned once in the book so I assume there was some historical licensing taken in the movie. By the way: Good movie, however.

Exciting and very detailed consideration of the Cuban missile crisis and what came before (and after) that fully incorporates the Soviet perspective based on Soviet archives. Quite insightful, though the tale that emerges is, if anything, more terrifying than the picture we had at the time.

Unique information and points of view overcome a slightly awkward prose style and set it apart from most accounts of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Naftali and Fursenko have done a excellent piece of research in this interesting book about the Cuban Missile Crisis. In particular, they highlight the close to insane policies of the Russian Government as they sought to bolster the Cuban regime from US attack. This book gives the whole picture including the bay of pigs and other US misadventures that drove Castro into the Soviet orbit. The most fascinating section for me was the part on Castro and way he was compelled to adopt Soviet style communism. The US simply did not leave him any choice. A balanced look at high powered diplomacy that had gone mad.

It was frightening to live through the Cuban Missile Crisis. I was a little kid but still recall how scared and tense my parents and teachers were: an all-pervasive feeling of dread. I'm sure today's children feel the same about 9-11-01, and in future years they may have memories about this September's tragedy similar to mine about those 13 days in 1962. Fursenko and Naftali have done an admirable and thorough job detailing the rise of Castro and Cuban-American-Soviet relations during that period. It was overdue, since classics such as Graham Allison's *Essence of Decision* did not have the benefit of access to Soviet archives. The one criticism I have is that the authors almost overwhelm you with facts at the expense of interpretation. I didn't, for example, get a good sense of exactly why Fidel threw his lot in with the Soviets back in '60 when it was clear Moscow intended to keep Cuba going as a sugar colony--only at less than world prices! (...)

A brilliant study, will open your eyes to reality. You are gonna be surprised with how little you knew about the Cuban Missile Crisis

I've read a number of excellent books about the Cuban Missile Crisis and this ranks with the best. The depth of the research adds a lot to our understanding of one of the seminal events of the cold war.

Another book on the Cuban Missile Crisis might seem to be overkill, but Fursenko and Naftali, the Russian and American co-authors, have delivered a terrific book that relies on newly accessible Soviet archives, and expands the period covered so we have a fuller understanding of what brought on the crisis. We have a good look at the inception of the Castro regime, with the book providing some interesting detail on the initial politics involved inside Cuba. The broader reach of the book presents us with a unique perspective, showing us the miscalculations on both sides that ultimately brought the world to the brink of war. JFK, and Attorney General Kennedy, have always gotten well deserved great marks for the handling of the crisis, but the book shows us some errors on the U.S. side, as well as the Soviet side, in the run up towards crisis. For those looking for cheerleading this is not the book for you. The authors points to a conversation between JFK and Khrushchev son in law Aleksei Adzhubei that likely set off alarm bells in the Kremlin: JFK, in a record of the conversation in Kremlin archives, told Adzhubei a story. "Kennedy: 'At the time I called Allen Dulles into my office and dressed him down. I told him: you should learn from the Russians. When they had difficulties in Hungary, they liquidated the conflict in three days. When they did not like things in Finland, the president of that country goes to visit the Soviet premier in Siberia and all is worked out. But you, Dulles, have never been capable of doing that.' " Giving the Soviets the idea that Cuba might be comparable to Hungary, and subject to U.S. invasion on the basis of "sphere of influence" politics might not have been the best idea in a conversation designed to impart the thoughts of the U.S. President in a "backchannel" conversation. "Despite his keen interest in foreign affairs, in the spring of 1962, John Kennedy had no idea of the dangerous shifts taking place in the Kremlin's understanding of the balance of power. He would have been surprised to learn that Khrushchev was as pessimistic about the Soviet Union's international position as he was about that of the United States. "Khrushchev made multiple errors of his own, including buying into the concept that the United States would not detect the Cuban missile build up until it was too late to act. The book covers the fact that even back then intelligence bureaucracies would tell the powers that be what they wanted to hear. "The Soviet Union's chief military representative in

Cuba, Major General A. A. Dementyev, raised this issue with Rodion Malinovsky before the Presidium conditionally approved the Anadyr plan. It will be impossible to hide these missiles from American U-2s, Dementyev warned the Soviet defense minister. The comment provoked an angry response from Malinovsky. According to Alekseev, who was sitting nearby, the defense minister kicked Dementyev under the table to register his disapproval. The defense minister, perhaps like his patron Khrushchev, clung to the thesis that U.S. intelligence would not detect the missiles until it was too late to do anything about them. "The Soviets also had to deal with an unruly Fidel Castro, who had to be pacified, politically, in the run up to the crisis, and during the crisis itself. Those interactions are covered, in some detail, in the book. They are of great interest historically, and certainly lend a greater understanding of the events leading up to the crisis, and the pressures Khrushchev faced on his side. The movement of the U.S. Jupiters based in Turkey were in fact an integral part of the solution. The book shows us the acceptance, by JFK, of the functional equivalence of the Cuban deployment with the U.S. deployment in Turkey. The wink and nod given to the Soviet government on the ultimate removal of the U.S. Jupiters is covered, as JFK covered his political flank by not making that trade-off explicit. A great book that brings a fuller historical understanding and wider context to the Cuban Missile crisis. It brings us all the way to Dallas, and to the removal of Khrushchev after the assassination of JFK. If this era is of interest it comes highly recommended.

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