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Stephen Joseph Weil   4/20/2011

Back from the Brink: Khrushchev's Pursuit of Brinkmanship and Arms Control, 1955-1963

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An abstract of
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Abstract

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Under what circumstances will state leaders change their beliefs about international politics? This paper will develop three different theories of learning and then apply them to the context of Khrushchev's foreign policy. These learning theories will be compared against alternative explanations for Soviet behavior, such as the relative balance of nuclear forces, the state of the Sino-Soviet relationship, and domestic political constraints. This paper concludes that learning is most likely to occur after a significant "formative event," in this case the Cuban missile crisis, which leads policymakers to reconsider their beliefs.

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Introduction

This paper explores whether or not state leaders are capable of changing their beliefs about international politics. Drawing on research from psychology, economics, and political science, I will outline a learning framework that explains the conditions under which leaders will modify their beliefs. This theoretical framework will then be evaluated through a case study of Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev's foreign policy between 1955 and 1963. The case study will focus in particular on Khrushchev's evolving attitudes towards nuclear brinkmanship and arms control. Concentrating on this time period allows for fruitful tests of learning theory against conventional explanations of Soviet behavior while also engaging some of the most important historical episodes of the Cold War, such as the Berlin and Cuba crises and the signing of the Limited Test Ban Treaty (LTBT).

This paper is divided into four main sections. The first section will survey the existing literature on learning in foreign policy and develop the theories that will subsequently be evaluated in the case study. The following section will discuss the research design and generate some initial cross-case comparisons by treating each year between 1955 and 1963 as an individual case. The case study is presented in the third section, and the final section concludes and suggests some avenues for future research.

Learning in Foreign Policy

The concept of learning is, at least implicitly, central to the evolving debate between realist and constructivist theories of International Relations (IR).[1] The core insight coming from the wave of constructivist scholarship that emerged after the end of the Cold War is the observation that "ideas matter" in foreign policy (see, for example, Lebow 1994; Risse-Kappen

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[1] This paper will follow convention in distinguishing "international relations" as an object of analysis from "International Relations" (IR) as a field of study.

1994; Wohlforth 1994; Herman 1996). Constructivist scholars often advance the argument that structural explanations are indeterminate because they depend "at least in part on how decision makers understand the world and how they interpret the frequently ambiguous lessons of history" (Herman 1996, 277; see also Stein 1994). Learning theories attempt to fill this gap by explaining how leaders come to interpret the world in particular ways (see Reiter 1996, especially 3-13). Scholars outside of the learning context have examined a wide range of factors that influence beliefs, such as norms, identities, and epistemic communities (Adler 1992; Checkel 1998; Finnemore and Sikkink 2001). Most learning theories, in contrast, focus less on external social factors, and more on the individual cognitive processes that drive belief change.

Research on learning also has important normative implications. Jeffrey Knopf (2003, 185) defends the argument that learning should be an important subject for IR research "because of long-standing debates about whether it is possible to make progress in reducing the amount of armed conflict in world politics." If the preferences and beliefs of national leaders are truly fixed, or otherwise determined purely by structural conditions, then the patterns of international politics should be mostly locked into place. This view of international politics leaves little hope that states will be able to find ways to break out of hostile relationships and avoid conflict-inducing security dilemmas.

Jack Levy (1994) provides an excellent, albeit somewhat dated, overview of the learning research agenda. Levy finds that the application of learning theories to international affairs expanded significantly after foundational studies by Ernest May (1975), Robert Jervis (1976) and Lloyd Etheridge (1985). Scholars found evidence that learning influenced a wide range of foreign policy behaviors, including military interventions, crisis bargaining, and alliance formation (Bennett 1999; Leng 1983, 1986; Reiter 1996). Research on learning also draws from

various disciplines, such as cognitive and social psychology, economics, game theory, and evolutionary biology (Levy 1994). Some political scientists used research from the field of organizational theory to develop models of governmental learning (Levitt and March 1988; Bennett 1999).

Despite this flurry of scholarly activity, no universal definition of learning has emerged. Three important features separate learning from other forms of policy change. First, learning is an *active* process, in which actors interpret historical experiences through their own analytical "frames" and conduct limited "experiments" to test their assumptions through trial and error (Levy 1994). Second, learning occurs when leaders change their beliefs about their national interests or about the nature of "cause and effect relationships" in international affairs (Bennett 1999; Breslauer and Tetlock 1991). For example, a leader might believe that interventionist activities will inspire bandwagoning. If that leader nevertheless authorized an intervention and failed to incur counterbalancing, then they should update their beliefs regarding the causes of bandwagoning and the effects of military intervention. It is precisely this dynamic that Bennett explores in the context of Soviet interventions in the Third World. Finally, learning occurs when a leader comes to *believe* something, as opposed to coming to *know* something (Breslauer and Tetlock 1991; Weber 1991). A leader receiving new information will not necessarily update his or her beliefs, but might instead simply "adapt" to the new information environment.

The distinction between "believing" and "knowing" requires further exploration. Philip Tetlock (1991, 27) argues that policymakers have certain "belief systems" that "provide policymakers with ready answers to basic questions about the world." Andrew Bennett (1999, 79-81) divides belief systems up into three major components: schemata or operational codes, specific historical analogies, and ideological beliefs. These belief systems allow policymakers to

simplify and cope with a complex international environment.[2] Tetlock (1991, 24-27) is

particularly critical of "neorealist" learning theories, which focus on policy change as the crucial

dependent variable. More specifically, he believes that these "reward-punishment" models of

learning fail "to address how decision makers cope with the causal ambiguity inherent in

complex historical flows of events" (26). The problem with these "rational learning" theories

(see, for example, Wagner 1989, Powell 2004) is that leaders will interpret the same historical

events differently depending upon their beliefs. Thus, for Tetlock and Bennett, learning should

be conceptualized as a change in belief systems rather than a modification of policy choices.

Many learning theories view policymakers as "naïve scientists," and consequently

Thomas Kuhn's (1970) seminal text *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* can perhaps lend

some further insight into the distinction between "learning" and "adaptation." Kuhn's central

argument is that groups of scientists rely on common "paradigms" to guide their research. These

paradigms function much in the same way as belief systems, by providing a common set of

assumptions that scientists can use to simplify a complex reality and focus their research. Kuhn

finds that scientists have historically been hesitant to challenge these foundational paradigms,

even when available evidence seems to contradict their assumptions. Scientists are instead likely

to interpret the disconfirming evidence in a way that is consistent with their shared paradigmatic

beliefs. This can be likened to the process of adaptation, wherein leaders receive evidence that

their policies are failing, but chose to simply modify their tactics rather than revising their core

beliefs. True scientific change occurs during "revolutions," such as the Copernican Revolution

or the shift from Newtonian to quantum physics. It is only during these phases that scientists

actually challenge the fundamental paradigms that underwrite their research. Learning can be

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[2] Beliefs and schemas are similar, but not identical, see Larson (1994). The main difference is that schemas are generalized systems of cognitive processing, whereas belief systems relate to more specific issues. See also Jervis (1976).

similarly thought of as a process of "changing paradigms," as it occurs only when policymakers actually question their underlying beliefs about international politics. This conceptualization of learning is theoretically productive, but produces some methodological and epistemological issues in distinguishing between policymakers' actions and beliefs (Tetlock 1991, 25-6; George and Bennett 2005, 194-7). This study will engage this issue by treating beliefs as "detectable unobservables" (see Jackson 2011, 72-111). Beliefs, much like quarks, cannot be directly observed, but their presence can nevertheless be detected through the effect that they have on observable processes. While physicists cannot "see" a quark, they can nevertheless demonstrate that certain physical processes only make sense if one assumes that quarks exist. Theory can thus provide a guide for explaining empirical reality. I do not intend to imply that the qualitative techniques employed in this paper have anywhere near the precision of experimental research in the natural sciences, but I will nevertheless attempt to use the large base of historical evidence about this period to determine as best as possible if Khrushchev's changing policies reflected corresponding shifts in his underlying beliefs.[3]

Drawing upon this conceptualization of learning, this paper will outline three different mechanisms through which leaders might update their beliefs about international politics. The first of these can be described as "cyclical learning," which is explored by Bennett (1999) in his study of Soviet military interventionism. The general thrust of Bennett's argument is that Soviet leaders drew lessons from their most recent policy successes or failures and used those assessments to guide future decisions. Bennett (1999, 86) argues that "cognitive and time

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[3] It is worth noting that Jackson takes the position that standard hypothesis testing techniques are often inadequate for research that centers on "unobservable" social factors. He argues that scholars would be better served by employing a "critical realist" methodology, which focuses on the abduction of underlying causal process and the detection of "causal complexes." I will not abandon the traditional hypothesis-testing structure in this paper, but my method nevertheless closely resembles the "middle ground" established by George and Bennett (2005), which is discussed by Jackson (2011, 108-9). They argue that "ultimately unobservable" causal processes can still be evaluated within a neopositivist methodology.

constraints lead decision-makers to give great weight to recent and dramatic successes and failures." This "recency bias" is likely to cause a process of cycling between different, competing policy strategies.

A second argument focuses on the role of "formative events." Both the formative events model and the cyclical model propose that policy failures create incentives for policy innovation, whereas policy successes encourage continuation. Dan Reiter (1996) differentiates the formative events model from cyclical learning, however, by arguing that leaders are only likely to update their beliefs after particularly significant events. Eric Stern (1997, 69) advances a similar argument in the context of crises, proposing that "the experience of crises may contribute to a posture of cognitive openness conducive to individual and collective learning." The underlying assumption of both theories, as discussed previously, is that leaders have certain belief systems that help them to cope with the uncertainty of international politics. Cyclical learning theory, however, proposes that leaders should use the most information about policy outcomes to update their beliefs, whereas the formative events theory contends that learning requires a powerful event, such as a crisis or war, in order to incentivize policymakers to reconsider their beliefs. Formative events theory, then, envisions the belief systems of policymakers as being comparatively rigid and resistant to change.

The final mechanism through which leaders might change their beliefs is social learning. Checkel (2001) argues that learning should be conceptualized as a deliberative process that induces preference change. Hall (1993) develops a similar model in the context of comparative politics, in which he draws upon Hugh Heclo's (1974, 305-6) observation that "governments not only 'power' … they also puzzle." In Hall's view, policymaking is driven by dominant policy "paradigms," which function much like Kuhnian scientific paradigms by providing a set of

assumptions upon which all practitioners can agree to operate. For both Checkel and Hall, learning is best facilitated when some group of experts holds a position of credibility with the political leadership. The authority associated with their specialized knowledge should allow these experts to more effectively persuade political leaders to change their beliefs.

Social learning theories are particularly interesting in the context of arms control, and substantial research has already been conducted on the role of epistemic communities, such as nuclear scientists and "arms controllers," in influencing the U.S.-Soviet arms race (Adler 1992; Evangelista 1999). Nuclear scientists in particular had unique technical and scientific expertise, meeting one of Hall's (1993) conditions for generating the necessary authority to induce social learning. Various scholars have argued that the attitudes of Soviet and American policymakers towards nuclear weapons eventually evolved as these groups of experts were able to persuade policymakers that their ideas were valid.

Each of these explanations potentially suffers from an inability to explain how the lessons learned by an individual leader translate into state policy. Bennett (1999) argues that lessons or ideas have to compete within the policy establishment in order to be adopted. In a system where power is highly concentrated, any idea that catches the interest of the political leadership can be implemented from the top down, whereas more inclusive political systems force different ideas to compete for influence (Risse-Kappen 1994). The flip side is that authoritarian leaders may be less willing to listen to new ideas in the first place. Reiter (1996) uses the Condorcet Jury Theorem to argue that learning should be more frequent in democracies than autocracies. This paper will not attempt to engage in a broad comparison of the learning process across different regime types, but the case study will nonetheless consider the influence of domestic political constraints on Khrushchev's learning.

Khrushchev's foreign policy provides an excellent case for evaluating these learning theories. Bennett (1999) and Anderson (1991) both argue that Soviet politics generally provides a tough test for learning theories, as the nature of Soviet bureaucratic competition discouraged innovations and deviations from the party line. The "Leninist principle of initiative" encouraged Soviet leaders to always put pressure on their opponents, even when the Soviets were disadvantaged or weak. This provided the theoretical basis for brinkmanship and nuclear bluff that carried in to Khrushchev's career. Furthermore, Khrushchev's personality was not conducive to learning, as his hypomania encouraged him to act impulsively and search for dramatic but simple solutions (Taubman 2003). These issues will be discussed in more detail during the case study, but they combine to create a tough case for any learning theory. Focusing on Khrushchev's foreign policy not only provides a theoretically intriguing case, but also allows for an examination of some of the most dramatic and important events in Cold War history. The partial test ban was the first arms control agreement signed between the superpowers, and it is striking that such an important agreement was reached soon after the most vivid crisis of the Cold War. How was it that Khrushchev, a politician most often remembered for his volatile personality and nuclear brinkmanship, came to be responsible for this major breakthrough? Any learning theory that could account for this important and radical shift in Soviet behavior would receive a great boost to its explanatory power.

This section has introduced three learning theories, each of which provides an explanation of the situations under which leaders will update their beliefs about international politics. This learning process is conceptually distinct from policy change, as leaders can adapt to new circumstances without actually adjusting their beliefs. The following section will lay out the research design that will be employed to test these theories.

Research Design

This paper employs both cross-case and within-case comparisons in order to test the aforementioned theories. The cross-case analysis is performed by treating each year between 1955 and 1963 as a single case, and then comparing each theory's predictions for those years with the observed outcomes. The dependent variable in this analysis is Khrushchev's "belief system" regarding negotiations with the United States. As discussed in the previous section, beliefs themselves are fundamentally unobservable, and it is thus difficult, if not impossible, to create an effective measure of Khrushchev's beliefs. This does not make this project impossible, but it does mean that this analysis requires an observable measure that can be used to evaluate the presence or absence of these underlying ideational factors. This study will accomplish this by focusing on Khrushchev's overall negotiating posture vis-à-vis the United States. Goldgeier (1994) outlines a simple typology of bargaining strategies, in which any leader can choose between coercion and accommodation. Goldgeier (1994, 8) defines coercion as "the use of threats, bluffs, warnings or force to exert pressure on an adversary to accept one's demands" and accommodation as "the offering of concessions or compromises to satisfy an opponent."[4] The danger of this measure is that it could reflect adaptation, rather than learning. The third section of this paper will address this concern by using process-tracing to determine if Khrushchev's strategy changes actually reflected shifts in his beliefs. I will draw upon the vast archival evidence available, including memoirs and Soviet bureaucratic records, in order to make such an analysis possible.

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[4] Other studies have used similar measures. Leng (1983), for example, employs a scale moving from most to least coercive: aggressive bullying, cautious bullying, reciprocation, appeasement. Khrushchev, however, tended to swing between extremes, making a simple coercion/accommodation dichotomy most appropriate.

Apart from these epistemological concerns, there are certainly other legitimate methodological issues with aggregating Khrushchev's foreign policy into one dichotomous measure. Because there were multiple issues in the U.S.-Soviet relationship, Khrushchev often employed elements of both coercion and accommodation. Khrushchev's Berlin ultimatum of 1958, for example, was undoubtedly an example of coercion. Bunn (1992), however, recalls that the Soviets were quite accommodating in test ban negotiations throughout the course of the Berlin crisis.

This paper attempts to resolve this dilemma by distinguishing between specific diplomatic proposals and Khrushchev's overall diplomatic strategy. Khrushchev's goal in employing coercion was always to pressure the Americans into compromise. It should not be seen as a contradiction, then, that Khrushchev made conciliatory arms control offers at the same time that he was threatening war over Berlin. Rather, these proposals should simply be seen as "the flip side of Khrushchev's diplomacy of crisis-mongering and nuclear brinkmanship" (Zubok 2007, 134). Khrushchev's concessions were almost always secondary to his threats and bluffs, and thus the presence or absence of *coercion* serves as the best basis for coding the dependent variable. Years in which Khrushchev used "threats, bluffs, warnings or force" are coded as "coercion," while years are coded as "accommodation" only if Khrushchev genuinely refrained from employing pressure.[5]

This coding scheme, while imperfect, avoids some shortfalls faced by alternative strategies. A measure that looked solely at specific arms control proposals, rather than Khrushchev's foreign policy in the aggregate, would potentially facilitate more objective coding,

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[5] The years 1958 and 1959 are an exception, as I coded them both as coercion with some accommodation. I argue that Khrushchev remained committed to coercion, but his attempts at negotiation met with some criticism from China and the Kremlin hawks, implying that Khrushchev's efforts were at least *viewed* by some parties as conciliatory. I address this issue in more depth in the case study.

but at the expense of accurately capturing Soviet motivations. Because individual arms control

proposals were often used for propaganda purposes, this alternative scheme would result in

certain years being coded as "accommodation" when the Soviets actually had no interest in

negotiation or compromise. Focusing on a single issue, such as arms control, would also provide

a very limited view of Soviet foreign policy. Khrushchev saw a wide range of issues in the U.S.-

Soviet relationship as being linked and consequently often thought in terms of policies that could

produce progress on multiple fronts.

The three learning theories outlined in the previous section generate different hypotheses

regarding Khrushchev's reliance on coercion. The cyclical learning theory predicts that leaders

should change their beliefs about their national interests or about cause and effect relationships

when *those beliefs* are discredited by *recent policy outcomes*. In the context of this research

design, this produces the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1. Khrushchev should adopt coercion if he perceives that accommodation has failed
recently, and should adopt accommodation if he perceives that coercion has failed recently.

The phrasing of this hypothesis, by focusing on Khrushchev's *perception* of policy

success or failure, raises falsifiability concerns. An alternative could be to look at whether or not

the previous policy (whether coercion or accommodation) produced a substantive concession by

the United States. Even this "objective" measure faces problems, as there were often

disagreements even within the Soviet leadership about what constituted a meaningful concession.

This dilemma reveals an important element of cyclical learning theory. The key prediction is

that leaders will change their strategies *when they believe those strategies have failed*. An

"objective" measure is thus not necessarily appropriate in this context. This does, however, raise

an important question. What causes certain leaders to perceive their policies as successes when

other leaders view them as failures? The within-case portion of this study will attempt to find

answers to this question. For the purposes of testing this hypothesis, however, the subjectivity

created by this coding strategy can be exploited as a strength. While the primary focus of this

study is Khrushchev's decision making, the within-case design will consider the viewpoints of

other members of the Soviet leadership when sufficient evidence is available. This theoretical

framework would predict that if a given member of the leadership disagreed with Khrushchev's

assessment of whether or not a policy had been successful, they should then advocate for the

opposite strategy from Khrushchev. We can thus generate the following addendum to

Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 1.1. Members of the Soviet leadership should advocate the opposite strategy from
Khrushchev (coercion or accommodation) if they disagree with his assessment of whether or not
the previous strategy was successful.

The formative events theory generates a similar but slightly modified hypothesis. This

theory proposes that the "belief updating" outlined above should occur only following a

"formative event," meaning a major war or crisis that imperiled the security of the leader's state.

The Cuban missile crisis is the prototypical example of a formative event that should have forced

Khrushchev to reconsider his coercive tactics. Blight (1990) considers whether or not the Berlin

crises should be considered alongside Cuba, but ultimately concludes that neither side felt close

enough to the brink of war. Other formative events, such as the experience of being deceived by

Hitler with Operation Barbarossa, may have shaped Khrushchev's thinking (and that of the rest

of the Soviet leadership), but they fall outside the scope of this project. Khrushchev's decision to

base missiles in Cuba was the culmination of his coercive strategy, and his failure thus forced

him to fundamentally reconsider his strategy of brinkmanship, ultimately pushing him towards

accommodation.

Hypothesis 2. Khrushchev should change his strategy from coercion to accommodation following the Cuban missile crisis.

Unlike the cyclical learning theory, the formative events model does not presume that the perception of policy failure is what produces learning. The shock of the crisis itself should produce cognitive openness, which should lead the relevant decision makers to conclude that their previous policy is dangerous. The rest of the Soviet leadership should thus be similarly motivated to learn as a result of the crisis, regardless of their perceptions of whether or not the specific policy that produced the crisis was a success or failure. Thus Hypothesis 2.1 is largely the same as the original hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2.1. The Soviet leadership should advocate a change from coercion to accommodation following the Cuban missile crisis.

Social learning theory proposes that belief change will occur through social deliberation when groups of specialists or experts have access to policymakers. These groups of experts have unique authority to challenge dominant policy paradigms and thus to persuade leaders to update their beliefs. In the context of this research design, Soviet nuclear scientists are the crucial epistemic community. Scientists such as Andrei Sakharov acted as forceful advocates for nuclear arms control. It is conceivable that the scientists could have argued for *more* coercive strategies, but their concerns about nuclear fallout and their direct experience with the destructive power of these weapons generally led the Soviet nuclear scientists to advocate against the arms race. Khrushchev should thus have turned towards accommodation when these scientists had influence within the policymaking establishment.

Hypothesis 3. Khrushchev (and the rest of the Soviet leadership) should adopt accommodation when Soviet nuclear scientists have influence in the policymaking process.

This hypothesis unfortunately cannot be tested by cross-case comparisons, because there is simply no variation in the independent variable over this time period. With the exception of a brief period in 1956 when Shepilov ran the Foreign Ministry, Khrushchev largely shut academics and scientists out of the policymaking process. The Premier would occasionally receive a letter about nuclear testing, but he never actively solicited scientists' advice. This issue will be addressed in more detail in the case study.

At this point it is necessary to consider alternative explanations for Soviet foreign policy behavior. The first explanation centers on the relative balance of nuclear forces between the Soviet Union and the United States. Proponents of "negotiating from strength" have argued that Soviet arms control concessions resulted from American pressure (Evangelista 1999, 13-16). From this perspective, the qualitative and quantitative advantages of the American nuclear force gave the United States significant negotiating leverage over the Soviet Union. This theoretical framework would predict that the Soviet leadership should defer to accommodation when confronted with an unfavorable nuclear balance, but should opt for coercion when they perceive that they hold an advantage.

Alternative Hypothesis 1. Khrushchev should adopt accommodation when he perceives the nuclear balance to favor the United States, and should adopt coercion when he perceives the nuclear balance to favor the Soviet Union.

Once again, the phrasing of this hypothesis focuses on *perception*. An alternative strategy would be to rely on an objective measure of the nuclear balance, such as a simple count of operational weapons. The problem is that this measure would miss one of the most important dynamics of the nuclear confrontation of the late 1950s and 1960s, namely the "missile gap." The Soviet Union was technically inferior to the United States throughout this entire period (both

qualitatively and quantitatively), but the information available *at that time* did not necessarily make this clear. It was only in 1961 that the United States was able to definitively dispel the myths about the missile gap. Because Khrushchev deliberately manipulated the international perception of the nuclear balance, it is more important to focus on *his understanding* of the Soviet position rather than the objective "correlation of forces." Khrushchev was aware that Soviet missile capabilities were almost nonexistent, but he nevertheless succeeded, for a time, in convincing the world that the Soviets held an advantage.

A second explanation for Soviet arms control behavior focuses on the role of domestic politics. Khrushchev solidified his position as the head of the Soviet Union after his defeat of the "anti-party group" in 1957, but he nevertheless required the continued support of powerful bureaucracies as well as his colleagues in the Presidium. Khrushchev's eventual ouster in 1964 serves as the most potent reminder of the threat that he faced. There were two main ways in which domestic political calculations shaped Khrushchev's foreign policy. First, Khrushchev staked his political authority on his ability to strengthen the Soviet domestic economy (Breslauer 1982; Taubman 2003). He thus viewed arms control as a strategy for freeing up resources that could be spent raising Soviet living standards (Khrushchev 1974, 534-40). Second, Khrushchev was influenced by his desire to avoid opposition from the conservative elements of the Soviet leadership (Taubman 2003; Fursenko and Naftali 2006; Zubok 2007). These hawks were skeptical of negotiations with the United States and often pushed Khrushchev to adopt a harder line. This theoretical framework would thus predict that Khrushchev should pursue accommodation (because of its economic benefits) unless a weak political position forces him to capitulate to conservative pressure.

Alternative Hypothesis 2. Khrushchev should adopt accommodation when he perceives his domestic political standing as strong, and coercion when he perceives his political standing as weak.

A final explanation for Khrushchev's foreign policy behavior centers on the role of the

Sino-Soviet relationship. The partnership between the Soviet Union and the People's Republic

of China (PRC) was constantly fraught with tension. The Soviet policy of "peaceful

coexistence," in particular, was a crucial source of tension between the communist allies. Mao

was a vigorous opponent of détente with the West and constantly criticized Khrushchev for

capitulating to the Americans. The Soviet Union was ultimately concerned both with the risk of

losing China as an ally, and by the prospect of China supplanting Soviet leadership within the

international communist movement. Khrushchev was thus often pushed towards more coercive

negotiating tactics in order to restore relations with the Chinese.

Alternative Hypothesis 3. Khrushchev should adopt coercion when Sino-Soviet relations are weak, and accommodation when Sino-Soviet relations are strong.

This theoretical perspective captures an important aspect of Soviet behavior, but it

unfortunately provides no explanation regarding the *origin* of Khrushchev's preferences. For the

purpose of generating predictions for cross-case comparisons, this hypothesis assumes that

Khrushchev's natural preference is for accommodation over coercion. The within-case portion

of this study will be able to look more closely at the role of Sino-Soviet relations without making

this assumption.

Before proceeding into more detailed within-case comparisons, it is useful to see how

these predictions match up with the observed results across cases. Table 1 provides the observed

results for each year in addition to the predictions of each theory. The within-case portion of the

study discusses these independent variables in more detail and provides explanations for

particular predictions.

Table 1: Cross-Case Comparisons
(RS = Relative Strength, DP = Domestic Politics, SSR = Sino-Soviet Relations, CL = Cyclical Learning, FEL = Formative Events Learning, OBS = Observed Result, Acc. = Accommodation, Coerc. = Coercion)

Year	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963
RS	*Acc.*	*Acc.*	*Acc.*	*Coerc.*	*Coerc.*	*Coerc.*	*Coerc.*	*Acc.*	*Acc.*
DP	*Acc.*	*Acc.*	*Acc.*	*Acc.*	*Less Acc.*	*Less Acc.*	*Less Acc.*	*Less Acc.* --Pre CMC *Coerc.* --Post CMC	*Coerc*
SSR	*Acc.*	*Acc.*	*Acc.*	*Coerc.*	*Coerc.*	*Coerc.*	*Coerc.*	*Coerc.*	*Coerc*
CL	*None*	*Acc.*	*Coerc.*	*Coerc.*	*Coerc.*	*Coerc.*	*Coerc.*	*Coerc* --Pre CMC *Acc.* --Post CMC	*Acc.*
FEL	*Coerc*	*Coerc*	*Coerc.*	*Coerc*	*Coerc*	*Coerc*	*Coerc*	*Coerc* --Pre CMC *Acc.* --Post CMC	*Acc.*
OBS	*Acc.*	*Acc./ None*	*Acc.*	*Coerc. (some Acc.)*	*Coerc. (some Acc.)*	*Coerc.*	*Coerc.*	*Coerc.*	*Acc.*

Each theory seems to generally do quite well, although some capture the pattern of

Khrushchev's behavior better than others. Relative strength accurately predicts Khrushchev's

initial strategy of accommodation and eventual shift towards coercion, but fails to predict

Khrushchev's coercion in 1962, when the United States had revealed the missile gap to be a

myth. Domestic politics appears to perform quite poorly, as Khrushchev shifted towards coercion in 1958 despite having a strong political position. The theory only gets four of the nine cases correctly, making it no more effective at predicting Khrushchev's behavior than flipping a coin. Sino-Soviet relations appear to account quite well for Khrushchev's behavior, as Khrushchev moved towards coercion in 1958 right as major fissures in the alliance began to emerge. This is potentially a spurious correlation, however, as the relative strength theory makes the same predictions for every year until 1962. Cyclical learning gets most of the predictions correct, although Khrushchev was somewhat slow in learning that his initial efforts at accommodation were ineffective. The case study, on the other hand, will reveal that this is largely a function of Khrushchev's inability to properly evaluate his successes and failures. Many other members of the Soviet leadership believed that Khrushchev's coercive bargaining with the United States was leading them nowhere, but the Premier continued to push ahead with his strategy nevertheless. Both cyclical learning and formative events capture Khrushchev's shift towards accommodation after the Cuban missile crisis, but the formative events theory obviously fails to explain Khrushchev's behavior up until that point.

This section has outlined the variables and hypotheses that will be the focus of the study. It has also provided a cross-case comparison of the theories in question. With this framework established, the next section will present the case study itself.

Case Study

The correlative evidence provided in the previous section is helpful, but not sufficient, for determining which theory best captures Khrushchev's behavior. Because many of these theories rely heavily on individual perceptions and beliefs, it is necessary to look at the case in more detail to determine which causal processes envisioned by these theories are actually at work.

The research design for this case study is based on George and Bennett's (2005) concept of "process tracing." This strategy involves identifying the causal mechanism envisioned by a given theory and then searching for evidence that indicates the presence or absence of that proposed causal chain. The objective is to supplement the observed correlation between two variables by examining the process by which they are linked.

The case study itself is structured thematically, rather than chronologically. The evidence for and against each theory will be considered in turn. This section will then conclude by synthesizing all of this evidence in order to determine which theory best explains Khrushchev's behavior and beliefs during the period.

Relative Strength

Khrushchev and the rest of the Soviet leadership paid a great deal of attention to the "correlation of forces" between East and West. As explained previously, the material balance (in nuclear weapons) always favored the United States, but the *perceived* balance was often more important. When Khrushchev solidified his position of power in 1955, things did not look favorable for the Soviet Union. Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali (2006, 39) maintain that Khrushchev "was well aware of the Soviet Union's weakness relative to the United States." The Soviets held a large conventional advantage in Europe, but Eisenhower's "New Look" policy convinced Khrushchev that conventional superiority would not translate into bargaining leverage. That same year, the Soviets advanced an ambitious arms control proposal that would have regulated both conventional and nuclear forces. On its face, this episode appears to be a strong confirmation of the relative strength theory, but closer examination of the causal process at work paints a different picture. In fact, while relative strength was indeed a crucial factor in shaping Soviet foreign policy, it had precisely the opposite effect as that predicted by

conventional theories. Khrushchev actually became *more* coercive during periods of weakness, and felt more comfortable accommodating from a position of strength. This section will examine a number of policy decisions in further detail in order to elucidate this point.

Matthew Evangelista (1990) explains the 1955 disarmament proposal within the framework of realist cooperation theory. According to Evangelista, the Soviet leadership was concerned that the arms race would further extend American advantages in nuclear weaponry while bankrupting the Soviet economy. The Soviet Union should have thus been willing to accept even a somewhat unfavorable arms control treaty in order to "lock in" the existing balance and control the escalating costs of the arms race. Evangelista argues that Khrushchev's willingness to reduce Soviet conventional forces unilaterally demonstrates that the 1955 proposal was more than just propaganda. According to the historian Vladislav Zubok (2007, 103-4), the proposal was partially a propaganda tool, but it also went much further than previous Soviet offers and reflected a genuine interest in "changing the image of the Soviet threat in the West." Khrushchev's defense of his arms control strategy against Molotov in a July Central Committee Plenum provides strong support for this view. Khrushchev argued,

> For a long time we took an incorrect position, proposing to cut the armed forces of all countries by one third … Who will make such an agreement? … We will look like opponents of disarmament. … We decided to introduce a proposal that … we start from the conditions of each state. … Based on these conditions, we must attain arms cuts to an appropriate level. … Such a proposal permits us the possibility of taking the initiative.[6]

Khrushchev was concerned that previous proposals were too propagandistic, to the point that they would not be accepted and no progress could be made on reducing military spending. He was interested, however, not only in ensuring progress on arms control, but also in taking the

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[6] Center for Preservation of Contemporary Documentation (TsKhSD) Fond 2, Opis 1, Delo 176, List 282-95, trans. Benjamin Aldrich-Moodie. On file at the Cold War International History Project Virtual Archive (CWIHP), "Nikita Khrushchev Collection."

perceptual initiative to create a peaceful image for the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, an opportunity was missed, as the United States was less interested in disarmament than the Soviet Union, leading them to counter the Soviet proposal with Eisenhower's "Open Skies" plan, which Khrushchev promptly dismissed as an attempt at espionage.[7]

Khrushchev's response to American nuclear superiority was not guided by the logic that the relative strength explanation would predict. As Zubok (2007, 123-4) explains, "Some scholars suggested that the nuclear factor forced Moscow to behave more responsibly … In reality, the opposite happened. … Khrushchev … decided to trump American nuclear superiority with Soviet nuclear brinkmanship." Khrushchev did not fully embrace brinkmanship until 1958, but even in 1955, Khrushchev's response to American attempts to "negotiate from strength" was to "undermine [American] confidence" that the Soviet Union could be "bullied into concessions" (Fursenko and Naftali 2006, 40). An example of this dynamic occurred in late 1955, when Khrushchev exploited misunderstandings of the new Soviet M-4 bombers to spark American fears of a "bomber gap." Fursenko and Naftali (2006, 46) see this strategy as the basis for Khrushchev's vehement resistance to Open Skies, as he thought that, "if he allowed U.S. planes to spy on every Soviet airfield, Washington would quickly discover that his country was a nuclear paper tiger." Khrushchev (1974, 536) expresses these concerns plainly in his memoirs.

It is notable that Open Skies was the subject of a serious disagreement between Khrushchev and Marshal Zhukov, who saw the inspection scheme as an effective strategy for eliminating fears of surprise attack. Eisenhower in fact first suggested the Open Skies plan to Zhukov privately at the 1955 Geneva Conference, receiving a very favorable response. The

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[7] Scholars disagree about whether the "Open Skies" plan reflected genuine interest in disarmament on Eisenhower's part. David Tal (2008), for example, argues that "Open Skies," and the ensuing debates within the administration over how to modify it, reflected Eisenhower's willingness to consider many different approaches to arms control. For the purposes of this argument, however, American intentions are less important than Soviet perceptions. Marquardt (2007, 56), on the other hand, argues that the Open Skies scheme "was intended to contain Soviet power and lead over time to the demise of the Soviet system."

President was quite surprised then to hear Khrushchev's furious rejection (Fursenko and Naftali 2006, 44-6). While the Soviet military brass faithfully supported Khrushchev in his removal of Zhukov only two years later, it is likely that they shared Zhukov's viewpoint. Zubok (2007, 135; see also Taubman 2003, 379) observes that, while nobody dared to criticize Khrushchev publicly, military officers privately held "doubts about the emphasis on nuclear missiles and expansionist schemes, not supported by real power." The military leadership, unlike Khrushchev, had their focus on the *material* balance of power. The military brass was not, however, interested in accommodation, as relative strength theory would predict, but instead sought a renewed reliance on Soviet conventional strength (Zubok 2007, 135-6; Taubman 2003, 504-5). The Open Skies episode serves to emphasize the indeterminacy of structural explanations, as a range of different players preferred at least three different responses to the same perceived Soviet structural weakness.

Throughout 1956, Khrushchev dealt with a series of crises that distracted him from his arms control agenda. In particular, uprisings against the Communist governments in Hungary and Poland required his utmost attention. Khrushchev also created an uproar in Soviet politics by delivering his "Secret Speech" denouncing Stalin to the Twentieth Party Congress. Khrushchev then decided to involve the Soviet Union in the Suez Crisis in November, although the Soviets played a relatively minor role. The Soviets continued their accommodating arms control strategy into 1957, introducing a proposal in June for a two to three year testing moratorium accompanied by monitoring stations, but no on-site inspections. This represented a significant concession by the Soviet side, but the Americans, driven by opposition to the test ban from the Atomic Energy Commission and the weapons laboratories, responded by linking the deal to a cutoff in fissile material production. The Soviets, knowing that the United States held a

lead in fissile material production, promptly rejected the proposal (Bunn 1992, 18-19). U.S.-Soviet arms control negotiations thus continued to languish with little hope of moving forward. The crucial turning point in this narrative occurred, however, with the launch of Sputnik in October 1957.

In his memoirs, Khrushchev (1990, 187) recalls that the launch of Sputnik was "a balm to the soul," because it demonstrated that "even the territory of the United States of America was vulnerable to a strike by our missile forces." In reality, Korolyov's missile was hampered by serious limitations, and it was not until the late 1960s that the Soviet Union truly operated an effective ICBM force. But, as Troyanovsky observed, Khrushchev had a very "rich imagination," and this may be what led Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov (1996) to label him as a "nuclear romantic." William Taubman (2003, 378) also describes 1957-1958 as a turning point because of the launch of Sputnik and economic growth that "was fast enough to elate Khrushchev." Khrushchev was confident enough to declare in January of 1958 that "it is the United States which is now intent on catching up with the Soviet Union." It comes as little surprise then that, in the words of Hope Harrison (2003, 96), "Khrushchev's accommodating style toward the West became coercive in the fall of 1958." The November Berlin ultimatum represented the crucial shift in Soviet strategy, and thus it is necessary to delve into that decision in more detail.

Khrushchev's perception of the balance of forces certainly influenced his decision to make an aggressive move on Berlin. Harrison (2003, 106) sees Khrushchev's nuclear bluff as a factor that "hovered conspicuously in the background." Even when Khrushchev was considering signing a unilateral peace treaty with the German Democratic Republic (GDR), he boasted that he was "'95 percent' certain that the West would not go to war over West Berlin" (Harrison

2003, 173). Khrushchev's aggressive tactics certainly reflected this confidence, as he reportedly told Averell Harriman during a break at the 1959 Geneva Conference of Foreign Ministers (CFM) that if the Americans sent in their tanks to Berlin, "our rockets will fly automatically" (Harrison 2003, 131). Taubman (2003, 414) says of this incident that Khrushchev knew he was threatening war, but nevertheless "knew (or thought he did) how far he could push Eisenhower."

Khrushchev's nuclear confidence was ultimately a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the first Berlin crisis. Harrison (2003) argues that a wide range of motives factored in to Khrushchev's decisions on Berlin, often resulting in a seemingly contradictory foreign policy. The Soviet leadership was particularly concerned with the risk that the GDR would collapse economically. Khrushchev and many other Soviet leaders felt an ideological obligation to support socialism in East Germany, but it should be noted that the GDR also served as a critical strategic bulwark against the Western forces in Europe that the Soviet Union could not afford to lose. Zubok (2007, 133-4) adds that Khrushchev was also "determined to demonstrate the effectiveness of his New Look in making Western powers abandon the containment strategy and begin to negotiate with the Soviet Union."[8] Khrushchev did not make any substantive progress on Berlin, but he interpreted the American acceptance of a CFM as confirmation that he "had been successful in compelling the West to negotiate," which further bolstered Khrushchev's confidence in his aggressive tactics (Harrison 2003, 121). It was indeed during this conference that Khrushchev waved his nuclear sword at Harriman.

Khrushchev was exuberant when he found out that Eisenhower had invited him to a summit in Washington. Khrushchev would be the first Soviet leader to travel to the United States, which he saw as confirmation of his personal diplomatic success (Taubman 2003, 419-

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[8] "New Look" here refers to Khrushchev's policy of reducing overall military spending by increasing reliance on nuclear weapons. The term is drawn from Eisenhower's own "New Look" strategy, see Freedman (2003).

20). The majority of Khrushchev's trip to America was spent touring the country, and Khrushchev devotes a large chunk of his memoirs to recounting various anecdotes about the places he visited and the people he met. The main substance of the trip, however, transpired at Camp David, where Eisenhower and Khrushchev discussed a range of issues confronting U.S.-Soviet relations. The two statesmen discussed World War II lend-lease debts, the Berlin issue, and the potential for increased Soviet-American trade, but Khrushchev (1974, 410) recalls that "the primary problem before us … was disarmament." The talks actually demonstrated that Eisenhower and Khrushchev were of a similar mind about many disarmament issues, and both leaders in particular complained about the pressure they felt from their militaries to spend increasing amounts on weapons systems (Khrushchev 1974, 411-2). Ultimately, Khrushchev's ability to make concessions was limited, because, as he (1974, 411) explains in his memoirs, "as long as the US held a big advantage over us, we couldn't submit to international disarmament controls." Khrushchev (1974, 410), however, is careful to stress that he objected only to international controls "*at that time*," because international monitoring would have revealed the Soviet paper tiger while locking in American advantages. This provides strong evidence against the relative strength theory, as Khrushchev was unwilling to accommodate when in a position of weakness, but he would have been open to compromise if the Soviet Union achieved a position of parity or strength.

Despite Eisenhower's and Khrushchev's shared interest in controlling military spending, the Camp David talks wound up being quite unproductive, with the two parties agreeing only to hold another summit in Paris the next year. When the Soviet Union shot down Francis Gary Powers' U-2 on May 1, 1960, the prospects for a successful Paris conference began to unravel. Khrushchev wanted to believe that Eisenhower had not been responsible for authorizing the

flights, allowing the two leaders to negotiate in reasonable faith at Paris, but once Eisenhower had admitted his role, any remaining hopes for progress were totally scuttled. From the perspective of relative strength theory, the story is then relatively uneventful until the inauguration of Kennedy in 1961. After Kennedy's election, a number of events upset the (perceived) nuclear balance that had existed during the late 1950s, producing some of the most dangerous crises of the Cold War period.

Taubman (2003, 485) writes that the Soviet leadership perceived Kennedy as "an inexperienced upstart" who could be pushed around and bullied into making concessions. Harrison (2003, 166) nevertheless notes that, "from the time of Kennedy's election … Khrushchev had gone out of his way to show his interest in an improvement in U.S.-Soviet relations." Khrushchev often saw negotiation and brinkmanship as two complementary strategies, but the available evidence indicates that Khrushchev saw pressure as the primary means by which he would force Kennedy into a compromise. Khrushchev (1974, 498) wrote in his memoirs, "By the time Kennedy came to the White House … there had already been a shift in the balance of power. … It was for this reason that Kennedy had felt obliged to … reach some kind of agreement." Harrison (2003, 167) argues that Khrushchev thought he would have leverage over Kennedy at the Vienna summit in June because of the failed Bay of Pigs operation and the Soviet success in launching Yuri Gagarin into space. Zubok (2007, 139) agrees with this assessment, arguing that these events gave him the confidence that "he could intimidate the new president by his brinkmanship tactics."

Khrushchev's pressure strategy was unable to pry any concessions out of Kennedy. Khrushchev only continued to up the ante, as he was still convinced that "the best way to restrain the American state … was to scare the daylights out of it" (Taubman 2003, 502). Khrushchev

continued raising the pressure up on Berlin, and even announced at the beginning of August that

the Soviet Union would resume nuclear testing. Khrushchev was insistent that the Soviet Union

would sign a separate peace treaty with the GDR, and brazenly told Kennedy that "it is up to the

U.S. to decide whether there will be war or peace" (Harrison 2003, 177). Finally, Khrushchev

decided to take action, giving the go-ahead for Ulbricht's plan to build a wall around West Berlin

on the night of August 12-13. Many scholars have argued that this was actually an instance of

Khrushchev "backing down" by refusing to follow through on his commitment to sign a separate

peace treaty with the GDR. These scholars believe that Kennedy's tough stand restrained

Khrushchev. Harrison (2003, 191-2, 201-203) considers the merits of this position but concludes

that Khrushchev ultimately chose not to sign a peace treaty because the Berlin Wall, which he

had not previously considered seriously, successfully accomplished Khrushchev's strategic goal

of preventing a GDR economic collapse. Harrison admits that the potential for conflict with the

West played some role in Khrushchev's calculations, but ultimately gives those threats less

weight relative to other factors. Zubok (2007, 140; see also Khrushchev 1974, 504-5) similarly

concludes that Kennedy's threats "only strengthened [Khrushchev's] instincts for brinkmanship."

From 1958 until 1961, Khrushchev successfully countered American nuclear superiority

with myths about the "missile gap" and an aggressive strategy of nuclear bluff, but the

foundation of his strategy would be seriously damaged on October 21, 1961, when U.S. Deputy

Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilparic gave a speech denouncing the Soviet "missile gap" as a

myth. Harrison (2003, 211) admits that this "presumably restrained Khrushchev." Fursenko and

Naftali (1997, 139) argue that this speech provoked a dramatic response by Khrushchev, who

attempted to recreate American fears of Soviet nuclear power by exploding the fifty-megaton

"*Tsar Bomba*" (the largest nuclear weapon ever detonated) over the Arctic Ocean only nine days

after Gilpatric's speech. Taubman (2003, 536) describes Khrushchev's reaction to this "reversal of fortune" as "allergic in the extreme," as the Soviets both denied that the United States held an advantage and simultaneously accused the Americans of warmongering and threatening to strike first.

The Gilpatric speech was obviously a difficult pill for Khrushchev to swallow, as he had relied heavily upon his illusory nuclear advantage to shape his foreign policy for the past few years. Relative strength theory would predict that this turn of events should have finally pushed Khrushchev towards accommodation, as he was now in a position of inferiority both materially and perceptually. Instead, at the beginning of 1962, Khrushchev gave a speech to the Presidium in which he declared "We must increase the pressure and let our adversary feel that our strength is growing" (cited in Zubok 2007, 142). The desire to recreate a Soviet nuclear advantage played a crucial role in Khrushchev's decision to place Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba (Khrushchev 2000, 482-94). Zubok (2007, 143-4) argues that Khrushchev both sought to deter an American invasion of Cuba and to "redress … the nuclear imbalance." Anatoly Dobrynin (1995, 73), who was the Ambassador to the United States at the time, interprets Khrushchev's decision as "part of a broader geopolitical strategy to achieve greater parity with the United States that would be useful not only in the dispute over Berlin but in negotiations on other issues." Fursenko and Naftali (1997, 171) argue that Khrushchev saw the "missile gambit" as a solution to a variety of problems, including the defense of Cuba and the lack of effective Soviet ICBMs. Taubman (2003, 535-8) similarly argues that Khrushchev saw the deployment of missiles to Cuba as a sort of "cure-all" that could fix a wide range of foreign policy issues simultaneously.[9]

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[9] See also Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow (1999, 82-109) for a consideration of a number of different explanations for the Soviet decision to base missiles in Cuba.

The crisis ultimately pushed Khrushchev to his own limit, and he was forced to back down and remove the missiles. Khrushchev attempted to portray the outcome as a victory, but he knew that his strategy had been defeated. The Soviet leader exploited the détente in U.S.-Soviet relations that existed in the aftermath of the crisis to push for negotiations on a test ban, in addition to broader forms of disarmament. Khrushchev's strategy for engaging Kennedy was strikingly different from his pre-crisis behavior; as Taubman (2003, 583) explains, "instead of 'bullying' him, he would try to persuade him." Relative strength theory would appear to be consistent with this outcome, as Khrushchev now properly responded to his position of strategic inferiority by turning towards accommodation. The process that led Khrushchev towards accommodation, however, is inconsistent with this explanation. Khrushchev initially refused to accept that he was bargaining from the weaker position, leading him to execute a dangerous gamble in order to regain the upper hand. It was only after Khrushchev determined that nuclear bluff could not make up for strategic weakness that he was willing to change his strategy. The military balance alone ultimately cannot explain Soviet decisions. Khrushchev's beliefs about nuclear brinkmanship strongly shaped the way that he perceived the nuclear balance and responded to it.

One could attempt to resurrect relative strength theory by modifying it to argue that states in a position of relative weakness will seek arms control agreements, but only if they prevent the balance of power from changing for the worse in the future (Evangelista 1990). Vojtech Mastny (2008, 5) advances an argument along these lines, proposing, "The weaker of the two superpowers, the Soviet Union, insisted that it would accept only a comprehensive ban that would impede further development of nuclear weapons, thereby reducing the value of America's superior nuclear arsenal." The Soviet Union certainly expressed a preference for comprehensive

arms control throughout this period, but even this modified relative strength argument cannot explain Khrushchev's reliance on nuclear bluff. The theory would predict that Khrushchev should have sought comprehensive arms control with a strategy of accommodation. Khrushchev instead used coercion and pressure to bully successive presidents into negotiations and concessions.

The decision to sign the LTBT in 1963, giving up on a comprehensive ban, further calls this modified argument into question. Evangelista (1999) explains that Khrushchev was concerned that a partial test ban could be dangerous, both because the United States maintained a strong lead in underground testing and because underground tests were prohibitively expensive. By 1963, then, Khrushchev was actually willing to accommodate and accept a suboptimal arms control agreement, rather than continuing with the previous Soviet strategy of holding out for a deal that would more effectively limit the American arsenal. Neither variant of the relative strength explanation truly captures Khrushchev's behavior: he responded to weakness at first by compensating with brinkmanship, and later by modifying his goals away from a comprehensive ban.

In sum, the relative strength theory often makes correct predictions about Soviet strategy, but fails to accurately describe how those decisions were made. Calculations about the relative balance of power factored prominently into Soviet decisions, but a multitude of individual and political factors shaped how Khrushchev and the rest of the Soviet leadership interpreted that balance, and consequently how they reacted to it. Most importantly, the conventional relative strength argument appears to hold no weight, as the Soviets were far more likely to accommodate when they were in a position of strength, rather than weakness.

Domestic Politics

From 1955 onwards, it was clear that Khrushchev held the top spot in the Soviet leadership, but his hold on power was never as firm as Stalin's. Khrushchev needed to maintain support among the party elite, the bureaucracies, and the military and intelligence organs. Khrushchev was thus concerned with securing policy accomplishments that would increase his personal credibility within the Soviet establishment (Breslauer 1982). Khrushchev believed that he could generate credibility either through bringing in economic benefits, or by demonstrating the value of his personal diplomacy (Harrison 2003, 113-4; Zubok 2007, 94-6, 133-5). While overt political opposition was often muted, Khrushchev nevertheless took political risks into account to some extent when formulating his policies. Larson (1997, 18) concludes that domestic politics were an important, but not "compelling," factor for Soviet foreign policy, as Soviet leaders were generally capable of overruling their opposition.

In order to understand the political threats that Khrushchev faced, it is important to consider his own rise to power. When Stalin collapsed with a stroke in his dacha on March 1, 1953, Khrushchev was at best the third ranking man behind Stalin in the Party hierarchy. Malenkov and Beria were undoubtedly the two strongest players, with Molotov and Voroshilov also in the running for top leadership positions. Khrushchev was an important figure, but none of the other top Communists assumed the former Kalinkova shepherd had the political guile to exploit his position (Taubman 2003). After Stalin's death, Malenkov stepped in as head of the government, while Beria took over the secret police. But despite their political advantages, Khrushchev worked his way up to the top "like Stalin in the twenties, he identified his cause with that of the Communist apparatus, manipulated the party machine against his rivals, wielded domestic and foreign policies for political purposes, and made and betrayed allies—first Beria, then Malenkov, finally Molotov" (Taubman 2003, 241).

Khrushchev's first move was initiating a coup against Beria, who had quickly utilized his power as head of the secret police to assert himself at the top of the leadership chain. Khrushchev capitalized on a crucial mistake by Beria, who tried to enlist (perhaps not genuinely) Khrushchev in a plot against Malenkov. Khrushchev used the offer to turn Malenkov against Beria, and after acquiring support from Molotov, Bulganin, Mikoyan and Marshal Zhukov, the group deposed Beria at a Presidium meeting before arresting him and eventually sentencing him to execution. The move resulted in Khrushchev jumping from an ordinary party secretary to the first secretary of the Central Committee, giving him the ability to mobilize the party apparatus. Malenkov and the rest of the Party leadership would soon regret their mistake (Taubman 2003). Khrushchev further solidified his position by appointing his crony Ivan Serov as head of the KGB (Zubok 2007, 97).

Khrushchev's next play was to depose Malenkov as the head of Soviet government. The split between the two former allies began in 1954, and came to fruition in 1955 when Khrushchev had Malenkov demoted from prime minister to minister of electrification at a February Supreme Soviet session. Khrushchev accused Malenkov of being "Beria's right hand" and used his positions on East Germany and light industry to further discredit him (Taubman 2003). Khrushchev did not go so far as to completely remove Malenkov from the Presidium, however, as he required Malenkov's support against Molotov on foreign policy issues (Fursenko and Naftali 2006, 21).

Political priorities played a strong role in shaping Khrushchev's 1955 disarmament proposal. Taubman (2003, 260) explains that tension with the West was at odds with both Malenkov's and Khrushchev's political goals, as it meant that "the USSR could hardly afford to reduce its military might." Both men wanted to place a higher priority on the domestic economy,

specifically by promoting agriculture and light industry. Breslauer (1982) sees this as an attempt

by Khrushchev to establish his authority by generating success on an important issue that would

build Khrushchev's personal credibility. As discussed in the previous section, Khrushchev faced

opposition from the military, but his political position was not vulnerable enough for this to

prevent him from pursuing his goals. Khrushchev was even able to use Zhukov's support of

Open Skies to discredit him after the defeat of the anti-party group. Zubok (2007, 121) sees this

as an instance where "political infighting in the Kremlin killed a potentially promising

diplomatic opening." As I argued in the previous section, however, Khrushchev's reasons for

rejecting the inspection scheme were not solely political, but were also influenced by his desire

to preserve secrecy about the Soviet nuclear program in order to maintain fears about the

"bomber gap" that undermined American negotiating leverage.

Arms control progress was limited in 1956, as the Soviets continued to object to

Eisenhower's Open Skies plan while the Americans would not agree to Khrushchev's

disarmament proposals. Khrushchev did, however, face a number of domestic crises during this

year that tested his political strength. Khrushchev ultimately survived the year, but Zubok (2007,

119) believes that his handling of the various crises "undermined his authority as a statesman

among Stalinists and anti-Stalinists alike." It was indeed this political weakness that inspired the

anti-party group led by Malenkov, Molotov and Kaganovich to attempt a coup against

Khrushchev in 1957.

Khrushchev's defeat of the anti-party group served as a major turning point in his career.

Zubok and Pleshakov (1996, 176) argue that after this point, Khrushchev "ruled the USSR

single-handedly." Taubman (2003, 365) largely agrees, contending that "his democratic

approach began to give way to an authoritarian manner." Mikoyan recalls how Khrushchev felt

as though "everyone would just agree with him" (cited in Taubman 2003, 365). It is at this point that it becomes clear why Alternative Hypothesis 2 tells an incomplete story. The logic of the argument is that Khrushchev should pursue his own preferences when his political position is strong, but, as discussed in the previous section, it was around this time that Khrushchev's preferences began to shift from accommodation towards coercion. Khrushchev did not embrace coercion until 1958, however, and even advanced a proposal for a two to three year testing moratorium in 1957. Khrushchev also came to believe that the political benefits he sought through accommodation could be better achieved with a strategy of pressure. Khrushchev did not see brinkmanship as an alternative to negotiation, but rather as a supplement. Khrushchev desired political and economic benefits from compromises with the United States, but he viewed pressure as the most effective strategy for bringing about those compromises.

Even after 1957, Khrushchev was not free to ignore all political pressure. Khrushchev required allies, after all, to survive a coup attempt. Serov and Zhukov proved to be important supporters, and Khrushchev was certainly aided by the fact that most Secretariat members were his protégés, and thus supported him against the Presidium opposition (Zubok 2007, 119). Mikoyan in particular proved to be "the strongest counter to the opposition," as he argued that Khrushchev's "bold initiatives" had been crucial in resolving the crises in Poland, Hungary and Egypt (Zubok 2007, 120). Khrushchev required support not only from the party elites, but also from the powerful bureaucracies, and the military and intelligence services in particular (Zubok 2007, 104). Taubman (2003, 366) argues that the bureaucratic resistance Khrushchev faced was further magnified by the small size of his own personal staff.

Khrushchev's Berlin policy was influenced heavily by political considerations. Mikoyan contends in his memoirs that Khrushchev did not consult his Presidium colleagues before

delivering the Berlin ultimatum, but Harrison (2003, 107-9) finds evidence that contradicts

Mikoyan's version of the events. Khrushchev at least included the foreign affairs bureaucracies

in drafting the ultimatum, and he did inform the rest of the Soviet leadership before his

declaration, even if he did not allow much, if any, input. Harrison (2003, 116) argues further that

one of Khrushchev's main goals in initiating the crisis was "to demonstrate to his domestic and

foreign critics (in China, the GDR, and elsewhere) that he was not … appeasing the 'paper tiger'

West." The political considerations herein are threefold. Khrushchev wanted (1) to appease

conservative critics in the Presidium and military, (2) to establish his personal authority by

securing concessions from the West with his personal diplomacy, and (3) to prove that peaceful

coexistence could reap economic dividends.   A number of developments throughout the crisis

confirm that these factors played an important role.

Khrushchev viewed the American agreement to hold a Conference of Foreign Ministers,

and the eventual invitation to an Eisenhower-Khrushchev summit in Washington, as key political

victories that provided evidence that his diplomatic strategy was producing results (Harrison

2003, 121; Khrushchev 1974, 374). Khrushchev's policies began to come across as

contradictory, however, as he combined continued threats over Berlin with unilateral troop cuts,

a testing moratorium, and accommodating arms control proposals (Bunn 1992). This does not

indicate that Khrushchev's faith in pressure was shaken, but simply reveals how Khrushchev saw

coercion and negotiation as two parts of the same strategy. Unfortunately, as Taubman (2003,

454) explains, the rest of the Soviet government did not see the world through Khrushchev's

eyes, and politically, "the ground had shifted at home" by the time Khrushchev returned from

America. The military was outraged at Khrushchev's unilateral troop cuts and conservatives

became more vocal in their opposition to Khrushchev's "America-first" policy, which, in their view, had produced no significant progress.

Khrushchev's handling of the 1960 U-2 incident could reflect his concern about his political standing. Taubman (2003, 457) sees Khrushchev's belligerent reaction and subsequent scuttling of the Paris conference as an effort to assuage conservative critics, as Troyanovsky believed that "if Khrushchev hadn't reacted with sufficient harshness, the hawks in Moscow and Beijing would have used the U-2 incident … to show that the Soviet leader was prepared to accept any insult from Washington."[10] Taubman (2003, 513) ultimately concludes that despite the increasing opposition, "this was the period of Khrushchev's sole stewardship." Khrushchev's rivals were afraid of his political power, and criticism was generally muted or carefully directed towards Khrushchev's policies rather than the "boss" himself. While Khrushchev may have used this opportunity to score political points, the threat from conservative critics was not yet strong enough to *compel* Khrushchev to adopt a harder line.

Khrushchev's handling of the Paris conference is better explained by Khrushchev's frustrations with Eisenhower than his fear of conservative resistance. In the immediate aftermath of Khrushchev's America trip, he was confident that the superpowers would reach agreements on both Berlin and a test ban at the upcoming summit (Taubman 2003, 448). As the summit loomed closer, "Khrushchev must have picked up signs that the summit might not meet expectations" (Taubman 2003, 450). The U-2 incident was the straw the broke the camel's back, as it stung Khrushchev with a sense of betrayal (Larson 1997, 19). Khrushchev at first refused to believe that Eisenhower could have been involved in planning the flights, preferring instead to blame other administration figures such as CIA chief Allen Dulles (Taubman 2003, 446). Dobrynin (1995, 42), who was serving as Gromyko's main advisor on American policy at the time,

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[10] Harrison (2003, 136) advances the same argument, referencing the same quotation from Troyanovsky.

believes that Khrushchev showed up at the Paris summit genuinely hoping that Eisenhower would issue an apology, and that negotiations would then proceed. Taubman (2003, 455-60) largely agrees with this assessment, citing numerous examples where Khrushchev confided to his colleagues (and his son Sergei) that he "hoped a last minute gesture by Eisenhower would allow the meeting to proceed." Taubman believes, however, that Khrushchev reached the conclusion around the time that the Paris delegates were set to take off from Moscow that "it was practically impossible that the president would agree, so the summit would almost certainly collapse." The evidence seems to indicate that Khrushchev genuinely wanted the summit the work, but ended up trapping himself politically by impulsively making a demand that Eisenhower could not accept and Khrushchev could not back down from.

Khrushchev's aggressive posture towards Eisenhower carried over into his dealings with Kennedy. As discussed in the previous section, Khrushchev and the Soviet leadership saw Kennedy as a weak leader who could easily be pushed around.[11] Khrushchev's coercive policy towards Kennedy was probably influenced in part by his lingering fear of conservative opposition, but Khrushchev's ultimate motives came from his own faith in nuclear bluff combined with his realization in 1960 that his limited efforts at accommodating Eisenhower were largely unsuccessful. Khrushchev changed gears somewhat after the construction of the Berlin Wall in August. Harrison (2003, 210) writes that after that point, "Khrushchev gave priority to the chance of coming to an agreement with the West over Ulbricht's pressure for a separate treaty." This "America-first" strategy was exactly what generated criticism among Khrushchev's conservative critics, but Khrushchev's political position was bolstered after his

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[11] This view was not entirely universal. In particular, Mikoyan argued for a more diplomatic approach to dealing with Kennedy. See Fursenko and Naftali (1997, 125).

handling of the U-2 incident and the construction of the Berlin Wall, which represented at least

"a de facto solution to the Berlin question" (Mastny 2008, 10; see also Zubok 2007, 141-2).

Political calculations again came into play during Khrushchev's Cuban gamble. Dean

Rusk assessed after discovering the missiles in Cuba that hardliners had taken over Khrushchev's

government. Archival evidence has made it common knowledge that this view was inaccurate,

and that decision to deploy nuclear missiles to Cuba arose of Khrushchev's own volition.[12] A

number of factors played into Khrushchev's decision, most prominently his desire to restore the

nuclear balance and protect Cuba against American invasion. Taubman (2003, 537-40) makes

something of a political argument in linking Khrushchev's Cuban gamble to his frustration with

the lack of progress on Berlin.[13] Taubman does not make the connection to his political standing

explicit, but, as argued earlier in this section, Khrushchev's political strength depended in large

part on the credibility he created by resolving major disputes with the United States. Fursenko

and Naftali (1997, 156) advance a similar argument that "Khrushchev had staked his prestige in

the Presidium on settling U.S.-Soviet relations through disarmament agreements." For Fursenko

and Naftali, then, it was the U.S. decision to restart testing in 1961, rather than the lack of

progress on Berlin, that undermined Khrushchev's political prestige, and thus necessitated a

dramatic move. Zubok (2007, 143-4) presents yet another argument, proposing that the defense

of Cuba had itself become important for Khrushchev's domestic political credibility, because

"the Cuban Revolution had become a big factor in Soviet domestic politics."

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[12] This is not to imply that that the threat of conservative opposition did not influence Khrushchev's policy; after all, that is the argument being presented here. See Taubman (2003, 531) on Dean Rusk.

[13] Taubman does not take a firm position on whether or not Cuba was linked to Berlin, although he strongly implies that this is his view. He recognizes, however, that Troyanovsky, "who should know," claims explicitly that Cuba was not linked to Berlin. He provides a strong refutation of Troyanovsky's arguments pp. 38-40. He concludes, "Whatever his thinking about Berlin, it was clear to Khrushchev that U.S.-Soviet relations were going nowhere in 1961 and 1962." For the purposes of this argument, then, the historical dispute makes little difference.

Even though Khrushchev's strategy was designed to eventually bolster his political standing, it faced some strong initial opposition. According to Fursenko and Naftali (1997, 179-80), the most potent opposition came from Mikoyan, Kozlov, and the military. Khrushchev had already made up his mind about the issue, however, and the resistance was eventually overcome. Khrushchev's political fortunes were back on the line in October when Kennedy first announced that the United States was aware of the missiles in Cuba. Khrushchev at first returned to his familiar strategy of coercion in response to Kennedy's announcement of a quarantine, calling it a "serious threat to peace and security." As the crisis escalated, however, Khrushchev's fear of war took hold and pushed him towards more compromising measures (Taubman 2003, 560-77). Regardless of how Khrushchev attempted to portray it, the Cuban Missile Crisis was undoubtedly a political loss. Taubman (2003, 579) cites a number of close Khrushchev associates who agree with this assessment, one of whom recalls, "[Khrushchev] made a show of having been brave, but we could tell by his behavior, especially by his irritability, that he felt it had been a defeat."

Many scholars have argued that the political vulnerability created by the Cuban Missile Crisis opened a bargaining space for Kennedy and Khrushchev to negotiate the LTBT. Fursenko and Naftali (1997, 336-8) argue that the crisis was a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the agreement, with Kennedy's concessions being the other crucial part of the equation. Taubman (2003, 582-3) explains that Khrushchev needed to prove to his critics that his concessions on Cuba could generate progress in U.S.-Soviet relations. This gave Khrushchev the political impetus to turn down the heat and genuinely seek out an agreement with Washington. Fursenko and Naftali (1997, 323-4) go even further in arguing that Khrushchev perceived that his political fate was intimately tied with Kennedy's, as the Soviet position in Cuba depended on

Kennedy's nonaggression pledge. Evangelista (1999, 82) also proposes that "Khrushchev appears to have wanted to achieve a breakthrough in disarmament in order to have something to show in the wake of the Cuban fiasco." Ultimately, a number of different incentives gave Khrushchev the impetus to seek out an agreement with Washington.

Vojtech Mastny (2008, 4) disagrees with this conventional interpretation, proposing instead that "the weakness of Nikita Khrushchev in the aftermath of the Cuban missile crisis served as an impediment rather than incentive to negotiating." While Khrushchev often attempted to stake his authority on the success of his personal diplomacy with the West, conservative critics in both Moscow and Beijing were skeptical of the focus on U.S.-Soviet relations. Mastny (2008, 6) argues that "Khrushchev for his own internal reasons could not easily afford to be accommodating to the West." In the view of the hawks at home, the Soviet leader had acted both too aggressively and too timidly, by first almost provoking the United States into a nuclear conflict but then backing down during the heat of the crisis. Mastny (2008, 14) argues that even some "keen contemporary observers" detected the political pressure Khrushchev was facing both from Beijing and from the conservative opposition in Moscow led by Kozlov and Brezhnev. This pressure perhaps explains why Khrushchev at least initially maintained traditional Soviet positions during the test ban negotiations, rejecting both a partial ban and any inspection scheme (Mastny 2008, 8). Khrushchev's stance began to soften in early 1963, however, after Mikoyan successfully repaired Soviet-Cuban relations and ensured the return of some nuclear missiles that had escaped American attention. Mastny (2008, 11) believes that "with the Cuban problem defused … Khrushchev seemed more ready than before to drop his political preconditions." He agreed to Kennedy's proposed quota of two to four inspections

annually, but Kennedy changed the deal to eight to ten inspections in response to political

pressure from within his administration.

Mastny's argument does not imply that domestic political calculations were unimportant;

it simply provides a complementary explanation. As explained previously, Khrushchev had

three overriding political motivations. The weakness created by the Cuban missile crisis

incentivized Khrushchev to establish his authority by creating successful negotiations with the

West (which could also demonstrate the economic benefits of Khrushchev's strategy), but the

presence of conservative resistance simultaneously pushed Khrushchev to adopt a more

aggressive posture towards the United States. The story was similar throughout the rest of this

period. Political pressures often pushed Khrushchev in different and seemingly contradictory

directions, making it difficult to capture the effect of domestic politics in a single unidirectional

hypothesis.

To sum up, domestic politics can explain many of the causal processes at work in shaping

Khrushchev's policies. Domestic political calculations provide an important framework for

understanding both Khrushchev's goals and the strategies that he used to pursue them. The

evidence is strong that Khrushchev's foreign policy was driven by his desire to prove that his

personal diplomacy could be effective, but is much weaker at demonstrating that Khrushchev

adopted hard-line positions in response to political pressure. The threat of conservative

resistance was relatively insignificant until after the Cuban missile crisis, and it tended to

influence Khrushchev's policy only at the margins.

Sino-Soviet Relations

Khrushchev inherited from Stalin a relationship with China that was permeated by

mistrust. Much of this tension originated from disagreements between Stalin and Mao, however,

and the leadership turnover in the Soviet Union thus helped to facilitate a stabilization of

bilateral relations (Pleshakov 1998, 229). Khrushchev also became the first Soviet leader to visit

China when he traveled to meet the PRC leadership in 1954. The Soviet leader had a number of

incentives for maintaining a strong relationship with China. Khrushchev was powerfully

motivated by Marxist-Leninist ideology, and he thus saw it as an obligation to support other

communist parties around the globe (Pleshakov 1998, 226-8). Odd Arne Westad (1998, 165), on

the other hand, argues that the Sino-Soviet relationship was an anti-systemic alliance, shaped by

the mutual desire by both parties to contain the United States. For China, the issue was more

about pushing the "imperialists" out of Asia, while the Soviet Union was more interested in

bolstering Moscow's global role and managing tension with the West. Zhihua Shen and Yafeng

Xia (2009, 84) argue that the relationship was important for Khrushchev's political support, as he

"needed the support of other Communist parties, especially the CCP, to consolidate his authority

at home."

For the first few years of Khrushchev's tenure, Sino-Soviet relations remained quite

strong. Westad (1998, 173) sees the period from 1955 until mid-1958 as the "high point of the

Sino-Soviet alliance." Mao initially lauded Khrushchev's attempts at rapprochement with the

West before turning into a vehement critic of "peaceful coexistence" towards the end of 1957.

The relationship envisioned by Alternative Hypothesis 3 was consequently not present until the

second half of 1958, when the PRC began to push the Soviet Union towards a more hawkish

anti-Western stance. Some scholars, however, argue that the Sino-Soviet split began emerging

prior to 1958. Pleshakov (1998, 231) sees 1957 as a turning point, after which relations between

the two communist powers were in terminal decline. Deborah Kaple (1998, 130-2) draws on the

records of Soviet advisors in China to argue that signs of the fraying relationship emerged as

early as 1956, and became an issue of concern for the Central Committee by 1957. This historical controversy is largely insignificant in the context of this argument, however, as tensions with the PRC were certainly rising before Khrushchev embraced coercion with his Berlin ultimatum in 1958.

This observed correlation is more than a mere coincidence. As argued in the previous section, Khrushchev saw his Berlin strategy as a way to convince critics, both in Beijing and Moscow, that he was not "appeasing" the West. Harrison (2003, 141, 164-6) further argues that Ulbricht was able to exploit tension in Sino-Soviet relations to force Khrushchev's hand. The East German leader would make overtures towards China when Khrushchev would not support Ulbricht's preferred (hawkish) policies, forcing Khrushchev to prove that he was a "reliable ally" by becoming more hardline. China was not the only factor, however, influencing Khrushchev's decision. The Soviet leader was concerned by the lack of American reciprocation to his earlier concessions, and also felt that the correlation of forces had shifted towards favoring the Soviet Union. Khrushchev was also genuinely motivated by the desire to protect the GDR (Harrison 2003; Zubok 2007). Ultimately, while Khrushchev may have hoped to score political points with China by taking a more aggressive stance in dealing with the United States, the evidence is weak that he was *compelled* to do so as a result of Chinese pressure. A meeting between Mao and Khrushchev in July 1958 serves to demonstrate this point. The two leaders began the meeting with flowery rhetoric about the Sino-Soviet alliance lasting for "ten thousand years." Mao and Khrushchev recognized that they had differences of understanding, but Mao concluded, "These issues can be easily solved, and cooperation between us will last forever."[14] The ensuing discussion featured a number of heated disputes, but none that challenged the fundamental basis

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[14] Archive of the President of the Russian Federation [AVPRF], fond 52, opis 1, delo 498, list 44-477, trans. Vladislav M. Zubok. On file at the Cold War International History Project Virtual Archive (CWIHP), "Sino-Soviet Relations Collection."

of the Sino-Soviet relationship. Even had he assumed the worst, Khrushchev could have appeased Chinese critics by abandoning negotiations, rather than turning to brinkmanship. Indeed, Khrushchev was later attacked by Chinese critics for pushing the United States too far and risking war (Harrison 2003, 182). The particular decision to leverage nuclear threats over Berlin thus must have emerged from a different motive.

Khrushchev's overall strategy for resolving the Berlin crisis was to pressure the United States into negotiations, but even this coercive policy was sometimes criticized by the Chinese. The Chinese were ultimately concerned not by *how* the Soviet Union negotiated with the United States, but by the fact that it was pursuing negotiations *at all*. Khrushchev traveled to Beijing in October 1959 expecting praise for his firm negotiations with Eisenhower, but found only criticism instead (Zubok 2007, 137). During a meeting between Khrushchev and Mao, the two leaders had a discussion regarding Taiwan that is particularly illuminating. At the time, Mao was pursuing a policy of brinkmanship over the Taiwan straits not unlike Khrushchev's own Berlin strategy. The Chinese had gone a bit further, however, by actually shelling the Taiwanese islands, although Mao contended that China only intended to "create complications for the United States" without starting "large-scale military actions." Mao believed that his policy had been successful at putting pressure on the United States, but Khrushchev informed him, "We hold a different opinion on this question." Khrushchev admitted that the United States was not willing to fight the PRC over Taiwan, but nevertheless argued to Mao that, "We stand for relaxation of tensions."[15] It is first interesting to note that Khrushchev was criticizing Mao for brinkmanship over Taiwan at the same time that he was threatening the United States over Berlin. More important is Khrushchev's argument in favor of a relaxation of tensions. This

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[15] AVPRF, f. 52, op. 1, d. 499, ll. 1-33, trans. Vladislav M. Zubok. On file at the Cold War International History Project Virtual Archive (CWIHP), "Sino-Soviet Relations Collection."

reveals how Khrushchev saw pressure as a means to bring about détente from a favorable position, while Mao was more interested in using pressure to advance the PRC's interests. Westad (1998, 178) explains that both the Soviet Union and the PRC perceived that the American position was weakening by the end of 1959, but drew "opposite tactical conclusions." Specifically, "Khrushchev wanted to regulate Cold War competition from a position of Soviet bloc strength. … Mao, on the other hand, argued … that this was the time to confront imperialism abroad." It was this combination of geopolitical and ideological divergence that eventually brought about the demise of the Sino-Soviet alliance (Westad 1998; Pleshakov 1998).

While Khrushchev oscillated somewhat between accommodation and coercion in 1958 and 1959, he turned resolutely towards coercion after the U-2 incident in May 1960. Criticism from China probably played a role in this shift, but it was not the decisive factor. In April, Mao publicly denounced Khrushchev's negotiations with Eisenhower as a betrayal of Leninism (Taubman 2003, 453). Troyanovsky believes that Khrushchev's dramatic reaction to the U-2 incident was critical to appease hawks both domestically and in China, and Khrushchev's Chinese critics were certainly pleased by his behavior in Paris (Taubman 2003, 457, 467). While Khrushchev may have used this opportunity to score political points, the threat posed by the Sino-Soviet split was not yet significant enough that Khrushchev felt that a hardline stance was necessary to save the alliance. While Khrushchev sought reconciliation with the PRC, he wanted that process to occur on his own terms, and those terms included Chinese acceptance of his policy of "peaceful coexistence." Shortly after the failed Paris conference, Khrushchev summoned the leaders of all the communist countries to assemble at the Third Congress of the Romanian Communist Party in June and proceeded to lambaste the Chinese leadership, particularly on the issue of relations with the West (Taubman 2003, 470-2; Westad 1998, 25-6).

The conference ended in a massive disagreement that prompted Khrushchev to withdraw all Soviet advisors from China. The two sides were able to produce a compromise declaration in November, but "events were already out of control" (Taubman 2003, 472). If Khrushchev was confident enough in June to publicly challenge Chinese positions, it seems difficult to believe that Khrushchev's handling of the U-2 crisis only two months earlier was motivated by his concerns about alienating China.

As argued in the previous section, Khrushchev's handling of the Paris conference is best explained by his frustrations with Eisenhower. If concerns over fraying Sino-Soviet relations were truly the primary factor at work here, Khrushchev should have taken a firmer stand at the end of 1959 or the beginning of 1960, when the Chinese communists were openly critical of Khrushchev's negotiations with Eisenhower. Khrushchev's behavior demonstrates that he was not interested in *appeasing* China, but rather in convincing the PRC to support "peaceful coexistence" by showing that it could produce concrete results. Khrushchev thus continued to hang on to the hope that the Paris conference could succeed and bring a deal that Khrushchev could present as evidence that his policies had been successful.

Any hope for progress in U.S.-Soviet relations was torched by the failed Paris conference. Relations with China were becoming equally rocky at this time. Westad (1998, 179) views the ensuing three years of the Sino-Soviet relationship as a period oscillating between rapprochement and conflict. Sergei Goncharenko (1998, 157-8) argues that the Soviet leaders even began to fear Chinese nuclear blackmail after the collapse of Sino-Soviet military relations in the early 1960s. It was in this context that Ulbricht and Khrushchev met at the end of November 1960 to discuss their Berlin strategy in light of Kennedy's recent election. According to Harrison's (2003, 151-7) account, both leaders saw an opportunity to pressure Kennedy into

concessions, although they were concerned that their threats were losing credibility. Ulbricht

and Khrushchev agreed that they would need to sign a unilateral treaty if at least an interim

agreement on Berlin had not been reached by the end of 1961. This embrace of pressure came at

a time when Sino-Soviet relations were weak, but Khrushchev's decision was not motivated by

the prospect of restoring ties with China. The Soviets opted to put pressure on Kennedy because

they viewed him as weak and inexperienced, and because Khrushchev still firmly believed that

coercion was the best strategy for generating favorable negotiations (Taubman 2003, 485). The

Sino-Soviet split did, however, influence Khrushchev's policy more indirectly. Harrison (2003,

164-6) explains that Ulbricht made a number of moves, including a visit to Beijing, that were

intended to exploit Sino-Soviet tensions in order to force Khrushchev's policies closer to

Ulbricht's preferred line. Khrushchev was largely able to resolve Ulbricht's concerns by

increasing economic aid to the GDR.

The intense Sino-Soviet conflict that emerged in the middle of 1960 largely dissipated

towards the end of the year. Westad (1998, 26) admits that disputes arose over some issues such

as Albania, but nevertheless contends that both sides were committed to the overall bilateral

relationship. This spirit of compromise can be felt during a September 1961 meeting between

Deng Xiaoping and Soviet Ambassador Chervonenko. Deng expressed the opinion that, "on this

or that concrete issue we might not have identical opinions, but on the whole after the Moscow

conference, our relations have been developing fairly well."[16] Despite the general improvement

in Sino-Soviet relations, Khrushchev remained committed to a policy of coercion. The Bay of

Pigs fiasco and the successful launch of the first man into space by the Soviet Union both made

Khrushchev confident that he would be able to pressure concessions out of Kennedy at Vienna

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[16] AVPRF f. 0100, op. 53, p. 8, d. 454, ll. 175-8, trans. Benjamin Aldrich-Moodie. On file at the Cold War
International History Project Virtual Archive (CWIHP), "Sino-Soviet Relations Collection."

(Harrison 2003, 166). Even Kennedy's tough stand at Vienna could not convince Khrushchev to back down, as he escalated the pressure further in August by breaking his promise not to resume nuclear testing. Harrison (2003, 181-2) actually finds that during this phase of the crisis, the Chinese, while publicly criticizing Khrushchev for "yielding too much to the West," were privately pushing the Soviet leader to back down from the brink of war. This serves to demonstrate two important points. First, Sino-Soviet relations cannot account for the origins of Khrushchev's preferences. Tension in the relationship often pushed Khrushchev towards coercion, but there were also situations (such as this one) where Khrushchev adopted a coercive strategy for his own reasons, despite strong Sino-Soviet relations. The second point is that, while the Soviet relationship with China influenced Khrushchev's decision making, Chinese criticism was not a powerful enough factor to *determine* his behavior. Khrushchev certainly preferred strong relations with Beijing, but Khrushchev frequently showed a willingness to disregard Chinese opposition when their demands conflicted with his principles. Khrushchev generally tried to convince the Chinese leadership to adopt his own views, rather than simply capitulating to theirs.

The construction of the Berlin wall did not immediately end the Berlin crisis, but it was eventually accepted as a de facto solution. Sino-Soviet relations nonetheless began to unravel again towards the end of the year. The Sino-Soviet dispute flared up during the 22nd Party Congress in October, although a temporary compromise was once again brokered. Taubman (2003, 540) observes that, "several attempts to mediate the rift were mounted during 1962, but instead the tension escalated." Westad (1998, 27) attributes this to Mao's resurgence in Chinese domestic politics in mid-1962. Khrushchev and Mao not only had strong personal conflicts

(Khrushchev [1974, 252] compares Mao to Stalin in his memoirs), but also crucial ideological disagreements (Westad 1998, 30-1).

Sino-Soviet relations were certainly frayed when Khrushchev announced his plan of basing Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba to his Presidium colleagues. Khrushchev's decision making does not indicate that the Cuban gamble was motivated by a desire to save the alliance with China. Concerns about China did, however, influence Khrushchev through a different mechanism. Fursenko and Naftali (1997, 169-72) argue that the Soviet leadership feared that increasing Chinese influence in Cuba would cause the Soviet Union to "lose" Cuba to the PRC. The zero-sum thinking inherent in this calculation demonstrates just how strained Sino-Soviet relations had become. The Soviet leadership did, however, have legitimate cause for concern. To use Yinghong Cheng's (2007, 98) description, both Beijing and Moscow "treated the island as a propaganda battleground." Cheng (2007, 113) further explains that, "From 1960 to 1964, Sino-Cuban relations were much closer and more intimate than many observers had assumed." Soviet concerns reached a climax in March, when Castro dismissed Escalante, who was one of the Soviet Union's most powerful allies within the Cuban government. When Escalante arrived in Moscow, he attributed his downfall to rising Chinese influence in Castro's government, which served to spark Soviet concerns about their leadership position within the international communist movement.

This argument appears compelling, but Khrushchev's Cuba policy was ultimately motivated by a broader range of concerns. Even Fursenko and Naftali do not contend that fears about losing Cuba to China played a crucial role in the ultimate decision. Khrushchev could have taken a number of steps outside of deploying nuclear missiles to boost relations with Cuba. The Cuban government was actually quite surprised when the Soviet Union first informed them

about Operation Anadyr (the Soviet code name for the Cuban mission), as they had certainly not asked Khrushchev for such a bold commitment to Cuba's defense. Taubman (2003), as discussed elsewhere, believes that the ploy was intended to resolve a number of issues simultaneously. In particular, Khrushchev sought to deter an American invasion of Cuba, restore the U.S.-Soviet nuclear balance, and (arguably) pressure the United States into further concessions on Berlin. This wide range of motives provides strong reason to believe that Khrushchev would have pursued brinkmanship over Cuba even absent concerns about China.

Despite the overall tension in the Sino-Soviet relationship during this period, the Soviet Union still received overt Chinese support throughout the crisis. Mao wrote in retrospect that he suspects Khrushchev supported China in their fall 1962 conflict with India in order to assure Chinese support on Cuba (Westad 1998, 28). Khrushchev's focus during the peak of the conflict was on finding a peaceful resolution that could avert nuclear war, and his decision making was thus largely uninfluenced by Chinese criticism. The aftermath of the crisis, however, served to be a crucial turning point in Sino-Soviet relations. Westad (1998, 28) believes that the crisis "pushed Sino-Soviet relations back into the downward spiral." China quickly shifted from praising the Soviet defense of Cuba to criticizing Khrushchev for backing down in the face of American pressure. Khrushchev did not, however fold under Chinese pressure and return to a policy of coercion. Taubman (2003, 583) believes instead that, "Khrushchev needed to show the Chinese that Cuban concessions could lead to agreements with Washington." Khrushchev consequently pushed for a wide range of concessions, especially on disarmament, in order to capitalize on the opportunity that the Caribbean crisis had created for U.S.-Soviet détente.

Mastny (2008) argues that Khrushchev's political weakness after the missile crisis prevented him from compromising with Kennedy, even though his inclinations were in favor of

relaxing tensions. Khrushchev faced perhaps the most intense Politburo opposition of his political career, which strongly limited his ability to make concessions to the United States. Dobrynin (1995, 98) observed that "Khrushchev was still stubbornly trying to have his own way on Germany and Berlin despite the fact that he came out of the Cuban crisis with his position weakened." It was not *despite* his weak position that Khrushchev maintained a hard line on these issues, but *because* of it. Khrushchev was nevertheless capable of taking some steps towards a U.S.-Soviet compromise. Khrushchev communicated through the "confidential channel" (Dobrynin-Robert Kennedy) that the Soviet Union would tolerate up to three on-site inspections annually as part of the verification for a test ban agreement. An opportunity was missed, however, because Kennedy was pressured by hawkish elements within his administration to further raise U.S. demands to eight inspections (Bunn 1992, Dobrynin 1995, 100).

Many scholars have linked the final Soviet decision to ratify the LTBT to the collapse in Sino-Soviet relations that occurred in the summer of 1963. The timing of these two events appears to provide strong confirmation for this proposition. It was after the failed Moscow summit in July that "the Sino-Soviet split reached the point of no return" (Mastny 2008, 17). Only five days later, the test ban treaty was signed in Moscow after a shockingly brief period of negotiations. Mastny (2008) explains this surprising sequence of events with evidence that Khrushchev had already accepted the idea of a partial test ban in April. The final collapse of the Sino-Soviet relationship thus "cleared the way" for an agreement that both the United States and the Soviet Union already desired (Mastny 2008, 18). Taubman (2003, 606) similarly argues that, "With Sino-Soviet relations beyond repair, Khrushchev no longer needed to appease Beijing." According to Zubok (2007, 152), it was the "outbreak of virtually undeclared war" between the

two communist powers that "explained Soviet acceptance of a partial test ban agreement which it could have had at any time during the past year." Some scholars see Kennedy's conciliatory speech at American University in June as the crucial breakthrough that convinced Khrushchev to negotiate. Andrei Gromyko (1989, 181) recalled the speech as "the outstanding act of [Kennedy's] presidential life." Mastny (2008) demonstrates convincingly, however, that more recent archival evidence discredits this view.

This episode is perhaps the strongest evidence that Sino-Soviet relations shaped Khrushchev's negotiations with the United States. It is important to note, however, that the collapse of Sino-Soviet relations is not what *caused* Khrushchev to sign the LTBT, but rather what *allowed* him to do so. Khrushchev's decision to adopt a more conciliatory posture on arms control came in the aftermath of the Cuban missile crisis, even though an agreement was not actually reached until the next summer. Khrushchev continued to pursue negotiations with Kennedy despite criticism from the Chinese leadership. China strongly opposed any disarmament negotiations, arguing that the communist bloc needed to focus instead on acquiring nuclear superiority (Westad 1998, 180). Khrushchev, just as he had done during previous crises in Sino-Soviet relations, focused on convincing the Chinese leadership instead of appeasing them (Mastny 2008, 16-7). Khrushchev could have caved to Chinese demands and abandoned his pursuit of détente with Kennedy, but the Soviet leader chose to stay the course. Khrushchev was convinced, however, that the pursuit of a stable relationship with Washington was more important than the maintenance of a difficult relationship with Beijing.

In conclusion, the Sino-Soviet relationship played an important, but not determinative, role in shaping Khrushchev's foreign policy. Khrushchev certainly preferred to maintain productive relations with China, but he was also willing to sacrifice that relationship when it

conflicted with more important foreign policy priorities. The evidence also indicates that Khrushchev did not always appease Chinese concerns by adopting a more confrontational stance towards the West, as the theory predicts. Instead, Khrushchev reacted to Chinese criticism by attempting to convince the PRC leadership to support his own positions.

Cyclical Learning

Cyclical learning theory makes no prediction regarding Khrushchev's initial strategy, as he had no real previous foreign policy experience to learn from when he first came to power. Goldgeier (1994) develops a separate argument, proposing that Soviet leaders learn from their formative experiences in rising to power domestically, and then use the political strategies that were effective in those domestic circumstances on the international scene. Goldgeier argues that Khrushchev rose to power through pressure and by staking out bold, clear positions, and thus carried this forward into his strategy of brinkmanship. Goldgeier's theory provides an interesting account of Khrushchev's eventual behavior in Berlin and Cuba, but fails to explain his accommodating strategy in the 1955 to 1957 period.

After Khrushchev's 1955 disarmament proposal, cyclical learning theory would predict that Khrushchev should continue accommodation if he perceived that proposal as successful, but should change towards coercion if he perceived that it had failed. As discussed in the first section, Khrushchev was certainly not satisfied with Eisenhower's Open Skies counter-proposal, but there is no evidence that he saw the policy of accommodation itself as a failure. Regardless of how Khrushchev felt, his foreign policy options were heavily limited in 1956 as a result of the series of domestic crises he faced. The Suez crisis in November, however, gave Khrushchev his first taste of the strategy of nuclear brinkmanship. As Pleshakov and Zubok (1996, 190) argue, "It first occurred to Khrushchev that nuclear bluff was a good thing … during the Anglo-French-

Israeli-Arab war." Khrushchev persuaded the Presidium to send letters to the aggressors, threatening Soviet military retaliation (which, given the circumstances, could only have meant the use of nuclear weapons). Pleshakov and Zubok (1996, 191; see also Zubok 2007, 130) contend that, "to his last days Khrushchev believed that this ultimatum was a gem of his diplomacy."

Cyclical learning theory would predict that Khrushchev should have taken the lesson he drew from the Suez crisis to implement a broader strategy of pressure and coercion. Khrushchev was a slow learner, however, and his strategy in 1957 remained one of accommodation. Khrushchev continued in the spirit of his 1955 proposal by suggesting a two to three year testing moratorium that would be accompanied by international monitoring (but no on-site inspections). It was only towards the end of 1957 that the lack of American reciprocation of Khrushchev's diplomatic offers prompted him to reconsider the effectiveness of his current strategy. Taubman (2003, 399) argues that Khrushchev was frustrated because he had made numerous concessions to the Americans only to receive nothing in return. Even the American Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson admitted that the United States had given up virtually no ground to the Soviets.

This frustration eventually led Khrushchev to embrace coercion rather than accommodation, a shift which was epitomized by his 1958 Berlin ultimatum. Khrushchev's calculation was also certainly affected by his perception that the balance of power had shifted in the Soviet Union's favor in 1957, with the launch of Sputnik giving the Soviet Union the opportunity to exploit fears about the missile gap. This was, however, a period where Khrushchev was as strong politically as he would ever be, so we can be reasonably confident in assessing that Khrushchev's shift towards coercion reflected his own changing preferences. Khrushchev became concerned as months progressed without any progress on his ultimatum, but

he was able to send Mikoyan to Washington to secure an agreement over a CFM in Geneva without backing down from his threats (Taubman 2003, 409). While no substantive agreements over Berlin were reached, Khrushchev nevertheless saw the conference as evidence that his aggressive strategy was producing results (Zubok 2007, 133; Harrison 2003, 121). When the CFM was followed up by an invitation for an Eisenhower-Khrushchev summit in Washington, the Soviet leader was elated. Khrushchev (1974, 374) recalled in his memoirs that he was "proud that we had finally forced the United States to recognize the necessity of establishing closer contacts with us." Khrushchev was apparently confident that he would reach substantive agreements with Eisenhower on Berlin and a test ban at the Paris summit scheduled for May 1960. It is interesting, however, that Khrushchev did not believe these lessons about the success of coercion applied for China, as he was quick to criticize Mao for his brinkmanship during the Taiwan Straits crises (Westad 1998, 176).

A period of mild détente existed in U.S.-Soviet relations lasting from the Geneva CFM until the U-2 incident in 1960. Bunn (1992) recalls that both sides were quite accommodating in their arms control proposals throughout this period. The fact that Khrushchev was willing to negotiate does not, however, indicate that he had abandoned his strategy of nuclear pressure. Zubok (2007, 134) believes that Soviet disarmament proposals during this period were merely propaganda designed to offset the image of Soviet aggression. This view is somewhat incomplete, as Khrushchev certainly did place some value on securing a test ban that could limit the costs of the arms race. Khrushchev's preference was still for comprehensive disarmament, however, and he continued to view nuclear brinkmanship as the best strategy for pursuing his more ambitious goals.

As discussed previously, Khrushchev came under increasing political strain towards the end of the 1950s, and in particular after the U-2 incident in May 1960. Khrushchev told his son Sergei after the U-2 was shot down that "the way to teach smart alecks a lesson is with a fist" (cited in Taubman 2003, 443). Khrushchev was not simply relaying the arguments of his conservative critics to his son, but was rather revealing his own rationale for dealing with Americans by force. Khrushchev's reaction to the U-2 crisis provides some limited evidence of learning processes at work. The Premier had initially held high hopes that he and Eisenhower could achieve real progress at the Paris conference, but the lack of progress in U.S.-Soviet negotiations began to frustrate the Soviet leader. The evidence for this argument is presented earlier. The implication is that Khrushchev made an evaluation that his odd amalgamation of coercion and accommodation was not producing results, and he consequently decided to abandon the policy in favor of a return to more pure coercion.

Khrushchev continued with this harder line after the election of Kennedy, seeing him as a weak politician that could be pressured into making concessions. Khrushchev's initial efforts were largely unsuccessful, as Kennedy stood his ground at the Vienna conference in June, despite his political weakness after the Bay of Pigs fiasco. According to Taubman (2003, 502), even Kennedy's tough stance "hadn't shaken Khrushchev's view that JFK could be pushed around." Khrushchev decided to further up the ante by breaking his promise not to resume nuclear testing in August. Dobrynin (1995, 44-5) writes critically of Khrushchev's strategy, contending that "from the very beginning it was based on an erroneous postulate." Dobrynin recalls how Mikoyan was the only member of the Politburo who was willing to stand up to Khrushchev and argue in favor of constructive dialogue rather than pressure. Dobrynin does not believe that the other Politburo members actually believed that Khrushchev's policies were

successful, but he chides them for their unwillingness to stand up to their foolish leader. Khrushchev was ultimately unsuccessful in prying concessions from Kennedy, but he nevertheless resolved many of his concerns about East Germany through the construction of the Berlin Wall.

Despite the limited victory Khrushchev achieved with the construction of the Berlin Wall, it should have been clear to the Soviet leader that his policy of coercion was not producing results. Fursenko and Naftali (1997, 177) believe that "the failure of Khrushchev's policy was painfully evident." Khrushchev nevertheless continued to talk about a unilateral peace treaty with the GDR, as Kennedy's tacit acceptance of the Berlin Wall had only "convinced Khrushchev that he could pressure Kennedy again" (Taubman 2003, 506). Harrison (2003, 218) also argues that Khrushchev sought to "push the West into further concessions" by keeping up the pressure on Berlin. Harrison (2003, 221) does, however, observe some learning by Khrushchev, as his "views of what was achievable narrowed during the crisis." In the face of tension with China, opposition domestically, and clear nuclear inferiority, Harrison (2003, 222) believes that Khrushchev "scaled back his goals accordingly." Khrushchev was still unwilling to update his beliefs about the effectiveness of brinkmanship as a strategy, but he at least adjusted his goals in accordance with his changing circumstances. Other members of the Soviet leadership drew different lessons from the Berlin crises, with Troyanovsky seeing the wall as a poor attempt to save face for a failed policy and Mikoyan arguing for a more compromising approach in negotiations with Kennedy (Taubman 2003, 506; Zubok 2007, 144).

Kennedy's tough stance during the Berlin crisis was followed up by a speech by Roswell Gilpatric in October of 1961 that dispelled the myth of the missile gap. Relative strength theory would predict that Khrushchev should recognize his unfavorable circumstances and turn towards

accommodation. Khrushchev was unable, however, to accept that his main diplomatic weapon had been neutralized, leading him to stubbornly deny the American advantage while making every effort to restore the Soviet position.[17] Zubok (2007, 143) argues that "brinkmanship spared Khrushchev the need to look for more complicated and nuanced approaches in foreign affairs," making his faith in nuclear pressure "unshakeable" (142). Troyanovsky provides a similar assessment of Khrushchev, recalling that "when some idea took hold of [Khrushchev], he was inclined to see in its implementation an easy solution to a particular problem, a sort of cure-all … he could stretch even a sound idea to the point of absurdity" (cited in Taubman 2003, 541). Brinkmanship for Khrushchev thus served as a sort of "one-size-fits-all" foreign policy that could provide a simple solution to a range of issues. Khrushchev was understandably hesitant to abandon such a policy so quickly.

The Cuban missile crisis was Khrushchev's last, and most dangerous, effort at nuclear blackmail. As Taubman argues, Khrushchev saw the Cuban missiles as a "cure-all" that could address a wide range of foreign policy goals. Regardless of whether or not Khrushchev was seeking to protect Cuba, force American concessions on Berlin, bolster his credibility with Beijing, or restore the nuclear balance (the answer is probably a combination of all these factors), what is important is that he chose coercion as his preferred strategy to achieve these goals. He even inferred a lesson about tactics by applying the Soviet success in secretly constructing the Berlin Wall overnight to the Cuban mission, which he convinced himself could remain concealed (Harrison 2003, 186).

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[17] See Jervis (1976) and Jervis, Lebow and Stein (1985) on cognitive dissonance and motivated bias. When leaders hold strong beliefs, they are more resistant to challenges, making leaders prone to re-interpret new events or conditions as being consistent with their existing paradigm, as opposed to updating the paradigm itself. Kuhn (1970) makes a similar argument in the context of scientific paradigms, which is elaborated in the first section of the paper.

Even after the Americans discovered the weapons, Khrushchev's initial reaction was to remain tough and keep up the pressure. Khrushchev was not alone in his confidence, as Gromyko also sent a telegram back to the Central Committee on October 19th informing them, "Everything which we know about the position of the USA government on the Cuban question allows us to conclude that the overall situation is completely satisfactory."[18] What then finally caused Khrushchev to back down? Sergei Khrushchev contends that Kennedy's letter on October 25th genuinely "touched" his father and convinced him to compromise, but Sergei also remarked that "DEFCON 2 didn't hurt either" (Taubman 2003, 567). It was also on October 25th that Soviet ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin sent home a cable warning that Kennedy might be forced by political pressure to invade Cuba.[19] Blight (1990) argues that the fear of being responsible for nuclear Armageddon was crucial in pulling both sides back from the brink. Fursenko and Naftali (1997) argue that Khrushchev recognized that his dangerous gambit was not achieving progress, and thus chose to save face with an agreement over a Cuban non-aggression pact. As discussed in the section on domestic politics, Khrushchev appeared to tout this compromise as a success, but his closest colleagues could tell that Khrushchev viewed the outcome as a defeat.

If cyclical learning theory is correct, this episode should have convinced Khrushchev to abandon coercion in favor of accommodation. The same prediction would be made, however, by the formative events theory. The following section will thus consider the missile crisis and its aftermath (concluding with the signing of the LTBT) in more detail to evaluate which type of

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[18] AVPRF, copy courtesy of NSA, trans. Mark H. Doctoroff. On file at the Cold War International History Project Virtual Archive (CWIHP), "Cuban Missile Crisis Collection."
[19] AVPRF, copy obtained by NHK (Japanese Television), on file at the Cold War International History Project Virtual Archive (CWIHP), "Cuban Missile Crisis Collection."

learning process was in place. It will also summarize the other evidence for and against these two experiential learning theories.

Formative Events

Formative events and cyclical learning each predict a somewhat different process by which leaders will update their beliefs. Cyclical learning envisions a somewhat regular process whereby leaders evaluate the success of previous policies and use these determinations to guide their future decisions. Formative events theory, by contrast, contends that certain events will shock leaders and force them to call a wide set of beliefs into question. After a formative event, leaders should not only be evaluating whether or not the policy that led up to that event was successful, but should also be more broadly rethinking their foreign policy interests. Formative events theory also proposes that belief updating should be relatively infrequent, as opposed to cyclical learning theory, which argues that belief updating should occur in reaction to the most recent events.

The Cuban missile crisis forced Khrushchev to revise his beliefs, not only about brinkmanship, but also about the broader Soviet position in the Cold War and its corresponding national interests (Khrushchev 2002). According to Taubman (2003, 581), "Khrushchev had learned at last that bluff and bluster didn't pay, but they had been his main weapons, and without them, he was lost." The Soviet leader ultimately decided that when dealing with Kennedy, "instead of 'bullying' him, he would try to persuade him" (Taubman 2003, 583). Fursenko and Naftali (1997, 320) explain that "Khrushchev's actions in the wake of the crisis gave the White House hope that, in social science terms, the Soviet leader had undergone some 'nuclear learning' as a result of flirting with thermonuclear war." The authors argue that this was a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for progress on U.S.-Soviet arms control. Goldgeier

(1994, 72) contends that "Khrushchev was impressed with the dangers posed by nuclear weapons, and this awareness caused a shift in his basic bargaining style." Each of these arguments is consistent, however, with both cyclical and formative events learning.

Further evidence demonstrates that Khrushchev did not change course after the missile crisis solely because he saw coercion as an ineffective political strategy, but also because the experience of standing on the nuclear brink genuinely shocked Khrushchev into updating his beliefs. Bunn (1992, 42) believes, "both leaders had strong incentives to pull back from the fearsome nuclear abyss … Both seemed to need agreement on limiting the arms race to represent a new cooperation on preventing nuclear war." This would be reflective of a new interest on Khrushchev's part in containing the arms race for the sake of preventing nuclear war. Zubok (2007, 148-9) provides a similar assessment, claiming that "Finally, it dawned upon Khrushchev how dangerous the game he had started was. … Khrushchev … had a glimpse into the nuclear abyss and discovered that even carefully calculated schemes of nuclear brinkmanship could lead to a catastrophe." Troyanovsky believed that the missile crisis "had a tremendous educational value" for Khrushchev, in that it "made [him] realize, not in theory, but in practical terms, that nuclear annihilation was a real possibility" (cited in Zubok 2007, 150). Blight (1990, 7) argues that "fear … actually *produced* the learning required" to resolve the missile crisis. It was not fear of death, but rather the fear of being responsible for starting a nuclear war, that drove both sides to seek compromise. This learning process influenced more than simply the outcome of the crisis, however, as the mutual lessons drawn about the risks of nuclear conflict guided both sides throughout the rest of the Cold War.

Despite the lessons drawn from the missile crisis, Khrushchev did not move immediately to embrace the partial test ban, waiting instead until after the complete collapse of Sino-Soviet

relations in July 1963. The Chinese (and some Kremlin hawks) had drawn a different lesson

from the missile crisis, arguing that it reflected the need to pursue nuclear superiority rather than

disarmament (Westad 1998, 180). While Khrushchev held off on signing a major test ban

agreement with the United States, he did not kowtow to Chinese pressure and turn up the heat on

the West. This, I argue, is a reflection of his revised interests in the aftermath of the Cuban

missile crisis. Khrushchev placed a high value on securing an agreement with the West, not only

to demonstrate his own political prowess, but also because he viewed détente as necessary in and

of itself for lowering the chance of nuclear war. Khrushchev's last-ditch effort to repair Sino-

Soviet relations was actually an attempt to convince the PRC to support his policies.

Khrushchev eventually warned Beijing that Moscow would sign a test ban with Washington

despite Chinese opposition (Westad 1998, 28). Khrushchev was also willing to defy his

domestic political opposition in order to pursue détente. Mastny (2008) argues that Khrushchev

faced significant opposition from Kozlov and other conservative Presidium members, both over

his negotiations with the West and his unilateral military cuts. Taubman (2003, 586) describes

how Khrushchev began to call for larger and larger unilateral troop cuts despite heated

opposition from the military brass. Khrushchev was willing to take these risks in order to

facilitate détente because the Cuban missile crisis had emphasized for him the importance of

stable East-West relations. Khrushchev thus not only adjusted his strategy, by abandoning

nuclear brinkmanship, but he also updated his interests by placing a much higher value on

détente for its own sake.

Overall, there is strong evidence from throughout this period that Khrushchev's beliefs

about nuclear brinkmanship shaped his foreign policy choices. The evidence is much weaker,

however, at demonstrating that Khrushchev did very much learning. Khrushchev drew some

inferences about the successes and failures of his past policies, but he was often stubbornly

unable to realize when his strategy was failing. Goldgeier (1994, 118) explains that

policymakers are prone to misapply the lessons of the past by focusing too much on instances

where policies have been successful. By failing to pay attention to the contextual factors that

made a given policy successful in a certain situation, policymakers incorrectly attribute the

success to the nature of the policy itself. When a given policy fails, however, policymakers are

quick to place the blame on contextual factors rather than the substance of the policy. This effect

was magnified for Khrushchev, who sought simple solutions to complex foreign policy issues.

When he determined that brinkmanship had been effective in one context, he was quick to apply

the strategy to solve a wide array of foreign policy issues. When brinkmanship failed to produce

results, he tended to blame factors other than the strategy itself. It was only after taking the

world to the brink of nuclear war that Khrushchev finally realized the flaws in his approach.

Khrushchev (1974, 461) himself provides further insight into his "stubborn" nature in his

memoirs, when he explains his behavior after the U-2 incident by referencing the Russian

proverb, "once you let your foot get caught in a quagmire, your whole body will get sucked in. In

other words, if we hadn't stood up to the Americans, they would have continued to send spies

into our country." Once Khrushchev had committed to brinkmanship over Berlin, he had his

foot in a quagmire, and felt that he could not back down without appearing weak. This attitude

made it difficult for Khrushchev to recognize when his policies were failing, and consequently

when to retreat from them.

       There is some evidence that Mikoyan, at least, may have been a quicker learner than

Khrushchev. As mentioned previously, Mikoyan realized that Khrushchev's pressure on Berlin

was not producing results, and thus argued for a more conciliatory policy. Dobrynin agreed with

Mikoyan's assessment, and claims that Gromyko privately concurred as well. Unfortunately, most of Khrushchev's colleagues were simply unwilling to challenge his decisions openly, leaving Mikoyan without Presidium support.

The lessons that Khrushchev drew from the Cuban missile crisis were also institutionalized as a form of organizational learning. When Khrushchev was removed from power in 1964, his rivals cited his dangerous tactics in Berlin, Cuba and even Egypt as reasons for his ouster. Polianskii declared, "Over the past seven years, the Soviet state without any serious reason and basis has been on the brink of war three times. … When there is no other way, we can and must threaten the imperialists … But you can't do that systematically" (cited in Harrison 2003, 232). While Brezhnev oversaw a massive arms buildup as Khrushchev's successor, he also promoted détente with the West and even negotiated two major bilateral arms control treaties. Brezhnev and the Soviet leaders after him also refrained from the type of nuclear brinkmanship that defined Khrushchev's tenure. Even during the 1973 Middle East War, Brezhnev's military threats were significantly restrained.

In summary, this case study found strong evidence that Khrushchev's beliefs about the effectiveness of nuclear brinkmanship shaped his foreign policy decisions. There is little evidence, however, that Khrushchev's beliefs about nuclear pressure were shaped by cyclical learning processes. Khrushchev held on to his views stubbornly and only genuinely updated his beliefs after the Cuban missile crisis brought him to the brink of nuclear war.

Social Learning

Several scholars have examined the role of epistemic communities, such as nuclear scientists, in shaping arms control policies during the Cold War (see, for example, Adler 1992;

Evangelista 1999). The evidence from this case indicates, however, that nuclear scientists had little to no influence over Khrushchev's foreign policy.

Evangelista (1999, 87-9) argues that nuclear scientists influenced policy both by providing technical information about arms control and by influencing international public opinion. These two factors were probably minor in Khrushchev's decision to sign the LTBT. If Khrushchev were solely concerned about public opposition to nuclear testing, he would have simply advanced propaganda proposals with no real intention of following through (as he did effectively through the 1950s and 1960s). There is also little evidence that Khrushchev paid much attention to the nuclear scientists when they voiced their opposition directly. Fursenko and Naftali (1997, 132) argue that "scientists were not invited to shape Kremlin decision making." Andrei Sakharov (1990, 207-8) recalls his attempt to convince Khrushchev (through Kurchatov) not to restart nuclear testing in 1958. According to Sakharov, "Khrushchev was extremely displeased and … from then until Kurchatov's death a year and a half later, he no longer enjoyed Khrushchev's trust." Sakharov (1990, 215-7, see also Taubman 2003, 503) attempted to influence Khrushchev directly to prevent the resumption of testing in 1961, but Khrushchev blew off his argument and told him, "Leave politics to us—we're the specialists."

There was a brief period during 1956 when it appeared that the Soviet government might become more open to the influence of academics. Zubok (2007, 113) explains that "Shepilov's arrival at the Foreign Ministry made Soviet foreign policy more responsive to the advice of experts." This was quickly reversed after Khrushchev's defeat of the anti-party group, as Khrushchev "did not feel much need for outside expertise and advice" (Zubok 2007, 121). Shepilov was replaced by Gromyko, who was selected because he would not attempt to act as an independent force in foreign policy. From that point onwards, the influence of scientists was, as

mentioned previously, extremely limited. Sakharov (1990, 199) explains that scientists could occasionally get Khrushchev's ear if they offered a "quick fix" for some pressing issue, but the Soviet leader was generally uninterested in their advice.

The closest that Soviet scientists came to actually influencing government policy occurred during the post-missile crisis test ban negotiations. Sakharov (1990, 230-1) believes that he, along with Viktor Adamsky, played an important role by bringing the possibility of an atmospheric ban to the attention of Yefim Slavsky, head of the Soviet nuclear weapons program. The idea had previously been floated several times, most recently by Kennedy, but was rejected by the Soviets. Slavsky apparently passed the idea up to the Foreign Ministry, where it eventually reached "the boss." As Zubok (2007, 151) recounts, "A few days later, Slavsky informed Sakharov that Khrushchev had accepted the proposal." Mastny (2008, 15-6) also argues that when Khrushchev introduced the idea to his colleagues, his "argumentation … bore close resemblance not to anything advocated by the military but to the position laid out in a memorandum … by a leading Soviet nuclear scientist, Viktor Adamskii." Mastny points out, however, that there is no evidence that Khrushchev actually read the memorandum, never mind that it shaped his decision. Proposals for an atmospheric ban had already been introduced by the Americans, and it is highly doubtful that Khrushchev would not have eventually reached the same ultimate conclusion and accepted those deals, even in the absence of Adamsky's input.

In conclusion, the role of nuclear scientists in shaping Khrushchev's arms control policy was limited at best. Soviet scientists attempted to influence the policy process, but were only well received when the leadership already agreed with their ideas.

Summary

The evidence from this case study demonstrates that domestic politics, Sino-Soviet relations and formative events each played an important role in shaping Khrushchev's behavior. Relative strength was also an influential factor, although it worked in the opposite direction from the conventional theory laid out towards the beginning of this paper. What is most evident, however, is that Khrushchev's beliefs about nuclear brinkmanship and coercion played heavily into his calculations. The non-learning theories all have significant gaps in their explanations that can be supplemented effectively by looking to Khrushchev's beliefs about pressure versus accommodation. Before looking more specifically at the evidence on learning, I will elaborate this point in more detail.

A major gap in the relative strength narrative occurs in 1962, when Khrushchev was confronted with overwhelming evidence that his nuclear advantage had dissipated. One could attempt to salvage the original argument by proposing that Khrushchev still *perceived* that the Soviets held a nuclear advantage even after Gilpatric revealed that the missile gap was a myth, but this does not hold up to the evidence. Khrushchev explicitly saw the deployment of nuclear missiles to Cuba as an opportunity to redress the nuclear imbalance, implying that he was well aware that such an imbalance existed. Relative strength theory predicts that leaders should react to an unfavorable position through accommodation. Khrushchev, however, was convinced by this point that a strategy of negotiating from nuclear strength was the only effective means for dealing with the United States. This belief was so strong that Khrushchev simply could not imagine a world where he could not rely on nuclear bluff (Taubman 2003, 581). Khrushchev's beliefs about nuclear pressure (which he did not hold in 1955) led him to gamble on the possibility of re-creating nuclear parity, rather than to adjust to his new structural circumstances. After the Cuban fiasco revealed the limits of Khrushchev's strategy, he finally accepted his

circumstances and began to pursue accommodation with the United States. The fact that Khrushchev reacted to a similar position of nuclear inferiority differently in 1962 than he did in 1955 serves as a potent demonstration of why structural theories are underdetermined.

Domestic political threats undoubtedly shaped many of Khrushchev's foreign policy decisions, but his beliefs about nuclear brinkmanship generally determined his overall motives. Khrushchev's main domestic political goals, namely his effort to establish his personal authority and his campaign to reallocate money from the arms race towards consumer-oriented production, do, however, account to some extent for Khrushchev's obsession with nuclear coercion. Khrushchev saw nuclear reliance as an opportunity to reduce Soviet conventional military spending, and he also believed that that he could establish his legitimacy as a ruler by earning concessions from the United States with his personal diplomacy. This personal connection to the strategy of brinkmanship explains to a large degree why Soviet foreign policy during this period was primarily formed unilaterally by Khrushchev. Khrushchev's policy choices were influenced to an extent by opposition from the military and conservative elements of the Presidium, but this political pressure largely affected Khrushchev's policy at the margins. Regardless of whether Khrushchev's preference was for coercion or accommodation, he rarely let the political winds dictate the general thrust of his foreign policy. Khrushchev's first major foreign policy shift, which occurred with the Berlin ultimatum in 1958, occurred when Khrushchev was at the height of his political power. Conservative pressure pushed Khrushchev to take a harder stance against Eisenhower in 1960, but even Khrushchev's most accommodating gestures towards Eisenhower prior to that point were still fundamentally the flip side of a policy of coercion. Opposition from the Kremlin hawks thus at best caused a change in Khrushchev's tactics, but not his overall strategy. There is also compelling evidence that Khrushchev's tougher stance emerged because

of the lack of progress coming from talks with Eisenhower and Khrushchev's feeling of being betrayed, rather than Khrushchev's desire to placate the conservative opposition. Khrushchev's final major policy shift, towards conciliatory negotiations with Kennedy after the Cuban missile crisis, also occurred despite powerful resistance from the military and the Kremlin hawks. The fact that Khrushchev was removed in a coup by the Brezhnev-led conservative opposition barely more than year after signing the LTBT only serves to emphasize that Khrushchev was willing and able to make controversial foreign policy decisions even against substantial political opposition.

The Sino-Soviet relationship played an important role in dictating the direction of Soviet foreign policy, but it did not generally determine Khrushchev's foreign policy goals. Some scholars have argued that Khrushchev became more interested in accommodation with the United States when relations with China worsened, while others propose that Khrushchev was actually pushed to adopt a more aggressive anti-American stance in order to placate Sino-Soviet tensions. Both dynamics were actually at play, as Khrushchev felt pressure to assuage Chinese concerns until the relationship had eventually worsened to the point where it was irrecoverable. What is important, however, is that Khrushchev rarely let this pressure force a change in his strategy. One could argue that Khrushchev's Berlin ultimatum was designed to appease Chinese critics of peaceful coexistence, but that very same year, Khrushchev was willing to risk Sino-Soviet ties with an open critique of Chinese foreign policy. Khrushchev's aggressive handling of the U-2 crisis could reasonably be considered a response to vocal Chinese pressure, but there is, as previously discussed, strong evidence that other factors were important in Khrushchev's decision. Soviet foreign policy, especially towards Berlin and Cuba, was, however, strongly motivated by a desire to prevent other communist bloc states from drifting towards Chinese

leadership. The Sino-Soviet relations argument stands on the firmest ground when explaining Khrushchev's signing of the LTBT. The collapse of the alliance was a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for Khrushchev's decision to accept a partial test ban. Khrushchev had otherwise decided to accept an atmospheric test ban, both because he needed an agreement to recover domestic credibility, and because the Cuban missile crisis had impressed upon him the necessity of relaxing superpower tensions. The Soviet Premier did not finally sign the agreement, however, until the Sino-Soviet relationship had fully collapsed.

The evidence for cyclical learning is suspect, largely as a function of Khrushchev's personality. Khrushchev tended to stick to an idea quite firmly after adopting it. The gregarious Soviet leader relied primarily on the force of his personality, rather than acute political skills, and consequently looked for relatively simple solutions to international problems. Khrushchev was often left with no "plan B" when his initial gambles failed. Not unexpectedly, Khrushchev tended to draw more lessons from his victories than his successes. When a certain strategy succeeded, Khrushchev convinced himself that it could be applied in a wide range of circumstances. When his policies failed to produce immediate results, Khrushchev was far more likely to find some contextual factor to blame than he was to consider whether or not his strategy was flawed. The glaring flaws in his evaluation process demonstrate the weakness of cyclical learning theory. The model provides no explanation of the methods by which policymakers will evaluate their policies. The theory thus cannot predict the conditions that will actually lead decision makers to change their beliefs, a shortcoming that is addressed in part by the formative events theory.

Many of Khrushchev's colleagues in the Soviet leadership did actually learn from Khrushchev's mistakes, but they were unwilling to challenge their boss. Mikoyan was a notable

exception, and he most forcefully challenged Khrushchev after Kennedy's election by arguing in favor of compromise over pressure. Dobrynin, who admittedly had minimal influence at the time, agreed with Mikoyan's assessment, and claims in his memoirs that Gromyko, while being unwilling to challenge Khrushchev directly, shared his views. These conflicting views serve to illustrate Risse-Kappen's argument about the relationship between ideas and political structure. An idea that gains hold in an authoritarian government, such as Khrushchev's faith in nuclear brinkmanship, can more effectively override opposition and influence policy, but the closed nature of that system makes it more difficult for new ideas to emerge. The absence of cyclical learning is reflective thus not only of Khrushchev's personality, but also of the political structure in which he was situated.

The Cuban missile crisis is a prototypical example of a formative event producing learning. Khrushchev's closest advisors agree that the crisis was a sobering moment for the ambitious Premier. Khrushchev was finally forced to reconsider the utility of his main political tool, nuclear brinkmanship. This close encounter with nuclear war caused Khrushchev not only to reconsider the effectiveness of his coercion tactics, but to more broadly rethink the Soviet position in the world. Khrushchev came to see détente between the superpowers as a necessity, not only because successful agreements would restore his political standing, but also because he believed stable U.S.-Soviet relations were necessary for managing the dangers of the nuclear arms race. Khrushchev was not able to immediately translate these lessons into new policies, as he was distracted by Chinese criticism, conservative opposition, and deteriorating Soviet-Cuban relations. Khrushchev's backchannel offers to Kennedy about the test ban treaty, along with the recollections of his close advisors, further confirm that Khrushchev's change of heart was

genuine. The fact that Khrushchev was generally very inflexible in his beliefs provides hope that even the most narrow-minded individuals can learn when confronted with a powerful experience.

Khrushchev waited until the collapse of the Sino-Soviet conference in Moscow in July before concluding an agreement with the United States. The fact that, after years of haggling, the July test ban negotiations took only five days to produce an agreement demonstrates that Khrushchev had already made up his mind on the issue and was simply waiting for the results of the Sino-Soviet talks. Khrushchev used the meeting as one final effort to repair the relationship, but the rift between the former communist allies had already grown too large. It is difficult to generate reliable counterfactual predictions, but I suspect that it would have taken a miraculous reversal in the relationship in order to convince Khrushchev to abandon his plans for a compromise with Kennedy. Khrushchev was already quite disillusioned with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and with Mao in particular. Khrushchev was generally reluctant to sign compromise agreements with the PRC, preferring instead to win them over to his positions. Khrushchev took a similar approach during the Moscow negotiations by trying to persuade the Chinese representatives that his conciliatory strategy towards the United States would produce valuable benefits. The important point is that Khrushchev did not appear willing to sacrifice his foreign policy goals for the sake of improved relations with China. Khrushchev waited for one last chance to win China back to his side, but he saw this effort as something that should be complementary, rather than supplementary, to his pursuit of détente with Washington. The timing of the LTBT is thus best accounted for by reference to the Sino-Soviet relationship, but Khrushchev's decision to pursue the treaty was ultimately the result of the "nuclear education" that Khrushchev received from the missile crisis.

There is also evidence that the missile crisis spurred learning throughout the Soviet leadership. When Khrushchev was removed from power in 1964, his aggressive tactics in Berlin and Cuba were cited as a primary reason for his dismissal. Khrushchev's colleagues, especially his conservative critics in the Presidium, did not, however, necessarily agree with his conclusion that the Soviet Union should pursue compromise with the United States. They shared his understanding that peaceful U.S.-Soviet relations were necessary to manage the risk of nuclear conflict, but did not believe that the Soviet Union should back down from its negotiating positions. The Brezhnev-led group of conservatives that would eventually take power also learned a completely different lesson from the crisis, which was that the Soviet Union needed to achieve nuclear parity with the United States (Dobrynin 1995, 93). It is telling, however, that even this hawkish group never again attempted to deploy nuclear brinkmanship as Khrushchev had done, even as they were financing a massive buildup of the Soviet nuclear arsenal.

This section has summarized the most compelling evidence from the case study and presented an evaluation of how well the various theories explain Khrushchev's behavior. The final segment of the paper will highlight some important implications raised by the case, provide some direction for future research, and then conclude.

Conclusion

The research presented in this paper provides support for many of the core assumptions of the existing literature on learning and also some further insight into the dynamics of learning. One of the central arguments advanced by constructivist scholarship, which also serves as a foundational assumption for any theory of learning, is that ideas matter in shaping foreign policy decisions. In this case at least, Khrushchev's beliefs played a central role in Soviet decision

making. This could simply be a reflection of the concentrated nature of power in the Soviet political system, so there is no firm basis for generalizing these conclusions to countries with more pluralistic political institutions.

This paper has also examined the conditions under which leaders will update their beliefs. The previous section considered whether or not the empirical evidence supports the learning models that were outlined in the first part of the paper. This section will draw on three important empirical insights from the case in order to generate some new theoretical conclusions and point to directions for further research.

The first observation is that learning processes are influenced heavily by personal characteristics. Khrushchev's cognitive style was generally quite simplistic, and this seems to have contributed to his rigid beliefs and ineffective learning. Dyson and Preston (2006, see also Tetlock 1993, Tetlock and Tyler 1996) contend that effective analogical reasoning (a crucial aspect of learning from past policy outcomes) is determined by an individual's level of "cognitive complexity" and policy expertise. The authors evaluate their argument in the context of six major foreign policy decisions undertaken by four different American presidents. Dyson and Preston conclude that leaders with high levels of cognitive complexity draw sophisticated analogies from a wide range of sources, while those with lower levels of complexity draw simple analogies that are limited to their generational context. This theoretical framework is a plausible account for Khrushchev's behavior, but Dyson and Preston argue that further research is necessary to test their theory more rigorously.

The second empirical concern is that different leaders often make conflicting evaluations of the same policies. Cyclical learning theory in particular suffers from an inability to explain which factors will cause leaders to update their beliefs. Research in political psychology has

already identified a number of cognitive biases that hinder effective decision making (McDermott 2004, 120-41). Studies of cognitive dissonance, for example, demonstrate that individuals are capable of holding on to their existing beliefs even if the face of contradicting evidence. Formative events apparently provide a way of breaking through these cognitive barriers, but more research should be done to determine what constitutes a formative event, and what aspects of those events specifically allow individuals to break from their cognitive biases.

A final observation relates to the concept of "vicarious" learning. Goldsmith (2003) argues that leaders learn lessons not only from their direct experiences, but also by emulating other actors. Goldsmith's empirical support for this claim is relatively lackluster, as he focuses exclusively on Russia and Ukraine, which provide a relatively easy test for his theory. The research presented here finds no support for the idea of vicarious learning. Khrushchev, for example, was criticizing Chinese brinkmanship over Taiwan at the same time that he was escalating the crisis over Berlin. If Khrushchev believed, as he argued to the Chinese leadership, that China's aggressive tactics would provoke the West, he should have applied this reasoning to his own behavior and lowered the pressure on Berlin. Instead, we see more evidence that leaders focus primarily on their own experiences when making judgments about future policies. This study obviously does not serve as a comprehensive test of vicarious learning, but future research could expand the empirical work on this subject.

The tough test created by this particular case further allows for some confidence that the results of this study are more broadly generalizable. Khrushchev should be a worst-case scenario for any learning theory: his personality was stubborn and impulsive, his cognitive style was relatively simple, and Soviet political culture encouraged brinkmanship. The evidence against cyclical learning only serves to emphasize this point, as Khrushchev was generally unwilling to

admit when his policies were failing and instead continued to stick to his guns (or bombs, as it were). The fact that this man was then able to undergo such a radical transformation after the Cuban missile crisis demonstrates that formative events can produce learning even in the most difficult subjects.

In conclusion, this study has provided an empirical test of three different learning theories in an important historical case. These theories were also compared against three conventional explanations for Soviet behavior in order to better evaluate the substantive influence that learning dynamics had on Soviet foreign policy. The results of the case study provided strong support for the formative events theory, but weak support for cyclical learning and social learning. The findings presented here confirm that the learning research agenda is moving in the right direction, but they also reveal a number of gaps in the learning literature that could serve as takeoff points for future research.

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