

The

"Tiger File. This explains why Khrushchev by

# Book

## Moscow's Man in The Middle

**IN CONFIDENCE**

**Moscow's Ambassador to America's  
Six Cold War Presidents (1962-1986)**

By Anatoly Dobrynin  
Times Books. 692 pp. \$30

**By Robert G. Kaiser**

**T**HIS IS an amazing book, first of all simply because it exists. A relatively candid memoir by a senior official of the Soviet Union is not the sort of volume American readers ever expected to see, but here it is. Better yet, it is a good book, a compelling historical account of the Cold War from Kennedy through Reagan filled with historical scooplets, quotations from original Soviet documents, juicy gossip and memorable anecdotes.

Anatoly Dobrynin, who served as a Soviet diplomat for half a century and as ambassador to the United States for half of that ca-

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Washington Post

posted him during the Cuba Missile Crisis

# World

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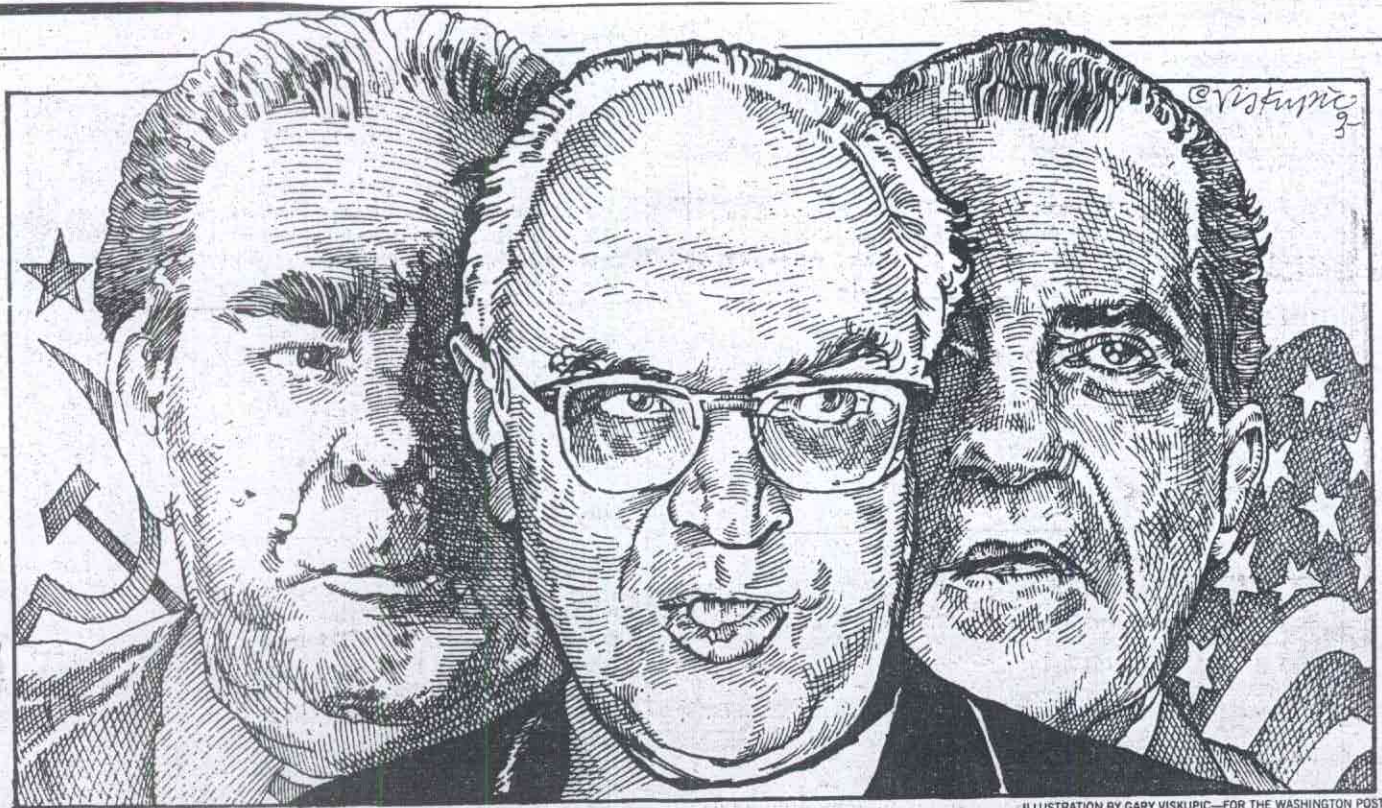


ILLUSTRATION BY GARY VISKUPIC—FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

reer, is quite candid about the history he observed and occasionally was able to nudge. He performs a great service for posterity by filling *In Confidence* with vivid, firsthand accounts of every Cold War confrontation from the Cuban Missile Crisis to the shooting down of KAL Flight 007. He adds to the historical record of every one of them. And he blames nearly every one largely on his own bosses in Moscow, complaining that their isolated and ideological view of the world constantly bedeviled his

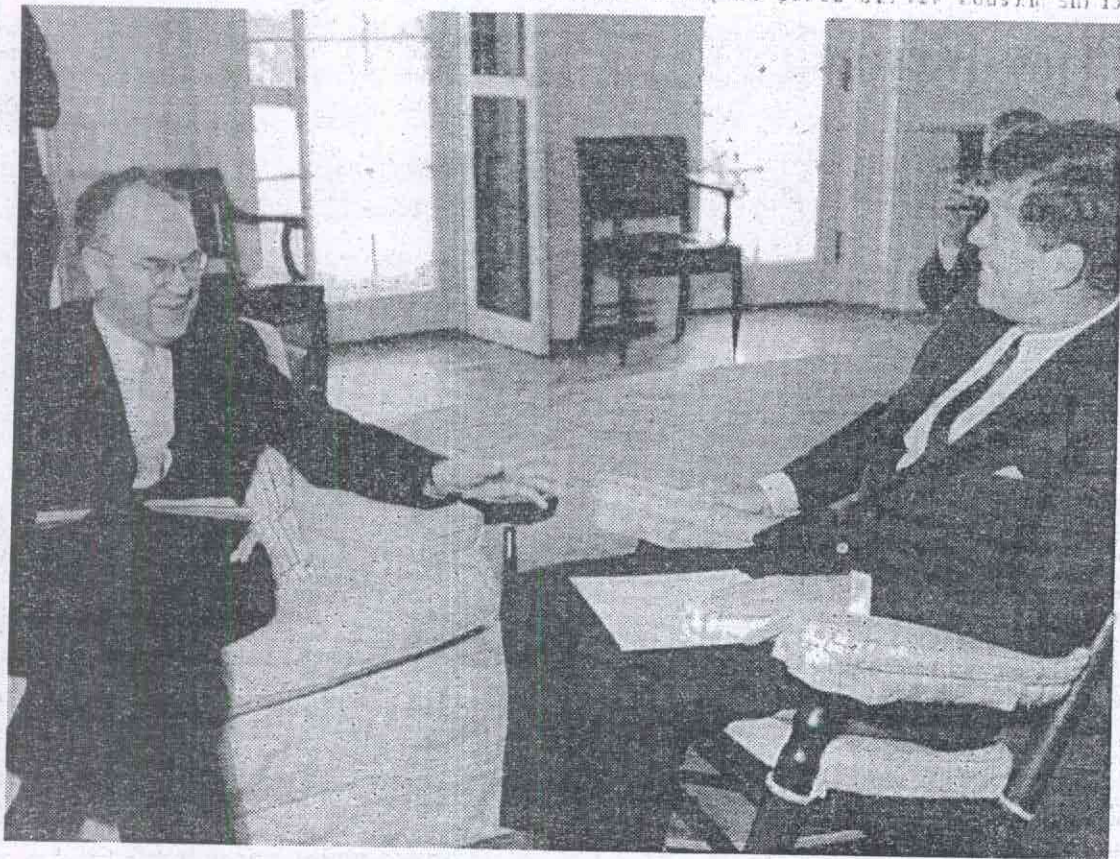
diplomacy in Washington. He even gives the Soviet side a significant measure of the blame for the Vietnam War, commenting repeatedly that his leaders allowed themselves to be used and manipulated by a government in Hanoi that showed no real concern for Soviet interests.

Not that he absolves the Americans with whom he worked, collectively or individually. In the style of the Soviet man he has always been, Dobrynin attributes anti-Soviet machinations to Pentagon cabals, Jewish in-

fluence and stubborn hard-liners, even as he acknowledges that the hard-liners often had good cause for their skeptical views of Soviet intentions.

Individually, many of the Americans Dobrynin worked with seemed to be in a sort of competition to see who could be more fawning and more indiscreet to the Soviet ambassador. Henry Kissinger may enjoy these memoirs less than most readers; others will be amused by the stories Dobrynin

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**Anatoly Dobrynin with President Kennedy at the White House in March 1962**

UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL

# Anatoly Dobrynin

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tells of Kissinger's vanities and self-promotions.

Perhaps the most intriguing revelation in the book is Dobrynin's description of Leonid Brezhnev's determination to be Richard Nixon's staunchest supporter through the trials of Watergate—"Nixon's last friend," as Dobrynin puts it. He describes an extraordinary personal relationship between the two men that began at the end of 1973, after their second summit meeting and the Yom Kippur War. The correspondence was prompted by the hostilities in the Suez area, following an American nuclear alert that had alarmed the Soviets.

Dobrynin writes that he personally was not so alarmed by the alert, since he saw it as a tactical maneuver by Kissinger, who, as he said at the time, was "just playing the game." Kissinger himself told Dobrynin that the alert was prompted mostly by "domestic considerations" and would be lifted in a day, as indeed it was. (At the time Kissinger publicly ridiculed the suggestion that the alert could be attributed to domestic considerations. He denied this in his memoirs as well.) Soon afterward, "for his own private reasons," Dobrynin writes, Kissinger privately expressed regret over the alert, which he called a "rash move" for which the White House was to blame. (Watergate was taking a heavy toll on the Nixon presidency at the time.)

Nixon evidently realized the alert was a mistake and summoned Dobrynin to Camp David. He promised to resume active cooperation, to restrain the Israelis in the wake of their victory over Egypt, and to avoid future episodes of the same kind. "Please inform the general secretary [Brezhnev]," Dobrynin quotes Nixon as saying, "that as long as I live and hold the office of president I will never allow a real confrontation with the Soviet Union." He added to these pleasing words a confession that Watergate was part of the reason for what had happened. His enemies were using Watergate to try to undermine his authority, which may have prompted him to lose his "cool" during the crisis, Nixon said.

Dobrynin forwarded this unusual confession to Brezhnev, who was apparently moved by it and responded with the first of a series of supportive personal messages to Nixon. "I should like from the depths of my heart to wish you energy and success in overcoming all kinds of difficulties, the causes of which are not easily seen at a distance," he wrote. Nixon was delighted with this message and told Dobrynin that

Brezhnev was "the only foreign leader—including America's own allies—who had been able to find human words of cheer amidst his [Watergate] difficulties."

Then on Dec. 13, 1973, continuing this private exchange, Nixon startled Dobrynin by giving him an unexpected analysis of current events based on conclusions "he had come to . . . only recently" about "Israeli intransigence." Israel wanted a permanent state of war with the Arabs, Nixon said, adding that "Israel and the American Jewish community were anxious to prevent any improvement in Soviet-American relations." Israel's hard line, "encouraged in every way by the politically influential Jewish lobby in America, which in turn helped shape American foreign policy," had pushed the United States into a situation "where its course ran counter to the whole world: the Arabs, the Soviet Union, and nearly all its allies in Western Europe as well as Japan." (These quotations are from Dobrynin's recollection of what Nixon said; he prides himself on the accuracy of his accounts of such conversations, which he wrote down as soon as he could.)

But, Nixon continued, he owed nothing to the Jewish vote since "most Jews had always voted against him," so he was determined to pursue a balanced peace settlement in the Middle East. "He was also clearly vexed," Dobrynin continues, "by the hostile campaign against him over Watergate by the mass media. The president said that the American media were run 'essentially by the same Jewish circles.' With deep feeling he said their campaign knew no limits, and they had no idea of decency let alone gratitude. In fact he used even stronger language than that."

Nixon went on to make "a curious remark about Kissinger." After pointing out that "his Jewish origin made him less vulnerable to the attacks of the American Jewish community," Nixon noted that Kissinger "had at times strongly indulged Israel's nationalist sentiments, for which he had to be corrected, but on the whole, the president was convinced that Kissinger was working along the right lines."

Alas, Dobrynin took Nixon's anti-Semitic diatribe at face value and passed it on to Moscow. Brezhnev responded, not surprisingly, by saying that the president's comments on Israel and the Middle East "coincided with the view of the Soviet leadership." Dobrynin ends his account of this hitherto-undisclosed Nixon-Brezhnev correspondence by observing: "The

irony of the situation was that during this period Nixon seemed to be as frank, direct, and even cynical in conversations with his old communist enemies as he was with friends, if not more so."

**D**OBRYNIN'S account teaches an important lesson. As the official documents begin to pour out of Soviet and American archives, scholars will be tempted to overstate the importance of one or another documentary revelation, when the real story of the Cold War is largely a human drama. Dobrynin was on hand for much of it—he took part in every Soviet-American summit from 1955 to 1990—and he watched the spectacle with a detached, sometimes bemused eye.

Detente was Dobrynin's cause. He believed throughout that the Soviet Union and the United States could manage to coexist peacefully and avoid nuclear confrontation if only their leaders would pursue sensible diplomacy. Though his account occasionally feels self-aggrandizing, Dobrynin clearly did play a substantial personal role in keeping the two su-

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*"Perhaps the most intriguing revelation in the book is Dobrynin's description of Leonid Brezhnev's determination to be Richard Nixon's staunchest supporter through the trials of Watergate."*

perpowers out of the hottest water. He was certainly the most significant diplomat of the Cold War era.

But he wasn't always an insider. In 1962, his first year as the Soviet ambassador in Washington, he freely and repeatedly lied to his American interlocutors about what was going on in Cuba because, he insists plausibly, he was "an involuntary tool of deceit" who was never told the truth—and was instructed to tell lies—about the events that provoked the missile crisis. "This deliberate use of an ambassador by his own government to mislead an American administration remained a moral shock to me for years to come and left me more cautious and critical of the information I received from Moscow," he writes. It is a char-

acteristic passage. Dobrynin wants his readers to believe that he maintained a personal moral code while representing men in Moscow who did not. This reader concluded that Dobrynin sincerely believed this, and that he generally had a right to do so. (Later, he says, he was kept in the dark about Soviet plans to invade Czechoslovakia in 1968 and Afghanistan in 1979.)

The Nixon administration gave Dobrynin his greatest opportunities to pursue his own diplomatic agenda. The Soviet leadership was initially so alarmed at the prospect of a Nixon presidency that Dobrynin was instructed to offer Hubert H. Humphrey, Nixon's 1968 opponent, any form of aid he might want, including money. (Dobrynin was enormously relieved when Humphrey cut off the conversation by saying it was "more than enough for him to have Moscow's good wishes.") But three and a half years later Dobrynin was busily preparing for Nixon's first presidential visit to Moscow, where the first strategic arms limitation treaty was signed and detente officially began.

Dobrynin had an especially clear—and embarrassing—view of the spectacle of Nixon's paranoia. He was repeatedly cautioned not to tell the hapless secretary of State, William Rogers, secrets that Nixon or Kissinger had confided in him.

To promote the "confidential channel," which for Dobrynin came to represent his finest moments as ambassador, Kissinger had a special telephone installed in the Soviet embassy on 16th Street—a "second hot line," in Dobrynin's words, "which required no dialing and was not dependent on the ordinary telephone network." He and Kissinger "used it all the time. Its very existence has been kept secret until now."

It is hard sometimes to realize that Dobrynin is writing about the one international relationship that could at any moment have ruptured into catastrophic thermonuclear war. More often in this account the Soviet-American ballet resembles a high school romantic intrigue, with the two parties bound to yet baffled by one another, both groping to figure out the other's real intentions.

Dobrynin seems never to have lost a night's sleep worrying about nuclear holocaust, at least not after the Cuban crisis. He was certain, he writes repeatedly, that none of the leaders in Moscow wanted war or even had a serious plan for world domination. Yes, they believed in a vague but hopeful communist doctrine that considered the ultimate victory of their "socialism" inevitable, but by Dobrynin's account they weren't prepared to take serious risks to speed that process along.

**D**OBRYNIN has no trouble denouncing hardliners in the United States for their irrational anti-Sovietism. The anti-Soviet American who most baffles Dobrynin is Ronald Reagan. He criticizes Reagan but admires him; attacks his policies yet credits him with crucial steps that helped

## Daily Book World

*The following books are scheduled to be reviewed this week in Style:*

**COLOR LINES: The Troubled Dreams of Racial Harmony in an American Town**, by Mike Kelly. Reviewed by Jim Sleeper.

**THIEF OF LIGHT**, by David Ramus. In this thriller an art expert finds himself involved with Japanese gangsters and fake masterpieces. Reviewed by Dennis Drabelle.

**CITY LIFE: Urban Expectations in a New World**, by Witold Rybczynski. Reviewed by Jonathan Yardley.

**THE GIRL WHO DIED TWICE: The Libby Zion Case and the Hidden Hazards of Hospitals**, by Natalie Robins. Reviewed by Susan Garrett.

**OBLIVION**, by Josephine Hart. In this novel a British television producer finds himself haunted by the memory of his dead wife. Reviewed by Carolyn See.

end the Cold War. Dobrynin forcefully and effectively rebuts the argument that Reagan somehow deserves credit for the series of domestic events that unraveled the Soviet Union, but also says that Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative jolted the Soviets to think much harder about the need for arms control. By turning from confrontation to negotiation with Moscow in his second term, Dobrynin concludes, Reagan made it possible for Gorbachev to launch his reforms.

In the end Dobrynin's world collapsed. Gorbachev brought him back to Moscow in 1986 to become a member of the Party leadership as secretary of the Central Committee responsible for international relations, but this apparent promotion never brought much power or satisfaction.

Dobrynin looked on helplessly as Gorbachev floundered, then failed, a process he describes bitterly at the end of his book. He concludes that a more skillful reform program that preserved "all positive achievements" and eliminated "major shortcomings and mistakes of the past in a carefully planned and evolutionary way" would have created a renewed Soviet Union that could have developed into a successful nation that "ranked high among the democratic countries of the world." Yes, and then the moon would be made of Roquefort cheese.

But when he sticks to the subjects he really knows, Dobrynin is a fine analyst and a wonderful raconteur. He has left a record of his life and his times that will enrich Cold War history for as long as anyone cares to