

Sergo Mikoyan, *The Soviet Cuban Missile Crisis: Castro, Mikoyan, Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Missiles of November*. Edited by Svetlana Savranskaya. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012. 589pp.

Ashley Phelps and Dr. Roger Chapman\*

Palm Beach Atlantic University

The October 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis has long been a topic of interest to Cold War scholars, but largely the approach has been American-centric. For instance, books typically address how the Kennedy administration deftly, without triggering a nuclear war, forced Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev ‘to blink’ and remove the missiles from the Caribbean island. Little, however, has been explored in terms of the Soviet and Cuban perspectives of events during this time, in particular how it impacted relations between the Cuban leader Fidel Castro and the Kremlin. The publication of Sergo Mikoyan’s *The Soviet Cuban Missile Crisis* addresses this imbalance while adding a new layer of complexity on what Russians call Operation Anadyr.

The author presents a narrative based on the experiences of his father, the Soviet diplomat Anastas Mikoyan (1895-1978), who dealt with Castro before, during, and after the crisis. In addition, the author, who served as his father’s secretary, was a first-hand witness to some of the events described in the book. Finally, the author provides a rich collection of fifty

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\* Roger Chapman is an Associate Professor of History at Palm Beach Atlantic University and specialises in the Cold War period and US-Russian relations. Ashley Phelps is a student at the university.

primary documents, translated into English, and some published for the very first time. These three elements give an insight into the Soviet and Cuban perspective of the crisis that has never been presented to an English-speaking audience. This volume, sponsored by the Cold War International History Project of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, is an expansion of certain material first published by the author in the thousand-page Russian work, *The Anatomy of the Cuban Missile Crisis* (2006). Svetlana Savranskaya, a research fellow at the George Washington University's National Security Archive, saw this book through to fruition after Sergo Mikoyan passed away in 2010.

The first chapter of *The Soviet Cuban Missile Crisis* offers a biography (somewhat hagiographic) on Anastas Mikoyan, explaining how he came to be an important figure in Soviet diplomacy. Chapter two introduces the Cuban Revolution and explains how 'anti-American sentiments grew' (46) and how, in the words of Castro, 'In 1959-60 the North Americans prepared our nation for socialism' (47) by snubbing the new regime. As relations with the Americans soured, Castro turned to the Soviet Union. This led to 'Ten Days That Changed the Face of the Hemisphere' (the title of chapter three) in which during the Mikoyan's February 1960 visit to the island diplomatic ties were forged, giving Cuba the support of a superpower while Moscow, at the height of the Cold War, 'secured a dependable ally right under the Americans' nose' (83).

Chapters four through seven tell the story of the Cuban Missile Crisis, but chapters eight and nine explain Mikoyan's tense negotiations with Castro during and immediately after the ordeal. Unknown to the Americans at the time (and mostly since), in addition to the intermediate-range missiles and Il-28 bombers, the Soviets had provided Cuba with over one

hundred tactical nuclear weapons. Mikoyan's eventual task was to inform Castro that the tactical nukes would also have to go, even though this was not part of the settlement negotiated with Washington (as Kennedy had no inkling of their existence). Originally, the Soviets were going to quietly allow the tactical nuclear weapons to remain on the island because they were sceptical of the American pledge to not invade Cuba. Unfortunately for Castro, his reckless talk, erratic behaviour and unpredictability prompted Mikoyan to conclude that prudence required their removal as well. Those weapons left the island in December of that year. This action on the part of Moscow strained relations between Cuba and the Soviet Union, but Mikoyan's diplomatic skills prevented a major rupture from occurring.

*The Soviet Cuban Missile Crisis* is an insider's look of the crisis, detailing the levels of trust between individuals as well as between the Cuban, Soviet and United States governments. Importantly, the author is to be credited with providing a fuller picture of the crisis, but it should be pointed out that this was made possible only due to the Soviet Union's demise. The documents section of the work come from Sergo Mikoyan's own personal archives and the Russian Foreign Ministry Archive. They only cover, however, the November Soviet-Cuban Crisis of 1962, not the early Soviet-Cuban relationships or the October US-Soviet crisis. Nonetheless, the transcripts, telegrams, and official documents are insightful and show the difficulty of Anastas Mikoyan's task in convincing Castro that the USSR's decisions were the correct ones. A postscript by the editor, Svetlana Savranskaya, suggests this episode of the Cold War is the story about how a skilled diplomat is to be 'credit[ed] for walking Cuba from the brink' (267).