

This article was downloaded by: [George Washington University]  
On: 01 October 2013, At: 06:10  
Publisher: Routledge  
Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Cold War History

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fcwh20>

### Foxbats over Dimona: the Soviets nuclear dilemma in the Six Day War

Craig Daigle <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> City College of New York, E-mail: © 2009, Craig Daigle  
Published online: 11 Nov 2009.

To cite this article: Craig Daigle (2009) Foxbats over Dimona: the Soviets nuclear dilemma in the Six Day War, *Cold War History*, 9:4, 527-529

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14682740903268487>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

accede to the reunification of Germany and its entry into NATO. Then on to what Grachev calls the G7 ‘summit of a last (lost) chance’ in London in July 1991.

On the basis of this chronicle, Grachev draws up a balance sheet in his last chapter. Gorbachev’s gamble was to think not only that he could both reform the Soviet system and end the Cold War, but that these two great tasks complemented each other – that only a reformed Soviet Union could make the far-reaching concessions required to end the Cold War, while only the latter could make the world safe for reform at home. Granted this gamble was visionary, but wasn’t it also naïve? Grachev takes that charge seriously. ‘Was it simplistic’, he asks, ‘to believe that by proposing new rules of the game . . . he would be able to transform enemies into partners?’ Should Gorbachev not be deemed ‘a commander who, though he won numerous battles, ultimately lost the main war?’

Perhaps not surprisingly, Grachev’s final verdict is positive: ‘The “naïve” Gorbachev succeeded where several generations of post-war leaders, both East and West, had failed’. He ‘managed to recast the formal ritual’ of negotiations into ‘a genuine common endeavor’. He ‘left behind him a peacefully dismantled totalitarian system . . .’. He ‘raised the “iron curtain”’ and ‘allowed and encouraged the reunification of Germany and Europe after more than 40 years of division’.

If all this is correct, why do so many, particularly in his own country, judge Gorbachev so harshly? Grachev speculates that the very nobility of Gorbachev’s project ‘aroused so much hope and expectation’ that ‘many cannot forgive him for his failure’, that ‘he is being judged not as a politician or a normal man but as a new Moses who failed to lead his people to the Promised Land’. ‘Are we blaming Gorbachev (again with the wisdom of hindsight) for his errors and inconsistencies, or ourselves for not having effectively used the chance that was offered?’ A very good question! Especially since we haven’t done such a great job of managing the new, post-cold war world that he did so much to usher in.

William Taubman

*Amherst College*

*wctaubman@amherst.edu*

© 2009, William Taubman

**Foxbats over Dimona: the Soviets’ nuclear gamble in the Six-Day War**, by Isabella Ginor and Gideon Remez, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 2007, xi + 287 pp.

In *Foxbats Over Dimona*, Isabella Ginor and Gideon Remez concur with many orthodox accounts that argue that the Six Day War resulted primarily from ‘a successful Soviet–Arab attempt to provoke Israel into a preemptive strike’, but offer a radically different conclusion as to why the Kremlin pursued this course of action. According to the authors, the central motive for the Soviet move was to ‘halt and destroy Israel’s nuclear development before it could attain operational atomic weapons’ (p. 27). Based largely on interviews and memoirs of former Soviet

participants in the conflict, Ginor and Remez argue that Moscow had committed military personnel and weapons for a direct intervention and had developed plans to levy an air strike on the Dimona nuclear facility. 'Preventing Israel from achieving even the semblance of nuclear superiority over its neighbors and a credible reply to any external threat thus became a central objective of Soviet Middle Eastern policy', Remez and Ginor write (p. 32).

Central to the authors' study is their contention that direct Soviet military intervention in the Six Day War began with overflights of Israel's main nuclear facility by Soviet aircraft and pilots in preparation for the planned attack. Citing accounts by Aleksandr Vybornov, a Soviet MiG-25 (or 'Foxbat') pilot who reportedly flew reconnaissance missions over Dimona, as well as a 'definitive study' by Danny Shalom on the Israeli Air Force's role in the Six Day War, Remez and Ginor insist that Moscow authorised these missions to 'deliberately' instigate the crisis and war of 1967. They also point to a Soviet–Egyptian plan, conceived by Andrei Grechko, the Soviet defence minister, and Marshal Abdel Hakim Amer, Egypt's vice president and defence minister, which called for provoking the Israelis into a pre-emptive attack. Such action, Remez and Ginor contend, would be 'contained and reversed by a counterstrike, culminating in a "comprehensive attack . . . that will shift the battle onto enemy territory, hitting its vital areas"' (p. 70).

*Foxbats over Dimona* is a thoroughly engaging revisionist account that should be taken seriously by both Modern Middle Eastern and Cold War historians and significantly adds to the conversation regarding the Soviet motivations for issuing its faulty warning to the Egyptians about the presence of Israeli forces on the Syrian border. The problem with this study, however, is that it relies too heavily on highly circumstantial evidence, and the authors fail to make their case convincingly. In their most important chapter (named after the title of the book), Remez and Ginor base their claim that Soviet-piloted MiG-25 Foxbats had conducted operational sorties over Dimona on a short biography of Vybornov from a US Air Force website, when almost all other existing evidence points to the fact that the sorties could have been operated by Egyptian MiG-21 pilots.<sup>1</sup> They attribute Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko's references to overflights of the Dimona reactor 'by Egyptian MiG-21s' to a very questionable adherence to observing his own 'thirty year rule' of 'casting the historical record in the desired political light' (p. 122). And they imply from a completely sanitised document printed in *Foreign Relations of the United States* that the document could have discussed the Soviet missions over Dimona given that the date of the document corresponds to the alleged reconnaissance mission of the Foxbat. Remez and Ginor may well, in time, prove to be correct that this was the subject of the document, but at this point it is mere speculation.

Perhaps most disappointing, though, is that the authors are highly dismissive of the importance of documentary evidence to historical research. In their opening chapter, for example, they claim that 'even when and if such papers [on the Soviet role in the Six Day War] are released, they are most likely to be inadequate and even largely unreliable' (p. 3). Later in the book, they present a lengthy passage from

Deputy Foreign Minister and long-time Central Committee member Vladimir Semyonov suggesting that Soviet officials did not record key decisions on paper. Thus, write the authors, 'whether and how the USSR's leadership decided to respond ... cannot be expected to appear in any document – certainly none that is likely to be released anytime soon' (p. 51). Considering the numerous studies on Cold War history that have been produced in the past decade based largely on documentary evidence from former Soviet and East European archives and that have significantly altered the way historians view the Cold War, this is a highly dubious claim. The authors are correct that solely relying on 'inflexible requirements for archival evidence' can oftentimes mean that 'entire chapters can be excised from history', but minimising the importance of documentary evidence only detracts from the important contributions their research has made in the form of oral history.

#### Note

- [1] Following the publication of *Foxbats Over Dimona*, Col. Aleksandr V. Drobyshesky, chief spokesman of the Russian Air Force, confirmed in writing that Soviet pilots, in the USSR's most-advanced MiG-25 Foxbat aircraft, did participate in highly-provocative sorties over Israel's nuclear facility at Dimona in May 1967, just prior to the Six Day War (David Horovitz, 'Russia Confirms Soviet Sorties Over Dimona in '67', *Jerusalem Post*, 23 August 2007).

Craig Daigle  
City College of New York  
cdaigle@ccny.cuny.edu  
© 2009, Craig Daigle

**The Soviet Union and the June 1967 Six Day War**, edited by Yaacov Ro'i and Boris Morozov, Washington, DC, Woodrow Wilson Center Press/Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 2008, xxiv + 366 pp.

Among the numerous books on the Middle East wars, *The Soviet Union and the June 1967 Six Day War* represents a valuable contribution to the understanding of the global importance of the Arab–Israeli conflict. The main focus of the book is the Soviet involvement in the 1967 Arab–Israeli June war, but the authors present a broader picture of the Soviet military and political goals in the Middle East and Mediterranean, both in the context of the Soviet Union's relations with its Arab allies and of the Cold War confrontation with the United States. Although the emphasis is on the 1967 conflict, the book covers the period of the most intensive Soviet presence in the Middle East from the Suez Crisis in 1956 to the Yom Kippur War in 1973.