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Sergey Radchenko, *To Run the World: The Kremlin's Cold War Bid for Global Power* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 768 pp.

To Run the World is in many respects a triumph. Across over 600 pages of captivating research and analysis, it charts the motivations of the Soviet leadership from post-war aggrandizement to the unravelling of the empire. In telling this story, it encompasses an equally ambitious geographical scope, ranging far beyond Washington and Moscow to Angola, Afghanistan, Cuba, Egypt, Iran and, most significantly, China.

By its author's own admission, this is a "doorstopper" and it doesn't present easy answers or singular narratives to explain the Soviet experience of the Cold War. Instead, at each twist and turn, myriad participants, regions, logics, contexts and events are brought into dialogue. In tracing "Moscow's narratives of legitimacy" across this ever-changing terrain, the book reveals a Soviet Union riven with unsolvable tensions: a project caught between imperialism and modernity, recognition and revolution, all the while locked in an unwinnable competition with the United States and China.

Radchenko's biography—a native of Sakhalin, expert on China, and Professor at Cardiff and John Hopkins Universities—is an essential component of this compelling study. He skilfully mines and triangulates a rich seam of archival sources from Moscow, Washington, Beijing, and beyond to tell a truly multi-dimensional tale. In engaging and page-turning prose, it is an approach that serves to unravel the binaries that have characterised too much analysis of Cold War relations between the Soviet Union and the West.

What emerges throughout is the remarkable hold of China on the Soviet leadership and the struggle between these two powers to be the leaders of international communism. Radchenko suggests that the chief crises under Khrushchev's watch—the Berlin ultimatum (1958) and the Cuban missile crisis (1962)—can only be fully understood in the context of Sino-Soviet competition and fears over loss of face to China and the third world. For Brezhnev, even at the height of détente, he was appealing to Nixon with the claim that: "You and I can understand one another better and easier than either of us understand the Chinese." It was indicative of both the significance of China and the civilisationist—even racist—world view of the Soviet leadership documented in this book.

If China loomed large, then the lived experience of the Second World War on these leaders is also a major theme. The personal trauma of this conflict tempered the triumphalism. To highlight the point, Radchenko begins the book with Khruschev witnessing the burning of corpses in Stalingrad and the loss of his son in 1943; Brezhnev injured by a mine in the Black Sea; and a young Gorbachev uncovering decomposing Soviet soldiers in the thaw of spring. As the latter recounts: "It burned us, leaving an impression on our characters, on our entire worldview."

The book argues that this trauma placed certain limits on the lengths the Soviet leadership would go to. Even in the most dangerous hour of the Cold War—the Cuban missile crisis—Khrushchev was haunted by his witnessing of the suicide of a tank corps commissar, Nikolai Vashugin, after a disastrous military defeat in June 1941. For Khrushchev, the suicide was insanity and he would never go that far. In Radchenko's view, "[t]hose early experiences on the front lines raised questions in his mind about the limits of human rationality." They were essential lessons for the onset of an age

of Mutually Assured Destruction. However, as Radchenko adds, the passing of the generations who had witnessed the horrors of war left "their successors their ambition but, alas, not their wisdom." It serves as a reminder of the shadow cast by the more recent authoritarian and revanchist turn in Russia, which now includes revisions of its nuclear doctrine.

What emerges most strikingly across every chapter of this highly rewarding book is the way in which change and continuity were two sides of the same coin for sustaining the viability of the Soviet Union. On the one hand, the Soviet leadership could be impressively flexible—able to deploy cynical ideological positioning to adapt to political contingencies, and adroitly operating in a world where today's partner can be tomorrow's sworn enemy. On the other hand, these same leaders were perennially preoccupied with the desire for security through the external recognition of the Soviet Union as a true global power.

This is an argument that downplays the role of ideology as a guide to Soviet foreign policymaking during the Cold War, while also serving to emphasise the failure of each Soviet leader to resolve this fundamental contradiction. None of them could square the circle of achieving recognition and legitimacy from the West—or, more exactly, the United States—while simultaneously striving to be acknowledged as the leader of a revolutionary new world order.

For Stalin, it was a contradiction that manifested as opportunism, where territorial gains legitimated by other Great Powers were more highly prized than territory taken by force alone. Khruschev revelled in being the leader of a superpower, while also being a "revolutionary romantic." The same trap snared Brezhnev, who could suggest "running the world" with the United States while simultaneously fuelling "Moscow's imperial over-extension" in the third world. Even Gorbachev maintained that the United States and Soviet Union had a special responsibility to shape the world.

However, the mistake "was to think that they could do this hand-in-hand, rather than in competition, with the United States." When they were called out by the United States, each leader, in turn, vented their outrage at being talked down to and being "taught" by the Americans. It is a complaint frequently restated by Putin, who shares the same thwarted ambition to convincingly deliver the vision, appeal, and the economy to run the world. Perhaps by yoking Russia to China—a more viable contemporary challenger to the US-led global order—Putin has recognised a fact that eluded his predecessors.

Yet, this is a strategy with its own consequences and insecurities, and certain quotes in this book chime somewhat louder today. For example, Mao lecturing Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin in 1965 that the Sino-Soviet struggle would last for 10,000 years, while the previous year he fulminated that the Soviet Union had annexed territories "east of Baikal, including Khabarovsk, Vladivostok, and the Kamchatka Peninsula…. We have yet to settle this bill with them."

To Run the World is a book of many rewards, though it is not without some occasional frustrations. Perhaps the ideological dimension is too readily downplayed—especially given its role in framing the Sino-Soviet competition to lead the communist world. In appealing to multiple audiences—from a general one to seasoned experts—progress through the book involves navigating some of the more well-worn and digested events of the Cold War in order to get to the bigger reveals that this book

delivers. The conclusion could also have offered some bolder and more expansive claims to draw the themes together rather than what is largely a summary. There are also a few repetitions throughout the book, which a keener editor might have picked up on. Nevertheless, these are minor quibbles for a book that will stand the test of time and become essential reading for anyone seeking to understand the ambition and resentment behind the Soviet—and Russian—urge to run the world.

Paul Richardson