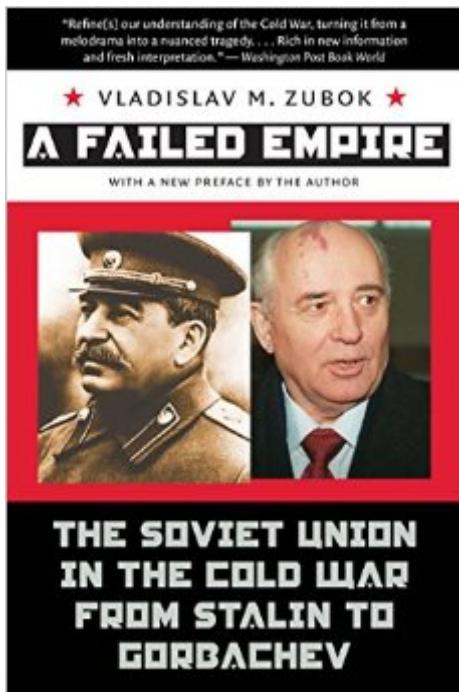


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A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union In The Cold War From Stalin To Gorbachev (The New Cold War History)



Synopsis

In this widely praised book, Vladislav Zubok argues that Western interpretations of the Cold War have erred by exaggerating either the Kremlin's pragmatism or its aggressiveness. Explaining the interests, aspirations, illusions, fears, and misperceptions of the Kremlin leaders and Soviet elites, Zubok offers a Soviet perspective on the greatest standoff of the twentieth century. Using recently declassified Politburo records, ciphered telegrams, diaries, and taped conversations, among other sources, Zubok offers the first work in English to cover the entire Cold War from the Soviet side. *A Failed Empire* provides a history quite different from those written by the Western victors. In a new preface for this edition, the author adds to our understanding of today's events in Russia, including who the new players are and how their policies will affect the state of the world in the twenty-first century.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The collapse of the USSR is one of the most important events of the twentieth century. During its existence after 1917 until 1991, the USSR stood at the centre of world politics - especially after 1945. It embodied many of the important aspects of modern history including socialism (which it embodied in its Marxist-Leninist form), State-led industrialisation and development (which it pioneered), technologically driven change (the Soviets took an early lead in the space race) and the

State as a provider of welfare (of which the USSR was an early practitioner). The end of the USSR also meant the end of a key defining feature of the twentieth century. This was the case not only for those in the Soviet sphere but also for those outside it who defined themselves as the opposite of the USSR, notably American capitalist democracy. Zubok's book is a "must read" for any one interested why the Soviet Union came to its sudden end. The conventional Western view is that during the Reagan-Thatcher era, the US commenced an arms race in order to exhaust and bring down the USSR. This worked. Unable to keep up, the Soviets simply threw in the towel and gave up. While plausible on the surface, this explanation opens as many questions as it answers. After 1945 the USSR though a victor in the Second World War, lay exhausted and devastated. The difference in Soviet capabilities and those of the US at that time was much greater than at the point of the dissolution of the USSR. Nevertheless, the USSR stared down the Americans, within two decades had narrowed the gap and set itself up as a seemingly viable alternative superpower, forcing the US to deal with it as its equal.

If one desires to understand events as they transpired in any historical event, the necessity of reviewing both parties to a conflict becomes of particular import, and in the case of Vladislav Zubok's book *A Failed Empire*, the "other" side, the Soviet Union, is thoroughly analyzed from the inside in this pursuit. The result of Zubok's careful review of primary sources, from the memoirs and diaries of many participants, to the actual transcripts of meetings as they occurred in the halls of power, is a wide-ranging and informative description of Soviet perspectives and ideology, and how these positions informed the events of the Cold War. The overriding theme that the author tackles in his careful analysis of the conflict between the USSR and the US is one that involves a "revolutionary-imperial paradigm", meaning that, whatever the ideology of revolutionary zeal that spawned and maintained the Soviets, they were also an empire that wished to bring other nationalities and regions under their control, either for the purpose of security--as was the case with the occupation of Eastern and Central Europe--or to pursue its goal of eventual communistic overthrow where it was deemed possible for the revolution to take root, as in Cuba or Ethiopia. This idea of a nation that saw itself as an antidote to the history of capitalistic imperialism, but ironically acted in the same way to translate its own ideology into power, is a clever and revealing point to be understood about the Soviets, because it casts them in a light of following the same self-interest as the enemy they so effectively denounced. When viewing the different stages of the evolution of the USSR, Zubok makes some revealing points about each stage of its development.

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