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‘Never a Dull Moment’: The Moscow Ambassadorship of Sir Frank Roberts in the Years of the Berlin and Cuban Missile Crises, 1960-62¹

Diplomacy and Statecraft

December 2016

Pre-publication version

This article explores the largely unsung Moscow ambassadorship of Britain’s Frank Roberts, 1960-62. After examining his Embassy’s role in developing cultural and commercial relations, the article addresses Roberts’ involvement in the Berlin and Cuban missile crises. In the former case, he made a low-key but important contribution by influencing American policy, while in the second case he provided insightful assessments of Soviet attitudes and thinking. It is argued that Roberts’ ambassadorship demonstrated the continued importance of the resident embassy and ambassador, because of the lack of ministerial-level Anglo-Soviet relations and because of the need to interpret Soviet policy in crisis situations. The research contributes to the literature of diplomatic representation as well as of Anglo-Soviet relations during the Cold War.

It is fair to say that Cold War relations between Britain and the Soviet Union were of limited substance, due to the ideological differences and to the close British relationship with the United States. Nonetheless, for Sir Frank Roberts, British ambassador in Moscow, 1960-62, there was ‘never a dull moment’,² with the striking contrast between ‘the dangers of the second Berlin and Cuba crises’ on one hand and Nikita Khrushchev’s version of *glasnost* and *perestroika* on the other. Khrushchev, moreover, was by far the most extroverted and accessible of Soviet leaders, enabling the Ambassador to appraise him in person on numerous occasions. Although Britain left the American government to negotiate with the Soviet Union over Berlin, Roberts advanced the British perspective in these discussions in a low-key but effective manner through his close ties with Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson. His efforts supplemented the top-level Anglo-American bonds, which historians regard as being especially close (albeit not without problems) in the Harold Macmillan-John F. Kennedy years. The relationship provided Britain with the potential to influence the Cold War, balancing the limited influence over the Soviet Union.³ During the missile crisis – the most dangerous clash of the Cold War – Roberts provided his government with a vital set of ears and eyes in Moscow, conveying invaluable insights into Soviet conduct. The period also saw the Moscow Embassy develop Anglo-Soviet commercial and cultural ties – a dimension of East-West relations in which the British made a notably positive contribution. The article sheds light on the career of one of Britain’s most important and able – if generally unsung – Cold War diplomats, and adds to the literature of

diplomatic representation as well as of Anglo-Soviet relations.⁴ It is maintained that the resident embassy and ambassador still had an important role to play, despite arguments that developments in travel and communications technology were making them redundant.

Roberts and the Moscow Embassy

Frank Roberts joined the Foreign Office in 1930, and served in Cairo and Paris before the outbreak of the war, during which he was based in London. One of his first engagements in a Soviet issue took place in 1943, when he was Acting Head of the FO's Central Department and when evidence emerged of the Soviet murder three years previously of 15,000 Polish officers in the Katyn Forest. Roberts was much more sympathetic than were most of his colleagues to openly supporting Polish claims that the Russians were guilty of a war crime, maintaining that Poland 'look[ed] to us for a sensible middle course and it seems important that we should not discourage them from looking to us by running too obviously after the Russians and Americans and possibly eventually falling between all possible stools'. This contrasted with the view of Gladwyn Jebb, a senior official in the Department of Economic Warfare, who thought that Polish fears that great power politics would overshadow the interests of the small countries were exaggerated, and who urged the Foreign Office not to be 'moved' by the 'clamour' of the Polish government-in-exile. While Roberts had demonstrated a moderate cast of mind, and a willingness to reach an independent judgment, the constraints of the Grand Alliance meant that the British government preferred to play down the atrocity, resulting in controversy later.⁵

Roberts attended the Yalta conference in 1945, and played a particularly important role the following year as the Moscow Embassy's *chargé d'affaires*. In a series of telegrams influenced by the American Embassy's *chargé d'affaires* George Kennan, he explained the developing Cold War by stressing the 'ever-increasing emphasis laid here upon Marxist-Leninist ideology as the basis for Soviet internal and foreign policy'. This had become 'hard to distinguish from Soviet imperialism'. Demonstrating a pragmatic willingness to put ideology to one side, Roberts also maintained that a working relationship with the Soviet Union could be established 'on the basis of zones of influence in which we left the other party free from interference or criticism within specific areas'. Furthermore, 'maintaining our special relationship with America in a form consistent with friendship with the Soviet Union' was important, too, to bolster Britain's interests in an era in which British power was declining. On Roberts' suggestion, the Foreign Office established a Committee on Policy towards Russia, and when he returned from Moscow in 1947 he became Ernest Bevin's Principal Private Secretary (PPS).⁶ In this role he joined what was 'as strong a team as any British Foreign Secretary has ever led', dealing with key issues such as the Berlin Airlift.⁷ Roberts then

occupied the positions of Deputy High Commissioner to India, 1949-51; Ambassador to Yugoslavia, 1954-57; and Permanent Representative to NATO, 1957-60. His time in the Soviet Union, his PPS role and his NATO experience gave him particular expertise in Soviet and German affairs. This made him ideally equipped for the role of Ambassador in Moscow against the background of the Berlin crisis.

The Embassy to which Roberts returned in autumn 1960 had about 40 diplomatic staff.⁸ The building, which was constructed in the nineteenth century, was located on Kutuzovsky Prospekt looking across the Moscow River towards the Kremlin. It was not large enough to meet the office and residential needs of a modern embassy. Whitehall authorised an extension, but Roberts and his colleagues argued successfully that only a brand new embassy would be suitable - not least because 'the proposed extension would affect the garden very considerably'. This was significant because 'large receptions' were held there. Embassy staff also thought that settling for a mere extension would reflect poorly on Britain because 'so many governments were building new large embassies' in Moscow.⁹ Humphrey Trevelyan, Roberts' successor as Ambassador (1962-65) recorded that after discussions with the Soviet government 'we were shown a succession of wholly unsuitable sites for a new ... Embassy in the slummier parts' of Moscow.¹⁰ Finally, a site on Smolenskaya Embankment fitted the bill.

One of the difficulties with the existing embassy was a lack of safe rooms, which was of particular concern given the Soviet propensity for spying.¹¹ In October 1959 microphones were found in rooms that had been used as the registry and as the cipher room. Foreign Minister Alec Douglas-Home's PPS A.C.I. Samuel noted 'a distinct possibility' that 'the Russians had ... been able to read our telegrams or pick 'up information of value'.¹² Soviet surveillance was all-pervasive, even extending to diplomats' living quarters. Brian Crowe noted that despite the liberalisation of the Soviet Union in the Khrushchev years (shown, for example, by the publication of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's 'One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich' in *Novy Mir* magazine), the KGB was 'still active. Everything was bugged. You couldn't talk in your own flat without being overheard'.¹³ Second Secretary Dennis Amy recalled that the Soviets 'would go to any lengths to compromise people', not least by setting 'honeytraps'.¹⁴ The case of William J. Vassall, a former member of the Naval Attaché's staff who had been sexually compromised and blackmailed into spying came to light late in 1962, while in 1968 Ambassador Geoffrey Harrison was forced to resign after becoming entangled with a Russian chambermaid working for the KGB.¹⁵ First Secretary John Fretwell recalled that there was a strong chance (born out by the Harrison case) that any Soviet citizens who diplomats encountered more than once were 'acting for the KGB', or would soon be 'forced to do so'.¹⁶ The extent to which the Embassy reciprocated in the spying game is hard to gauge, but there was an MI6 station headed by Ruari Chisholm then by Gervase Cowell. With CIA help, Chisholm and then Cowell 'ran' GRU colonel Oleg Penkovsky, 1960-62. Cowell has been credited with a

potentially critical role when on 2 November 1962 he answered the telephone to hear a pre-arranged set of sounds (three blows of breath, repeated in another call one minute later) which Penkovsky was to use in the event of an imminent nuclear attack on the West. Cowell revealed in 2000 that he was certain that Penkovsky had been captured and had surrendered information about call signs. Cowell therefore did not respond, neither alerting Roberts nor the MI6 chief in London, Sir Dick White.¹⁷

British Embassy officials maintained extensive ties with the Moscow diplomatic corps, which was of high quality because of the Soviet Union's increased international importance after the Second World War.¹⁸ According to Dennis Amy, there was little contact with ordinary Soviet citizens but 'you saw a great deal of every other country you could think of'.¹⁹ Meeting with fellow members of the corps enabled the sharing of information and so facilitated the better understanding of the Soviet scene, and provided a chance to concert policies. Kempton Jenkins, a German expert at the American Embassy, recalled how he and British diplomats would meet regularly to 'analyze events, and decide what we were going to report' to the respective governments.²⁰ The experience of Soviet spying furthered the bonds, with British security specialists 'sweeping' allied embassies for listening devices. Anglo-American security collaboration was especially extensive, with the British acting as the senior partner.²¹

So far as Roberts' working and managerial style is concerned, fellow diplomats have praised his intelligence and his work ethic, but there were also suggestions that he was over-ambitious, over-zealous, and reluctant to delegate. Most of the criticisms relate to Roberts' time in the Foreign Office, rather than to his ambassadorships, leading John Zametica to suggest that he 'was perhaps always destined to make his mark as a career diplomat rather than as a Foreign Office official', which required a more self-effacing approach.²² Roberts went down well with his staff in Moscow in the 1960s: Dennis Amy noted his empathy and approachability, describing him as a man who could 'switch from talking about Kremlinology at the highest level to football with workmen'. He 'really did care for each and every one of his people. He would talk to anybody about their problems in marriage or whatever they were.'²³ Furthermore, if Kempton Jenkins' view that Roberts was 'a brilliant, seasoned professional' is typical, then allied diplomats also thought well of the British Ambassador.²⁴

Commercial and Cultural Diplomacy

The Moscow Embassy was heavily involved in developing commercial relations, following agreements made during Prime Minister Harold Macmillan's visit to the Soviet Union in February 1959.²⁵ Soon, a Commercial Counsellor, Hilary King, was appointed to the Embassy,²⁶ and a British Trade Fair was held at Sokolniki Park in Moscow in May-June 1961. It was one of the largest foreign exhibitions ever to take

place in the Soviet Union, attracting around 1½ million visits and winning the admiration of the Soviet government.²⁷ At Khrushchev's behest, the Soviets held a 'lavish and cordial Government reception' on the opening day, to which 600 British business visitors were invited, along with members of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders' band, and some stand-fitters brought over for the exhibition (the idea of inviting 'workers' only occurred to the Soviets after they had learned that Roberts was inviting some to his own reception at the Embassy two days later).²⁸ Khrushchev himself attended the fair, showing 'keen and approving interest in the scale and organisation' of the event, and in 'individual exhibits' such as machinery. In what appeared to be an effort to foster division between the British and the Americans, Khrushchev commented that 'this conception of an industrial fair, with no "way of life" propaganda was exactly right' - the American exhibition of 1959 (scene of the Nixon-Khrushchev 'kitchen' debate) had been ill-judged with 'too many ugly modern statues'.²⁹

The Foreign Office reported in 1961 that the 'most striking feature in Soviet trade with Western Europe ... is the emergence of the United Kingdom as the Soviet Union's No. 1 trading partner, displacing West Germany [from] that position',³⁰ although, as Trevelyan noted, the relationship was distinctly one-sided: 'The Russians bought from us only about half what we bought from them.'³¹ Britain's efforts to use its diplomatic services to generate commercial opportunities reflected a common tendency among countries whose share of world trade was falling. The Plowden (1964), Duncan (1969) and Berrill (1974) reports into British representation abroad emphasised the need for commercial diplomacy. In 1977, the Central Policy Review Staff recommended on the basis of Britain's diminished international role that export promotion should take priority over political work.³²

There was good progress in the cultural as well as the commercial realm in the Roberts years.³³ The British and Soviet governments signed agreements in December 1959 and January 1961, providing for exchanges in education, technology, science, agriculture, medicine, social security and the arts.³⁴ In respect of the latter, the Embassy and the British Council arranged a tour of the Soviet Union by the Old Vic the following month, performing *Macbeth*, *Saint Joan*, and *The Importance of Being Earnest*. According to Roberts, 'the visit was an outstanding success', not least because Khrushchev and deputy leader Anastas Mikoyan attended one of the performances. Khrushchev's appearance 'when he was busy with the Central Committee Plenum suggests that the Soviet authorities wished to make a gesture of goodwill towards the United Kingdom, at any rate in the cultural field'.³⁵ The precise motive for the 'gesture of goodwill' is not apparent, but it was evidently a positive development, facilitated by British efforts.

When later in 1961 the Royal Ballet visited the Soviet Union, Roberts noted that many Soviet officials, heads of diplomatic missions and the British and foreign press attended the opening night. Khrushchev not only attended but brought important

colleagues, including Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko. Khrushchev's interest in the arts was 'intermittent, and such a weighty representation from the Presidium would normally be reserved for some cultural manifestation from Cuba, or some other uncommitted country whom it was desired to impress'. Although he also took the opportunity to lecture Roberts about Berlin during the intervals (see below), Khrushchev 'followed *Ondine* attentively and seemed interested in what he saw'. Roberts described the Royal Ballet visit as 'one of the most important, if not the most important, British cultural visits ever to have taken place in the Soviet Union'. His 'colleagues in the Diplomatic Corps were full of admiration, as were the Soviet audiences'.³⁶ He commented that cultural and commercial activities were Britain's most important contribution to East-West relations.³⁷ As well as boosting Britain's standing with Soviet and foreign officials in Moscow, cultural and commercial work had helped to make the Embassy a hive of activity. In his first year as Ambassador, Roberts and his colleagues entertained 6,000 visitors, along with hosting the trade fair, the Old Vic, the Royal Ballet and a film festival.³⁸

The Limits of the Anglo-Soviet Political Relationship

These developments helped to ease what was otherwise a fraught time. Roberts noted early in 1961 that the collapse of the Paris summit had damaged Anglo-Soviet relations, and that Khrushchev and other Soviet spokesmen had criticised 'Her Majesty's Government in general and the Prime Minister in particular ... for our shared responsibility for the RB-47 incident, for the Anglo-American agreement on the Holy Loch base for Polaris submarines, for our alleged equivocal attitude on disarmament and more generally for our alleged subservience to American and even to German policies'.³⁹ Ideological incongruity, the British commitment to close relations with the United States, and Britain's lesser power status meant that the Anglo-Soviet political relationship was of limited substance. Rodric Braithwaite, who served as ambassador in Moscow at the end of the Cold War, commented that 'the substance of Anglo-Russian or Anglo-Soviet relations has always been very thin... as a bilateral relationship neither country has actually cared very much about the other'. Policy issues addressed mainly 'within the NATO alliance and within our relations with the Americans'. Most of Britain's direct dealings with the Soviet Union concerned 'things like who was going to throw out whose spy first, things which are not actually the mainstream of normal, bilateral international relations'. Much of Harold Macmillan and Harold Wilson's handling of the Soviet Union was predominantly 'gesture politics, because there was little bilateral substance'.⁴⁰

Roberts noted in November 1962 in his valedictory despatch that the British government had shown little inclination towards holding ministerial-level, bilateral Anglo-Soviet meetings, due to concerns about antagonising 'our American, German or

French allies' over Berlin. Although the previous two years had been 'neither propitious nor disastrous enough to encourage high-level Anglo-Soviet exchanges ... this has not deterred the Americans and others from fairly frequent contacts of a distinctly political flavour'. Roberts suggested that these meetings had facilitated mutual understanding and had eased tensions. However, beyond Alec Douglas-Home's meetings with Gromyko at the United Nations (UN) in New York and in disarmament talks in Geneva, 'I think I am not exaggerating when I say there have been no political contacts as such either way for two years'. Roberts encouraged London to seek 'more frequent political meetings' with Soviet leaders.⁴¹ During his year (1963-64) as prime minister, Douglas-Home did not show much interest in Anglo-Soviet diplomacy,⁴² unlike Harold Wilson (in office 1964-70), who visited Moscow twice. The results of Wilson's Soviet policy were limited, though, to a Consular Convention (1965) and a technological exchange agreement (1968),⁴³ suggesting that Anglo-Soviet summits did not necessarily achieve much.

The limited scope of Britain's top-level relations with the Soviet Union enabled the Ambassador in Moscow to conduct relations directly with the Kremlin, whose members fortunately were very much outward-facing. Roberts doubted 'if any group of rulers is as accessible or as ready to exchange views ... in their offices or at the many parties where we meet as are Mr. Khrushchev and his senior colleagues'. Members of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs 'now accept diplomatic invitations and find ways of returning diplomatic hospitality to a degree inconceivable when I was in the Soviet Union before'.⁴⁴ Khrushchev set the tone with his garrulousness. John Fretwell recollected that he even 'came to the Queen's birthday party on one occasion. He was seen around town a great deal ... he was not sealed away'.⁴⁵ The families of Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson and Khrushchev even shared weekend retreats.⁴⁶ Roberts did not achieve quite the same intimacy (largely due to his country's lesser international standing), but he saw Khrushchev often. There was ready access at lower levels, too. Fretwell noted that Embassy political staff had contact with Foreign Ministry officials, and that there was also 'good contact for the commercial and cultural sides of the embassy, who had their own particular sphere of people with whom they had authorised contact'.⁴⁷

Roberts and the Berlin Crisis

The first major diplomatic issue for the Ambassador to address was the Soviet challenge to Western ground access to Berlin. Since late 1958 Khrushchev had pressured the Allies to withdraw, by threatening to turn the issue of access over to the government of East Germany. The Western powers would then be obliged to extend *de facto* recognition to the East German government to begin what were likely to be unfruitful negotiations. At the Vienna summit with John F. Kennedy in June 1961, Khrushchev reasserted his

(always somewhat flexible) six-month deadline for a treaty.⁴⁸ In line with London's position, Frank Roberts supported talks with the Soviet Union over Berlin because he feared that in the absence of dialogue Khrushchev would have 'no option but to act unilaterally, which can only mean a separate peace treaty' with East Germany. The 'result would be that our subsequent prospects of effectively defending our rights in Berlin and preventing their gradual erosion without resort to force would be diminished'.⁴⁹ Roberts recorded that on 31 July 1961, during 'protracted conversations during each interval' of the Royal Ballet performance 'and for one and a half hours after the curtain had fallen', Khrushchev spoke about Berlin.⁵⁰ The Soviet leader explained that that he owed Harold Macmillan a hunting expedition, but it would be impossible to extend an invitation 'if we had broken over Berlin and were perhaps shooting each other instead of elk ... the West was now threatening to cut off trade and even go to war if the Soviet Government signed a peace treaty'. Khrushchev brandished his nuclear bombs:

Modern wars would be fought with nuclear weapons, ten of which could destroy France or for that matter the United Kingdom. The Soviet Union (and also the United States) would probably lose tens of millions, but the Soviet Union would certainly go to war if the Western Allies tried to force their way through to West Berlin after the Soviet Union had signed a peace treaty with the DDR [East Germany].⁵¹

More reassuringly, he added that it would be 'ridiculous for 200 million people to die over two million Berliners'.⁵² As Roberts noted, Khrushchev's Royal Ballet diatribe was also his last 'major attempt to persuade me that his United Nations solution' – which involved establishing Berlin as a 'free city' under the authority of the UN – 'was the right one'. But Roberts thought that 'the Berliners would not ... regard the United Nations as sufficient protection compared with the Americans and the rest of us'.⁵³ Furthermore, he recognised that at the ballet Khrushchev had not only taken the opportunity to vent his anxieties but also to try to detach Britain from the Americans by encouraging an independent British initiative.⁵⁴ That, however, was not something that Roberts pursued, given the obvious danger to allied unity and how in any case it was possible to exert influence through the American government (see below).

Although Khrushchev sought to dislodge the Western powers from Berlin, Roberts understood quite correctly that the Soviet leader's priority was, in the light of the mass east-to-west migration through West Berlin, keeping Germans in rather than keeping the Allies out. Khrushchev complained to the Ambassador more than once about 'the awful problem of the best people pouring out' of East Germany like 'blood'. Khrushchev was not, despite his threat of signing a peace treaty, 'all that keen ... on handing powers over to the East Germans'.⁵⁵ Roberts' emphasis on the Soviet Union's

defensive motivations was consistent with the views of Alec Douglas-Home and the Foreign Office – London believed (in part due to Roberts' influence) that Moscow's priority was to consolidate the East German state. By contrast, American policymakers were inclined to see Soviet policy as aggressive, trying to undermine Western solidarity and challenge American prestige across the world.⁵⁶

There was a shared sense, though, in the British and American governments that the Soviet Union would soon take measures to resolve the Berlin question. Roberts certainly took this view, telling London in July that 'the Russians' were most anxious for 'some change in the present situation'.⁵⁷ Khrushchev conveyed privileged military information when he told him that a particular major-general who had helped to crush the Hungarian uprising in 1956 had been appointed to command Soviet troops around Berlin. The Ambassador did not appreciate that this was a warning to the Western powers against taking military action against the Berlin Wall, which the Soviet and East German authorities began constructing on the night of 13-14 August 1962. Yet the significance of Khrushchev's point was far from obvious at the time, and the erection of the barrier certainly took most Western observers by surprise.⁵⁸

Although there was a brief confrontation between American and Soviet tanks at Checkpoint Charlie in the *Friedrichstrasse* in October,⁵⁹ and later there were instances of Soviet obstruction of ground transport through East Germany, it is evident that the building of the Wall had ended the Berlin *crisis* – not least because in December 1961 Khrushchev withdrew his deadline for signing a treaty with East Germany. Famously, President Kennedy said 'a wall is a lot better than a war'.⁶⁰ Yet the resolution of the crisis was not so apparent at the time, because without an agreement from the communist authorities Western ground access was still vulnerable, and Khrushchev had changed gear on the issue before. Since February 1961 Llewellyn Thompson – between whom and Roberts there was 'mutual admiration'⁶¹ - had taken a more favourable attitude to negotiations than had many other American officials, who were deeply sensitive about making concessions. Roberts thought that 'if we can get Kennedy to adopt this sort of line as his own it will be very good and will enable us to avoid appearing to be the ones who advocate compromise'. As Toshihiko Aono has explained, Thompson attempted to use the British stand – as conveyed by Roberts in Moscow - to help convince Secretary of State Dean Rusk of the importance of negotiations. At an Anglo-American summit in Bermuda in December 1961, the two governments agreed to maintain close cooperation in the forthcoming talks between Thompson and Gromyko in Moscow, and that Thompson would act in close consultation with Roberts. Douglas-Home suggested that Roberts would provide the American ambassador with 'whatever help he thought best', while Kennedy said that it would be difficult for Thompson to 'go on alone as the substance of the matter was approached'.⁶² Douglas-Home duly instructed him to 'help Thompson in preparing for his meetings with Gromyko and in analyzing their results'.⁶³

Thompson held meetings with the Soviet foreign minister in January 1962, but the discussions soon began to falter, in part due to French and West German concerns. The Foreign Office believed that as the talks were now in 'danger of petering out' Roberts should intervene to 'improve the atmosphere'. On 5 February, Rusk agreed with Home that 'Roberts should go ahead . . . provided that we have German agreement also'. However, Bonn's hesitation meant that matters did not go much further.⁶⁴ While the Soviets were inclined to mock Roberts for the British failure to participate in the Moscow talks over Berlin,⁶⁵ (trying once more to goad the British government into acting independently) they were unaware of how he exerted influence through his American colleague. Roberts had employed the 'special relationship' in the deft fashion envisioned in Macmillan's famous 'Greeks and Romans' metaphor, by injecting the British perspective discreetly into American policies.⁶⁶

There was other evidence of working closely with allied diplomats in Moscow in relation to divided Germany. On 14 February 1962, Soviet MiG fighter jets 'buzzed' the aircraft of Sir Christopher Steel, the British ambassador to West Germany, during a flight from Bonn to Berlin along one of the air corridors. Kempton Jenkins recalled that US, British, and French diplomats in Moscow decided that they had to lodge 'an immediate protest in the strongest language'. The ambassadors authorised a protest, but there was no time to 'wait for our ... capitals to coordinate a message and send it back to us'. So Jenkins, John Fretwell, and Jacques Andreani drafted a firm demarche themselves, which they then 'flashed ... back to our capitals, and the ambassadors went in simultaneously [in Moscow] with these protests'. The Soviets responded in a conciliatory fashion. Later, Alec Douglas-Home praised 'the drafters of the demarche for an outstanding job demonstrating initiative'.⁶⁷

Roberts and the Cuban Missile Crisis

Roberts' Moscow vantage point enabled him to provide vital 'man on the spot' insights during the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962.⁶⁸ President Kennedy's frequent contacts with British Ambassador David Ormsby-Gore and with Macmillan during the crisis meant that the British government was probably better informed than any other government.⁶⁹ Alongside ambassadors Ormsby-Gore in Washington and Herbert Marchant in Havana, Roberts helped to complete the picture. Some British officials learned of the American discovery of nuclear missiles in Cuba while attending an intelligence meeting at CIA headquarters on 19 October,⁷⁰ so it is likely that Roberts had at least some advance notice before the President's public announcement on Monday 22 October that the United States was imposing a naval blockade around Cuba. News that the Soviet Union had turned the island into a nuclear base took him by surprise. Despite

evidence of a substantial Soviet military buildup in Cuba since summer 1962, there were few British and American officials who expected that Moscow would place nuclear missiles rather than just conventional weapons in a region of great importance to the United States.⁷¹ Roberts surmised that Khrushchev had anticipated little more than protests and a showdown in the UN, where he could complain about American nuclear missiles in Turkey and in Italy. The Soviet leader had not expected the US government to implement a blockade and to threaten an attack on the missile bases.⁷²

President Kennedy complained publicly about how the Soviets had maintained that only defensive weapons were present on Cuba, but Roberts considered that assertions of Soviet deceit could only have 'incensed' Khrushchev and make him less likely to want to meet Kennedy to resolve the confrontation.⁷³ Roberts maintained, pragmatically, that there was no point getting 'worked up about Russian deceit in diplomacy', as it had deep roots, and he pointed out that Moscow's representatives had never said that 'there were no long-range ... missiles involved'. All the same, the question of whether a weapon was inherently offensive or defensive was a subjective point, and it was the case that long-range nuclear missiles were seen generally as 'a deterrent and the full sense of the word defensive'.⁷⁴ Overall, then, Roberts considered that Soviet deceit in relation to the missiles in Cuba violated no expectation of honesty, that the deception was in any case limited, and that expressing outrage could only have increased tensions just when cool heads and effective communication were essential to avoiding war.

Khrushchev's chief motivation, Roberts suggested, for installing nuclear missiles in Cuba was to seek an 'accretion of nuclear strength and bargaining power which the successful completion of the bases would have provided, and which would have shifted the present balance of power substantially ... in the Soviet favour'.⁷⁵ In 1961 the American government had announced publicly that it was, contrary to Khrushchev's pronouncements, in a position of overwhelming nuclear superiority. Now, according to Roberts, stationing nuclear missiles in Cuba offered the Soviets a nuclear 'quick fix' by augmenting their striking power substantially and by bolstering their prestige. His emphasis on the balance of power motivation was consistent with most other Anglo-American assessments. The British Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), for example, stated that 'the Russians had decided to install the missile complex because ... it would have given them a significant increase in their nuclear striking capability against the United States'.⁷⁶ Most US policymakers whose views are recorded accepted this motivation, too.⁷⁷

Significantly, though, Roberts gave equal weight to the Soviet leader's publicly-professed motive of preventing Cuba from 'from being crushed' by a US attack.⁷⁸ Against the background of the American-sponsored attack on Cuba at the Bay of Pigs in April 1961 and continued hostility (including 'covert' efforts to destabilise the Fidel Castro regime), the Ambassador thought that Khrushchev 'really considered an

American attack ... a probability', making it 'a Soviet interest to introduce into Cuba an effective deterrent'.⁷⁹ (Roberts stopped short of suggesting that by creating the impression that Cuba was in danger, US policies were at least partly responsible for causing the missile crisis.) Llewellyn Thompson, who by now had completed his Moscow tour and had returned to Washington, was about the only US policymaker who thought Khrushchev was genuinely concerned about defending Cuba.⁸⁰ Western officials tended to dismiss Khrushchev's defence-of-Cuba justification as a *post-facto* rationalisation after he had been forced to remove the missiles in return for a pledge that there would be no invasion of Cuba. Any view that Cuba *needed* defending from the US was given little credence. However, post-Cold War evidence has led historians to give weight to the defending-Cuba justification,⁸¹ suggesting that Roberts and Thompson were on the right track. Their insight and empathy was surely no coincidence; it derived from their frequent encounters with Khrushchev, providing them with an understanding of Soviet concerns that home-based officials could not achieve.

There was also speculation that Khrushchev placed nuclear missiles in Cuba to pressure the Western powers into withdrawing from Berlin. The JIC maintained that 'the West's determination to maintain the status quo' in the city had encouraged Khrushchev to take a drastic step to force the issue,⁸² while Dean Rusk and Undersecretary of State George Ball suggested that Khrushchev sought to use the missiles in Cuba to force a Cuba-Berlin 'bargain'.⁸³ Roberts, however, played down the Berlin question. He maintained that the Cuba initiative was intended 'to improve the Soviet Union's bargaining power', but not in relation to 'a particular issue (i.e. Berlin) at a particular time (i.e. this month)'.⁸⁴ It has indeed become apparent that Khrushchev did not install the missiles in Cuba with the express intention of sacrificing them in a Berlin trade, or in any deal: the costs and risks of the Cuban deployment greatly exceeded the value of sacrificing the weapons in any balanced exchange.⁸⁵ Furthermore, during the crisis Khrushchev firmly rejected the suggestion from his diplomats of using Berlin as a bargaining tool, as he did not wish to exacerbate an already fraught situation.⁸⁶ The result was that the issue of Berlin remained quiescent.

Of course, there were other issues to consider. On 24 October, the Soviet assistant naval attaché in London, Captain Yevgeny Ivanov, suggested that Britain should intervene to bring about a 'conciliation' between the United States and the Soviet Union.⁸⁷ Ivanov was an official of the GRU and had tried to mediate over Berlin. The idea of a British diplomatic initiative might avert catastrophe but also threatened to create divisions between London and Washington, and within NATO. Roberts was sceptical about Ivanov's approach, arguing that there was no reason why a 'junior official in London should have complete and up to date information on matters of the highest policy outside his competence and on a situation which has developed so fast in [the] past 48 hours.' The 'most likely explanation' for Ivanov's initiative was to divide

Britain and the United States,⁸⁸ a Soviet tactic that had been evident during the Berlin crisis. Furthermore, there was reason to doubt Ivanov's credibility because he maintained that there were no nuclear warheads in Cuba, and that the missiles could reach no further than Florida. Although the Ambassador did not seem to know about Ivanov's status as an intelligence officer, the GRU connection may not have had a bearing on the value of the proposal.⁸⁹

There are different views about Macmillan's attitude to mediation, which would probably have involved holding a summit conference. Len Scott notes he took the idea seriously, not least out of a desire to avoid catastrophe, although Peter Catterall maintains that the Prime Minister was wary about providing the Soviets with a chance to broach issues such as Berlin.⁹⁰ It is likely that Macmillan saw equal measures of both opportunity and risk in a conference, and in any case he maintained his role of supporting the American position – in part due to the influence of Alec Douglas-Home. The latter was deeply conscious of Moscow's duplicity and thought that Soviet encouragement to mediate was intended to 'test our resolve and lay a bait to our vanity'.⁹¹ This view probably derived, at least in part, to the cautious counsel of Roberts, for whom Douglas-Home had particular respect because of Roberts' lengthy experience as a diplomat.⁹² A paucity of Soviet sources means that it is impossible to provide a definitive verdict about Ivanov's intentions, but Len Scott has suggested that he was probably 'engaged on a mission from Moscow' rather than operating independently. Whether the main motive was to end the confrontation using British mediation, or if it was, as Roberts suggested, to sow division among the Western powers, remains uncertain. The secondary aim, however, was 'most certainly disinformation concerning Soviet nuclear forces in Cuba'.⁹³

While much of the world feared impending doom, Roberts emphasised that there was no missile crisis among most Muscovites. Life continued in a calm and orderly manner for the general public, and Soviet officials remained amenable.⁹⁴ In contrast with Roberts' experience during the Berlin crisis, now 'there was practically no attempt' from the Soviet government to emphasise 'the gravity of the situation'. This signified that while the Kremlin had acted riskily it 'did not want or expect or want its actions in Cuba to lead to war'.⁹⁵ As was also evident in a positive response to a message from the would-be peacemaker Bertrand Russell, Khrushchev was keen to 'find a way out and to avoid action further action endangering peace'.⁹⁶ On 26 October, the Soviet leader told the US administration that he would remove the missiles in return for a pledge not to invade Cuba, but the following day he raised the ante by demanding the removal of US Jupiter nuclear missiles from Turkey. The reason for the new demand, which posed particular difficulties for the administration because of its potential for dividing NATO, was central to how to respond. Deputy Undersecretary of the Foreign Office Sir Evelyn Shuckburgh argued that the additional demand suggested 'divisions in the Soviet leadership'.⁹⁷ Similarly, US National Security Adviser McGeorge

Bundy suggested that 'hardnosed' officials had been responsible for the tougher terms.⁹⁸ However, Roberts had long argued that Khrushchev was firmly in charge. He maintained a year earlier, for example, that 'all the evidence suggests that Khrushchev stands head and shoulders above his colleagues'.⁹⁹ Soon after the missile crisis Roberts dismissed 'the suggestion ... that some of Khrushchev's messages' were 'subsequently reversed by his colleagues and others the result of collective decisions'.¹⁰⁰ The 'crucial decisions at every stage were essentially his'.¹⁰¹ Roberts' picture of a Khrushchev securely in control demonstrated a sound appreciation of power dynamics within the Soviet hierarchy, and has been confirmed by Soviet evidence.¹⁰²

Roberts disdained the proposal to trade the Cuban missiles for American ones in Turkey. He argued that it was

an obvious but disingenuous try on: first because the proposition was proclaimed to the world [over the Soviet world radio service] long before President Kennedy could have digested it, if not before he received it; and secondly because of the expressive protestations of high-mindedness with which he surrounded it.¹⁰³

The Turkish missile proposal demonstrated Khrushchev's 'talent and his methods: he offers to trade something he does not really control for something long in the hands of his opponent'. Roberts clearly did not consider the US missiles in Turkey and the Soviet missiles in Cuba to be analogous, perhaps because Cuba was of much greater sensitivity to the US government than Turkey was to the Kremlin. Roberts expected that Kennedy would reject Khrushchev's offer while exposing its disingenuousness. However, the US administration responded to the Turkey overture by accepting a secret 'backchannel' deal on Sunday 28 October to withdraw the Jupiter missiles within six months, alongside pledging publicly that the US would not invade Cuba. Unaware of the clandestine US commitment (even many American officials were also in ignorance), Roberts was astonished at how Khrushchev appeared to engage in a 'complete climb-down over Cuba, accepting every American requirement, even including the United Nations inspection of the dismantling of Soviet bases'. He explained the seeming abandonment of the Jupiter demand by explaining that the Soviet leader 'feared early United States action against Cuba'.¹⁰⁴

Evidence has suggested that Khrushchev's demand for the withdrawal of the Jupiters reflected a search for suitable terms under which to make a concession he had already decided to make, with him recognising from the beginning of the crisis that the situation could escalate dangerously. By Saturday 27 October, he also had cause for concern about a letter from Fidel Castro proposing a nuclear first-strike on the United States in the event of an American invasion of Cuba, and about how on the same day Soviet forces shot down an American U-2 aircraft over Cuba (intensifying the pressure

in Washington for military action), and how another U-2 strayed into Soviet territory (potentially sparking a nuclear conflagration through misperception by the Soviet military).¹⁰⁵ All this meant that the American concession on Turkey played at most only a minor role in the Soviet capitulation. Roberts therefore did not need to know about the secret deal to understand correctly that Khrushchev retreated out of knowledge that the Soviet Union was in a position of military weakness in the Caribbean, and that the Soviet leader fully recognised the danger of the confrontation.

Soon after the resolution of the crisis, David Ormsby-Gore suggested linking the security of Cuba with that of Berlin, as a way of preserving the Western position in the city, but Roberts dissented. The Ambassador maintained that after the 'Cuban climb-down' Khrushchev was ill-poised to make

concessions to the West on an issue so vital to the USSR and to him personally as Berlin. For us to raise Berlin at this juncture would be tantamount to inviting him to restate his well-known position more intractably than ever and to call upon the West ... for concessions on our part to balance his 'statesmanship' over Cuba.¹⁰⁶

Roberts' argument helped to ensure that Ormsby-Gore's suggestion went no further. It was logical that just as Khrushchev had refrained from exploiting Berlin during the missile crisis, the United States and its allies should avoid exploiting the missile crisis victory to secure advantage in Berlin – otherwise the tensions that had blighted East-West relations in 1961 could well reignite.

While in the short-term Khrushchev escaped unscathed from his capitulation over missiles in Cuba, Roberts predicted that his authority would suffer among 'hard-headed Party functionaries who remember Stalin, who have access to Western appraisals of political developments and who know what Peking's judgment is'. There would 'at the least be a leaven of Khrushchev doubters and conceivably a potential nucleus of opposition to their present leader'.¹⁰⁷ Although foreign policy issues were not the sole reason for Khrushchev's downfall (in October 1964), Soviet Ambassador in Washington Anatoly Dobrynin noted that when the plenary meeting of the Central Committee was agreeing the dismissal 'many delegates strongly criticized his personal role in creating the Cuban crisis'. Dmitri Polyanski, for example, complained that the Cuban debacle 'damaged the international prestige of our country, our party, and our armed forces, while ... helping to strengthen US prestige'.¹⁰⁸

Roberts' longer-range forecasting was less impressive, though, reflecting an exaggerated view of the Soviet Union's underlying vigour. He pointed out in his valedictory despatch in November 1962 that

...the century ahead could easily become a Russian century to succeed the present American century ... the Soviet Union has shown that it can stand the strain of a heavy armaments programme and of space research and at the same time increase its standard of living, however slowly and inadequately.¹⁰⁹

Roberts' belief in the inherent vitality of the Soviet system today seems odd even in relation to a state that worked hard to conceal its defects, and which effectively surrendered in the Cold War in the 1980s. Nonetheless, the flawed assessment was of little immediate significance, not least because the Soviet Union was able to implement a substantial build-up of its nuclear forces in the wake of the missile crisis to reach parity with the United States by 1969.

Conclusions

As G.R. Berridge has noted, by the early 1960s there were those who were arguing that the resident embassy was becoming an anachronism.¹¹⁰ It was maintained that the advance of travel and communication technologies enabled the bypassing of ambassadors in negotiations; that the growth of multilateral institutions increased the opportunity for direct international dealings; and that the growth of the mass media obviated the information-gathering function of the resident embassy. The criticisms can all be countered in the case of Roberts' Embassy. First, top-level dealings between the London and Moscow governments were limited, as we have seen, although historians have noted that summit conferences can create more, not less, work for ambassadors; second, Cold War rivalry meant Britain and the Soviet Union were not parties to the same international organisations, except the UN, so limiting opportunities for mutual engagement; and, third, Moscow was poorly covered by press correspondents, who in any case do not always ask the most pertinent questions.¹¹¹ Furthermore, while it is clear that in a broadly adversarial relationship with the host state an embassy usually has less routine business to transact, the hostility is likely to mean, in turn, the increased risk of crises, in which the ambassador's assessments – conveyed to the home government through the technology of rapid communications - can be crucial. This was certainly the case during the Cuban Missile Crisis, an especially volatile and dangerous episode.

The Moscow Embassy's role under Frank Roberts in the development of commercial and cultural ties with the Soviet Union was also laudable, not least because relations in these spheres offered a chance to offset political tensions (such as the collapse of the four-power Paris summit in May 1960), while commercial bonds in particular provided a means of exerting a discernible influence on Soviet policies.¹¹² On political questions, Roberts worked closely with allied diplomats, with Anglo-American cooperation being particularly striking and providing an opportunity to influence

policy-making in Washington. This was evident in the aftermath of the construction of the Berlin Wall, when Roberts encouraged talks between the United States and the Soviet Union. The notable ease and frequency of Roberts' dealings with Soviet officials and politicians, including Khrushchev, derived from their accessibility but also from the good standing of the Ambassador and his staff. Roberts' assessments of decision-making in the Kremlin were speculative rather than definitive, and he did not anticipate either the construction of the Berlin Wall or the installation of nuclear missiles in Cuba. Nonetheless, he was not alone in this, and he was still able to appreciate the distribution of power in the Soviet government and to understand Nikita Khrushchev. This mattered, because, as former British Ambassador to the Soviet Union William Hayter suggested, 'so much of the future of the world depended' on the attitudes and impulses of 'those strange, powerful figures' in the Kremlin.¹¹³ Overall, Frank Roberts performed well in Moscow, and it is clear that there was 'never a dull moment' for him.

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² Frank Roberts, *Dealing with Dictators: The Destruction and Revival of Europe, 1930-1970* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991), p.234.

³ See, e.g., Nigel J. Ashton, *Kennedy, Macmillan and the Cold War: The Irony of Interdependence* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002); John Dumbrell, *A Special Relationship: Anglo-American Relations from the Cold War to Iraq* (Palgrave: Basingstoke, 2006), pp.49-74; Michael F. Hopkins, 'David Ormsby-Gore', in Michael F. Hopkins, Saul Kelly and John W. Young (eds), *The Washington Embassy: British Ambassadors to the United States, 1939-77* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009), pp.130-49.

⁴ The literature of British and American diplomatic representation includes Hopkins, Kelly and Young (eds), *The Washington Embassy*; Rogelia Pastor-Castro and John W. Young (eds.), *The Paris Embassy: British Ambassadors and Anglo-French Relations, 1944-79* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013); John W. Young, *Twentieth Century Diplomacy: A Case Study of British Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). On US diplomatic representation, see e.g. Jonathan Colman, 'Portrait of an Institution: The US Embassy in London, 1945-53', *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 4, 3 (2009), pp.339-60; Alison Holmes and J. Simon Rofe (eds), *The Embassy in Grosvenor Square: American Ambassadors to the United Kingdom, 1938-2008* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012); David Mayers, *The Ambassadors and America's Soviet Policy* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); John W. Young, *David Bruce and Diplomatic Practice: An American Ambassador in London, 1961-69* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

⁵ Gaynor Johnson, 'The British Foreign Office and the Discovery of the Katyn Massacre, 1943', unpublished paper, 2016.

⁶ Sean Greenwood, 'Frank Roberts and the "Other" Long Telegram: The View from the British Embassy in Moscow, March 1946', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 25 (1990), pp.104, 113, 114, 117. See also Ray Merrick, 'The Russia Committee of the British Foreign Office and the

Cold War, 1946-47', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 20, 3 (July 1985), pp. 453-468; John Zametica, 'Three Letters to Bevin: Frank Roberts at the Moscow Embassy, 1956-46', in John Zametica (ed), *British Officials and British Foreign Policy, 1945-50* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1990), pp.39-97.

⁷ Alan Bullock, *Ernest Bevin: Foreign Secretary* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p.98.

⁸ Foreign Office, *Foreign Office List and Diplomatic and Consular Year Book, 1962* (London: Harrison, 1962), p.36.

⁹ Steel, 'Moscow Embassy', 27 June 1961, FO 181/11149, National Archives, Kew, Surrey. Unless otherwise noted, all documentary evidence used in this article is from this archive.

¹⁰ Humphrey Trevelyan, *Worlds Apart: China 1953-55, USSR 1962-65* (London: Macmillan, 1973), p.269.

¹¹ 'Notes on plan for extension of Embassy offices', undated, unknown author, FO 181/11149. See Trevelyan, *Worlds Apart*, pp.257-64, for an Embassy perspective on Soviet spying. More generally, see Christopher Andrew, *KGB: The Inside Story* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991).

¹² Samuel to de Zulueta, 15 August 1960, PREM 11/3104.

¹³ Cambridge Diplomatic Oral History Project (CDOHP) interview with Brian Crowe, 15 October 2003.

¹⁴ CDOHP interview with Dennis Amy, 19 March 1998.

¹⁵ Chapman Pincher, *Treachery: Betrayals, Blunders, and Cover-ups: Six Decades of Espionage* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 2011), pp.465-66; Young, *Twentieth Century Diplomacy*, p.65.

¹⁶ CDOHP interview with Sir John Fretwell, 15 February 1996.

¹⁷ Peter Hennessy, *The Secret State: Whitehall and the Cold War* (London: Allen Lane, 2002), pp.42-43. For Roberts' (modest) role in relation to Penkovsky and his (overoptimistic) assessment of the spy's value during the Cuban Missile Crisis, see Roberts, *Dealing with Dictators*, pp.220-22. See also Jeremy Duns, *Dead Drop: The True Story of Oleg Penkovsky and the Cold War's Most Dangerous Operation* (London and New York: Simon and Schuster, 2013); David Gioe, 'Handling HERO: Joint Anglo-American Tradecraft in the case of Oleg Penkovsky', in David Gioe, Len Scott and Christopher Andrew (eds), *An International History of the Cuban Missile Crisis: A 50-Year Retrospective* (London: Routledge, 2014), pp.135-75; L.V. Scott, *Macmillan, Kennedy and the Cuban Missile Crisis: Political, Military and Intelligence Aspects* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), pp.120-22; Len Scott, 'Oleg Penkovsky, British Intelligence and the Cuban Missile Crisis', in Robert Dover and Michael S. Goodman (eds), *Learning from the Secret Past: Cases in British Intelligence History* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011), pp.344-74; Jerrold Schecter and Petr Deriabin, *The Spy Who Saved the World: How a Soviet Colonel Changed the Course of the Cold War* (New York: Scribner's, 1992).

¹⁸ William Hayter, *The Kremlin and the Embassy* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1966), p.45. For a US perspective on the Moscow diplomatic corps, see Kempton Jenkins, *Cold War Saga* (Ann Arbor: Nimble Books, 2010), pp.151-59. Young, *David Bruce*, chapter 6, pp.120-40, provides an account of the London diplomatic corps.

¹⁹ CDOHP interview with Dennis Amy.

²⁰ Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training (ADST), interview with Kempton B. Jenkins, 23 February 1995.

²¹ CDOHP interview with Dennis Amy.

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- ²³ CDOHP interview with Dennis Amy.
- ²⁴ Jenkins, *Cold War Saga*, p.152.
- ²⁵ On Anglo-Soviet commercial (and cultural) relations in the 1960s, see Trevelyan, *Worlds Apart*, chapter 21, pp.245-56. More generally, see John Fisher, Effie Pedaliu, and Richard Smith (eds), *The Foreign Office, Commerce and British Foreign Policy during the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, forthcoming).
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- ²⁷ Report on trade fair, undated, unknown author, FO 371/166271; Roberts to FO, 21 May 1961, FO 371/159602.
- ²⁸ Roberts to Wilson, 6 June 1961, FO 371/159602.
- ²⁹ Roberts to FO, 19 May 1961, FO 371/159602.
- ³⁰ Hutchings, 'Soviet Foreign Trade in 1961', 2 October 1962, FO 371/166237.
- ³¹ Trevelyan, *Worlds Apart*, p.246.
- ³² Keith Hamilton and Richard Langhorne, *The Practice of Diplomacy: Its Evolution, Theory and Administration* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p.220. For an account of the reports, see Young, *Twentieth Century Diplomacy*, pp.40-58. For Roberts' account of the Duncan report – to which he contributed – see Roberts, *Dealing with Dictators*, pp.270-74.
- ³³ The literature on British cultural diplomacy is limited, but see Frances Donaldson, *The British Council: The First Fifty Years* (London: Cape, 1984). On the American side, see e.g. Richard Arndt, *The First Resort of Kings: American Cultural Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century* (Dulles: Potomac, 2005); Danielle Fosler-Lussier, *Music in America's Cold War Diplomacy* (Oakland: University of California, 2015); Naima Prevots, *Dance for Export: American Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2008). See also David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy during the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
- ³⁴ Anglo-Soviet Cultural Agreement, undated, FO 371/159575.
- ³⁵ Roberts to Home, 3 February 1961, 'Visit of the Old Vic Theatre Company to the Soviet Union', FO 924/1391.
- ³⁶ Roberts to Home, 'The Visit of the Royal Ballet to the Soviet Union', 31 July 1961, FO 924/1391.
- ³⁷ Roberts' impressions on leaving Moscow, 19 November 1962, PREM 11/3996.
- ³⁸ Roberts, *Dealing with Dictators*, p.223.
- ³⁹ Annual report on the Soviet Union, 17 January 1961, FO 371/15934. RB-47 was a US reconnaissance aircraft which had flown from a British base and was shot down by the Soviets over the Barents Sea in July 1960. The two surviving airmen were released early the following year. See Michael R. Beschloss, *The Crisis Years: Kennedy and Khrushchev, 1960-1963* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), pp.23, 35-36, 40, 41, 54-58, 197.
- ⁴⁰ CDOHP interview with Sir Rodric Braithwaite, 28 January 1998.
- ⁴¹ Roberts' impressions on leaving Moscow, 19 November 1962, PREM 11/3996.
- ⁴² On Douglas-Home's foreign policies, see Andrew Holt, *The Foreign Policy of the Douglas-Home Government* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014).

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- ⁴³ See Geraint Hughes, *Harold Wilson's Cold War: The Labour Government and East-West Politics* (Woodbridge: Royal Historical Society/Boydell, 2009); and Roger Hooton Platt: 'British Relations with the Soviet Government in the Era of Détente, 1964-75', PhD dissertation, University of Liverpool, 2011.
- ⁴⁴ Roberts' impressions on leaving Moscow, 19 November 1962, PREM 11/3996.
- ⁴⁵ CDOHP interview with Sir John Fretwell.
- ⁴⁶ Mayers, *The Ambassadors*, p.202.
- ⁴⁷ CDOHP interview with Sir John Fretwell.
- ⁴⁸ On the Vienna summit, see Günter Bischof, Stefan Karner and Barbara Stelz-Marx (eds), *The Vienna Summit and its Importance in International History* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014). On the Berlin crisis, see e.g. Toshihiko Aono, "'It Is Not Easy for the United States to Carry the Whole Load': Anglo-American Relations during the Berlin Crisis, 1961-1962", *Diplomatic History*, 34: 2, April 2010, pp. 325-56; John P. S. Gearson and Kori Schake (eds.), *The Berlin Wall Crisis: Perspectives on the Cold War Alliances* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); John P.S. Gearson, *Harold Macmillan and the Berlin Wall Crisis, 1958-1962* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998); Hope M. Harrison, *Driving the Soviet Up the Wall: Soviet-East German Relations, 1953-1961* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Frederick Kempe, *Berlin, 1961: Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Most Dangerous Place on Earth* (New York: Putnam's, 2011).
- ⁴⁹ Roberts to FO, 26 April 1961, FO 371/160534.
- ⁵⁰ Roberts to Home, 'The Visit of the Royal Ballet to the Soviet Union', 31 July 1961, FO 924/1391.
- ⁵¹ Conversation between Khrushchev and Roberts, 2 July 1961, CAB 129/105; Duns, *Dead Drop*, pp.87-88.
- ⁵² Ibid.
- ⁵³ John Gearson, 'Witness Seminar: British Policy and the Berlin Wall Crisis, 1958-61', *Contemporary Record*, 6, 1 (Summer 1992), p.165; Roberts, *Dealing with Dictators*, p.215.
- ⁵⁴ Toshihiko Aono, 'The Twin Crises and the Anglo-American Alliance, 1961-1962', PhD dissertation, University of California Santa Barbara, 2007, p.98.
- ⁵⁵ Roberts' testimony in Gearson, 'Witness Seminar', pp.131, 137, 165.
- ⁵⁶ Aono, 'The Twin Crises', p.67.
- ⁵⁷ Roberts to Shuckburgh, 19 July 1961, FO 371/160542.
- ⁵⁸ Roberts, *Dealing with Dictators*, pp.215-16. On how far the Wall came as a surprise to the West (Roberts was not alone in not expecting the Soviet move), see William Burr, 'The Berlin Wall, Fifty Years Ago', National Security Archive George Washington University. <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB354/>
- ⁵⁹ See Raymond L. Garthoff, 'The US-Soviet Tank Confrontation at Checkpoint Charlie', in Stephen J. Cimbala (ed.), *Mysteries of the Cold War* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), pp. 73-88.
- ⁶⁰ Campbell Craig, 'Kennedy's International Legacy, Fifty Years On', *International Affairs*, 89: 6 (November 2013), p.1375.
- ⁶¹ Jenkins, *Cold War Saga*, p.152.
- ⁶² Aono, 'The Twin Crises', pp.79, 227-28.
- ⁶³ FO to Moscow, 1 January 1962, FO 371/163564.
- ⁶⁴ Aono, 'The Twin Crises', p.231.

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- ⁶⁵ Embassy in Soviet Union to Department of State, 2 February 1962, *FRUS 1961–1963 XIV Berlin Crisis, 1961–1962* (1993), document 280.
- ⁶⁶ On the metaphor and its limitations, see Ashton, *Kennedy, Macmillan*, pp.6-7.
- ⁶⁷ ADST interview with Kempton B. Jenkins, 23 February 1995; Jenkins, *Cold War Saga*, pp.185-86. Jenkins suggests mistakenly that the date of the incident was 12 April 1961; see ‘MiGs Fly Close to Ambassador’s Aircraft’, *The Times* (15 February 1962), p.12.
- ⁶⁸ General accounts of the crisis include Jonathan Colman, *The Cuban Missile Crisis: Origins, Course and Aftermath* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016); Michael M. Dobbs, *One Minute to Midnight: Kennedy, Khrushchev and Castro on the Brink of Nuclear War* (New York: Knopf, 2008); Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *‘One Hell of a Gamble’: Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958–64* (New York: Norton, 1997); Don Munton and David Welch, *The Cuban Missile Crisis: A Concise History*, 2nd edn (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
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- ⁷¹ On the American failure to anticipate the Soviet move, see Jonathan Renshon, ‘Mirroring Risk: The Cuban Missile Estimation’, *Intelligence and National Security*, 24: 3 (June 2009), pp. 315-38.
- ⁷² Roberts, *Dealing with Dictators*, p.219.
- ⁷³ Roberts to FO, 23 October 1962, FO 371/162375.
- ⁷⁴ Moscow to FO, 8 November 1962, FO 371/162405.
- ⁷⁵ ‘The Cuba Crisis: Its Course as seen from Moscow’, 7 November 1962, FO 371/162405.
- ⁷⁶ JIC, 26 October 1962, CAB 158/47. See also Michael Goodman, ‘The Joint Intelligence Committee and the Cuban Missile Crisis’, in Gioe, Scott and Andrew (eds), *An International History*, pp.99-105.
- ⁷⁷ Off-the-record meeting on Cuba, 16 October 1961, *FRUS 1961-1963 XI*, document 21.
- ⁷⁸ Nikita Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev. Volume 3: Statesman, 1953-1964*, edited by Sergei Khrushchev and translated by George Shriver (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), p. 327.
- ⁷⁹ Roberts, ‘The Cuba Crisis: Its Course as seen from Moscow’, 7 November 1962, FO 371/162405.
- ⁸⁰ Ernest R. May and Philip D. Zelikow (eds), *The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House During the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Cambridge: Belknap, 1997), p.554. The views of Foy Kohler, Thompson’s successor in Moscow, are not apparent, but he only took up his post in September.
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- ⁸⁹ Foreign Office to Moscow, 24 October 1962, PREM 11/3690; Scott, *Macmillan, Kennedy*, pp.105, 109.
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- ⁹² Thorpe, *Douglas-Home*, p.234.
- ⁹³ Scott, *Macmillan, Kennedy*, pp.111-12.
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- ⁹⁶ Moscow to Foreign Office, 25 October 1962, PREM 11/3690.
- ⁹⁷ Scott, *Macmillan, Kennedy*, p.159.
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- ¹⁰⁴ Roberts to FO, 29 October 1962, FO 371/162383. See Philip Nash, *The Other Missiles of October: Eisenhower, Kennedy, and the Jupiters, 1957-1963* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), pp.118-25, for the US rejection of the Cuba-Turkey parallel.
- ¹⁰⁵ Don Munton, 'Hits and Myths: The *Essence*, the Puzzles and the Missile Crisis', *International Relations*, 26: 3 (September 2012), p.316; Fursenko and Naftali, 'One Hell of a Gamble', pp.284-85; Radchenko, 'The Cuban Missile Crisis', p.335.
- ¹⁰⁶ Roberts to FO, 30 October 1962, PREM 11/3691.
- ¹⁰⁷ The Cuba Crisis: Its Course as seen from Moscow, 7 November 1962, FO 371/162405. Against a background of strains between Beijing (Peking) and Moscow, the Mao regime asserted that Khrushchev had been guilty of 'adventurism' for sending the missiles, and of 'capitulationism' for withdrawing them. Cuba was 'Khrushchev's Munich'. Lorenz M. Luthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), p.227.
- ¹⁰⁸ Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to America's Six Cold War Presidents, 1962-1986* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), p. 93. See also the Polyansky report on Khrushchev's mistakes in foreign policy, October 1964, *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, 17/18 (Fall 2012), p.324; and CIA memorandum, 22 October 1964, *FRUS 1964-1968 XIV*, document 62.
- ¹⁰⁹ Roberts' impressions on leaving Moscow, 19 November 1962, PREM 11/3996.
- ¹¹⁰ G.R. Berridge, *Diplomacy: Theory and Practice*, 3rd edition (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005), p.119. Berridge notes that the growing criticisms of the worth of the resident mission took place despite the Vienna Convention of 1961, which had codified the conventions of diplomacy. See

ibid, pp.115-19; and Kai Bruns, *A Cornerstone of Modern Diplomacy: Britain and the Negotiation of the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

¹¹¹ Berridge, *Diplomacy*, p.125. As for the growth of the media, Roberts reported that newspapers 'prefer to cover Moscow from London (often with very odd results!) and of the two major Sunday papers only *The Observer* has a resident correspondent'. The American and continental press were much better represented 'in quality and quantity'. Roberts' impressions on leaving Moscow, 19 November 1962, PREM 11/3996. The point about summit conferences is from Young, *David Bruce*, p.186.

¹¹² Note by King, 7 May 1962, FO 181/1151.

¹¹³ Hayter, *The Kremlin and the Embassy*, p.106.