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One Minute To Midnight



Synopsis

In October 1962, at the height of the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union came to the brink of nuclear conflict over the placement of Soviet missiles in Cuba. In this hour-by-hour chronicle of those tense days, veteran Washington Post reporter Michael Dobbs reveals just how close we came to Armageddon. Here, for the first time, are gripping accounts of Khrushchev's plan to destroy the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo; the handling of Soviet nuclear warheads on Cuba; and the extraordinary story of a U-2 spy plane that got lost over Russia at the peak of the crisis. Written like a thriller, *One Minute to Midnight* is an exhaustively researched account of what Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. called "the most dangerous moment in human history" and the definitive book on the Cuban missile crisis. From the Trade Paperback edition.

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Customer Reviews

For those of us old enough to remember the events of the Cuban Missile Crisis -- October, 1962 -- (I was a high school freshman at the time) Michael Dobbs's "One Minute to Midnight" stirs up memories of how it was to live in the knowledge that very possibly the next day, the next hour, the next minute might bring nuclear annihilation. Based upon a vast quantity of primary sources material

-- much of it previously classified -- including interviews with Soviet and Cuban personnel and even previously unstudied aerial photographs of the Soviet missile sites in Cuba -- Dobbs has constructed a rivetting day-by-day (and in places almost minute-by-minute) account of a world on the brink of nuclear war. Along the way, the author dispells some old myths (such as those surrounding the "eyeball-to-eyeball" confrontation of Soviet-controlled ships with the US Navy blockading forces) and reveals some startling new truths (unknown to American Intelligence at the time, the Soviets had deployed nuclear-armed cruise missiles against the American base at Guantanamo Bay). Dobbs avoids overly mythologizing JFK's performance during the crisis (there was a good deal more uncertainty and policy shifting than was evident in White House accounts after the events), but neither does he seek to be a muck-raker denigrating JFK's leadership. In the end, the author praised both Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev for keeping their eyes on the goal, despite much hot-headed advice from many around them, of avoiding catastrophic war. What emerges perhaps more than anything is a sense of the chaos and confusion that prevailed and so often threatened to heat the water pot beyond boiling, not because of anyone's conscious intent, but because ignorance of the full circumstances seemed to require it.

The new book, "One Minute to Midnight" by Michael Dobbs is a masterfully written account of the Cuban missile Crisis in October 1962. The book is written from the perspective of those who lived through the most dangerous Cold War encounter between the two nuclear super powers, Russia and the United States. It probes the power plays of the introduction of nuclear missiles in Cuba by Nikita Khrushchev and President Kennedy's response that brought the world to the brink of nuclear war. Being a veteran who served with the Navy photo reconnaissance squadron VFP-62 during that period, I had particular interest in reading the new material uncovered by Mr. Dobb's investigative reporting. VFP-62 photo Crusaders flew the low-level photo missions over Cuba, gathering the intelligence needed to help President Kennedy forge a plan of action that avoided nuclear catastrophe. The discovery of nuclear capable cruise missiles, by VFP-62 photos, revealed new information on how they were to be used against Guantanamo Naval Base and invading U.S. forces. The use of tactical nuclear weapons was not considered by the Pentagon in the initial planning of the intended invasion of Cuba. The book is spell binding with the fast moving anticipation of a Tom Clancy novel, although in this case, events are real. Mr. Dobbs gets into the minds of the decision makers and probes the many ways the crisis could have ended in a total nuclear annihilation for Cuba, the Soviet Union, and the United States.

Like most Americans (or maybe not...), I knew that the Cuban Missile Crisis was a dangerous time in the history of our planet. But until I read *One Minute to Midnight: Kennedy, Khrushchev, and Castro on the Brink of Nuclear War* by Michael Dobbs, I don't think I fully understood how close we came to a full nuclear exchange with the Soviet Union. And the common wisdom of Kennedy being the "winner" of this confrontation doesn't capture the reality of how much luck, timing, and conviction played in the event.

Contents: Americans; Russians; Cubans; "Eyeball to Eyeball"; "Till Hell Freezes Over"; Intel; Nukes; Strike First; Hunt for the Grozny; Shootdown, "Some Sonofabitch"; "Run Like Hell"; Cat and Mouse; "Crate and Return"; Afterword; Acknowledgments and a Note on Sources; Notes; Index

Conventional wisdom paints the Cuban Missile Crisis as a time where Kennedy stood firm over the placement of Soviet nuclear missiles on Cuban soil. He went "eye to eye" with Khrushchev, and Khrushchev blinked. But Dobbs has exhaustively researched the event and paints a far different picture. Khrushchev introduced both medium-range and tactical nukes into Cuba in order to show Russian superiority and to protect a fellow communist country from a potential US invasion. This made Castro look invincible to himself and his people, and he welcomed the power they represented. When US intel discovered the missiles, the international tension started to rise as Kennedy declared this unacceptable and demanded the removal of the weapons. They also implemented a naval blockade of Cuba to prevent any more aid from showing up on the island. With each passing day (and often each passing hour), the risk that one side or the other would launch an attack continued to grow.

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