

But Khrushchev wanted more than this. Buoyed by the dramatic Soviet success in launching Sputnik, the world's first artificial space satellite, encouraged by a rapidly expanding economy whose growth rates greatly exceeded those of the United States in the late 1950s, and stimulated by his unquenchable innate optimism, he was convinced that the Soviet Union, now that it was free from the iron grip of Stalinist oppression, would surge forward and establish itself as the predominant world power. Thus, while Khrushchev wanted a negotiated end to the Cold War, he wanted this on terms highly favourable to the Soviet Union. He overplayed his hand and believed that he could push the United States and its allies out of West Berlin, replace the West as the dominant power in the newly decolonized states of Asia and Africa, and even install nuclear missiles in Cuba, right on the doorstep of the United States.

Khrushchev paid his adversaries the compliment of assuming that they were realists who would accept the inevitable and negotiate a settlement that reflected the Soviet Union's growing world power. He said as much to Adlai Stevenson, the American presidential aspirant, during a personal meeting in 1958:

You must understand, Mr. Stevenson, that we live in an epoch when one system is giving way to another. When you established your republican system in the eighteenth century the English did not like it. Now, too, a process is taking place in which the peoples want to live under a new system of society; and it is necessary that one agree and reconcile himself with this fact. The process should take place without interference.⁵⁴

In the end, Khrushchev's grand design came to naught. His threats and pressure alarmed his adversaries and strengthened NATO's unity and resolve. He underestimated the West's staying power, and he overestimated the economic potential of the Soviet camp. The Soviet Union lacked the strength to coerce the West into accepting a

⁵⁴ *The New York Times*, August 28, 1958, cited in Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc*, New York: Praeger, 1963, revised ed., p. 394.