

Khrushchev says strong leaders prevented WWII

Former USSR premier's son, Sergei, will deliver keynote address at Cold War confab.

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Sergei Khrushchev's pale blue eyes have seen a lot of history. His broad, easy smile resembles that of his father, Nikita Khrushchev, premier of the Soviet Union from 1958 to 1964, during the height of the Cold War.

In Anchorage to deliver the keynote address of the Cold War Conference and Nike Veterans Reunion on Thursday, the soft-spoken Brown University professor, now an American citizen, gave a preview of his upcoming lecture.

"We had, in the Cold War, Eisenhower, my father and Kennedy," he said. "I'll be talking about how these three people changed the atmosphere in the world."

All three men were what Khrushchev called "strong leaders," which he de-

scribed as one who does not hesitate.

"A strong leader knows he's strong and he knows that everyone knows he's strong, so he's not afraid of direct negotiations," he said.

Khrushchev noted that President Dwight Eisenhower was inaugurated in 1953, the same year his father became First Secretary of the Communist Party, tantamount to the head of the country. "When you have a one-party government, the head of the party is the head of the state," he said. Having two such "strong leaders" take power at the same time was an important reason why the Cold War didn't turn hot.

"Stalin thought that a third World War was inevitable," he said. "The American Congress had constant discussions about how to destroy Russian cities. Shortly after he became president, the American military went to Eisenhower and insisted, 'We have to go to war with Russia now, and



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Sergei Khrushchev, the son of former Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, will deliver the keynote address for the 2014 Alaska Cold War Conference at 7:30 p.m. Thursday at the Wendy Williamson Auditorium at UAA.

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KHRUSHCHEV: 'Iron Curtain ... like a mirror'

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we will win.'

"Eisenhower agreed that America would win the war, but asked, 'What will happen after?' When they couldn't tell him, he said, 'If we don't know what will happen after we win, it's no reason to start a war. We must find another solution.'

"Likewise, my father had the opinion that we could either go to war with America or deal with these people."

The two leaders began to discuss co-existence. They met at the Geneva Summit in 1955. In 1959, Khrushchev became the first Russian head of state to visit America. He brought his family, including son Sergei.

The mistakes of the Cold War — perhaps of all wars — can be traced to cultural differences, Sergei Khrushchev said. "When we look at the opposite side, we have only our own experiences, but we make decisions based on those experiences."

"The Iron Curtain was really more like a mirror," he said.

MISSTEPS AND WEAKNESS

Among the biggest mistakes on the American side was an attitude that nations had to pick sides, Khrushchev said. "They didn't understand that most of these people have their own national interest. America thought: We have to control communism. All leaders not on our side must be replaced."

The result was dismissing early requests for help from Ho Chi Minh and Fidel Castro, leading to the Vietnam War and the ongoing embargo of Cuba.

The us-or-them attitude continues to influence American foreign policy, he suggested, and is perhaps more dangerous when the national agenda appears indecisive. Without mentioning names, Khrushchev contrasted his definition of a strong leader with that of a weak leader.

"A weak leader is always looking over his shoulder. A weak leader all the time has to prove himself. He's afraid to show weakness so he tries to delegate responsibility to others, secretaries of state, foreign ministers, who have no room to maneuver. Instead of negotiations, he prefers to make ultimatums, to impose conditions that are not acceptable. He doesn't know how to find common ground. So he imposes conditions that are not acceptable to the other side."

He pointed to the current confrontation over the Ukraine as an example. Western and eastern parts of the country are arguably engaged in a civil war; with Russia said to be arming and assisting the eastern population and the U.S. and its allies threatening sanctions against Russia.

Khrushchev said he's no fan of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"I never did like him, even before he came to power," Khrushchev said. "I don't like his Stalinism. Reasons of personal relationships. But he's not stupid and he's not aggressive. He cannot back down because of sanctions or he'll lose the support of the people. The thinking in Russia is: 'We didn't surrender to Germany; we're not going to surrender to America.'"

Assuming that Putin will retreat in the face of sanctions is unthinkable, he said, as ludicrous as assuming that the United States would hand Alaska to Russia due to anything less than a war.

"Unfortunately, I think the Ukrainian future will be very bleak. Russia will also be affected. After the fight the Ukraine will be very poor. Western Ukraine wanted to be part of the European Union, but the fighting will so disrupt their economy that the EU won't have anything to do with them."

He called the threat of sanctions "a double-edged sword."

"The economy is important, particularly to America, which has the biggest trade deficit of any country in the world. If you boycott Iran, you lose eight million customers. Russia, 140 million customers. China, 1.5 billion customers."

THREE CAREERS

The appearance of weakness over the Cuban Missile Crisis is sometimes said to have contributed to the downfall of Nikita Khrushchev, who was replaced as head of the Communist Party by Leonid Brezhnev in 1964.

The transition was remarkably bloodless. "In the Russian mentality, you mustn't leave power until you are dead," Khrushchev said. While Stalin's dreaded chief of the secret police, Lavrentiy Beria, was executed with a handful of supporters in 1953, Khrushchev did not order arrests or retaliations as he rose to power.

"He did nothing they expected," Sergei Khrushchev said. "He wanted to make things more liberal. So he set a precedent for treating people a certain way when you come to power. He found jobs for all of them. So he became a non-person. Nobody talked to him. But they did not kill him."

Trained as an engineer, the junior Khrushchev eventually switched from working on missiles and the Russian space program to computers. He was visiting America when the Soviet Union collapsed, his savings disappeared and his office was closed. "Most of my computer colleagues are now working in the Silicon Valley," he said.

And so began what he called his "third career" as an author, lecturer and university professor, moving to America with his wife, Valentina Golenko. They now live in Cranston, Rhode Island, and keep an apartment in Russia where they stay during annual trips to visit family.

"We liked Americans," he said. "They're very friendly, unlike Europeans. And I like small cities, our neighbors. People ask why I stay in America and I tell them this is where my community is, and my friends."

He previously visited Anchorage once before, in 1993, an overnight stay during which he addressed the World Affairs Council. On this trip, he and Golenko are taking time to see sights.

"We're going into the woods today to find mushrooms," he said on Monday, with the gleeful anticipation. "It's a Russian habit."

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CONFERENCE AND REUNION

• Sergei Khrushchev, keynote address 7:30 p.m. Thursday, at the Wendy Williamson Auditorium at the UAA campus. Tickets for the talk are \$15, but free for teachers, high school students, college students, seniors (65+), active military and veterans if they pre-register at nikesitesummit.net.

• Presentations by various historians, military officials and academics start at 9 a.m. Friday, at the Hotel Captain Cook. Registration begins at 7:30 p.m. Free.

• Robert Wallace, a former CIA employee who served in Alaska during the Cold War, will deliver the luncheon address at noon, Friday, \$35, which includes lunch.

• Free tours of Kincaid Park, former Nike missile site, 1:30-4 p.m. on Friday. Kincaid Park, a former Nike base now turned into one of the city's most popular recreation areas, has one scenic spot near an old bunker is said to be particularly popular for wedding parties. Coinciding with a reunion of Nike veterans, the "Swords to Plowshares" celebration will include the dedication of a plaque honoring soldiers who manned the battery during its active years, 1959-1979.

• "Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb," the 1964 film classic, will be shown at 8 p.m., Friday, at the Alaska Experience Theatre in the Fourth Avenue Marketplace.

• A plaque honoring veterans of Site Summit will be dedicated at Arctic Valley Ski Lodge on Saturday.