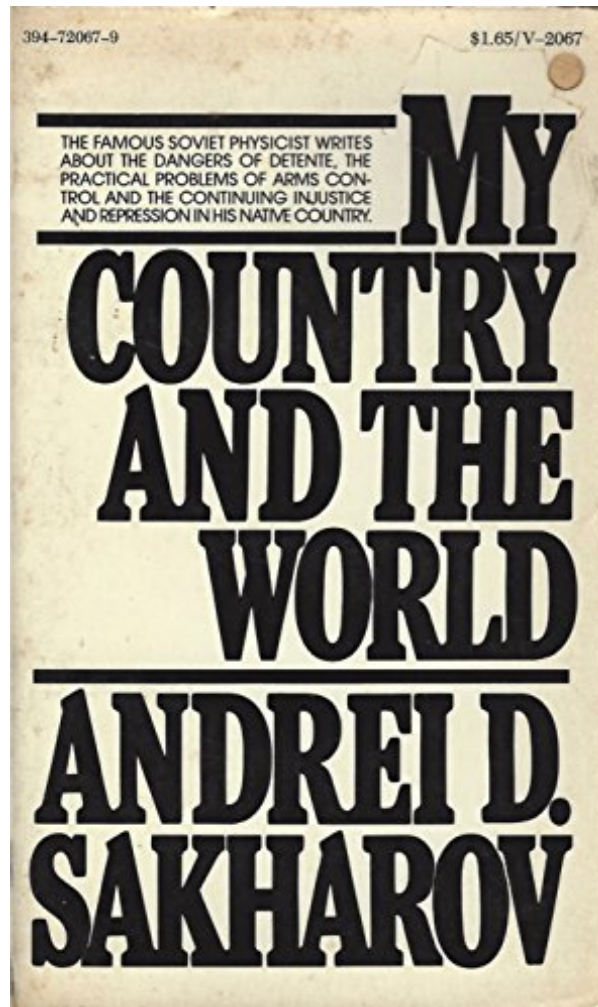


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The voice of truth and conscience

By Gary Selikow

Andrei Sakharov was one of the greatest fighters for human rights of the 20th century.

He gained the 1975 Nobel Prize and in 1979 was exiled to Gorky.

In this book Sakharov outlines his vision of the USSR and the world at the time.

In this moving and forthright book Sakharov outlined the problems of the Soviet Union of the time including poverty, poor living standards, alcoholism, and economic stagnation. He criticized the privileges of the Nomenklatura, or Communist Party elite.

He attacked the discrimination and repression of minorities such as the Jews, Ukrainians, Crimean Tatars, Volga Germans and Meshki Turks.

In 1944 the Crimean Tatars became victims of a criminal forced resettlement during which half of the children and old people died of hunger and cold. They were denied the right to resettle in their native Crimea until after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the independence of Ukraine.

Their fate was shared by the Volga Germans, the Meshki Turks and others.

He outlines the hypocrisy and blindness of leftwing intellectuals of his time, and during the Stalin years before.

During the 1920s a Western writer declared that the "rumors" of famine in the USSR were exaggerated "Nowhere have I eaten so well as in the USSR" he said at the very time that NKVD "anti-profiteer" detachments were machine gunning starving children who were trying to cross the border.

Sakharov attacks the hypocrisy of the leftist intelligentsia who showed a moral blindness in condoning human rights abuses and crimes in Communist states.

Their moral perfidy is echoed today in their support of terror groups like Hamas and Hezbollah, their vicious prejudice against Israel, and their support for both Arab/Islamic dictatorships like Iran, Syria, Libya and Sudan as well as revolutionary/Communist regimes like Cuba, Venezuela, North Korea and Zimbabwe.

In this book he condemned leftists who were so vocal about the excesses of Pinochet's Chile but were silent about the mass executions in Cambodia and Vietnam by the Communists.

Sakharov attacked Soviet support for totalitarian regimes like Gaddafi's Libya and Idi Amin's Uganda, as well as Soviet support for the genocide of the Ibos in Nigeria and the Kurds of Iraq.

Sakharov saw the greatest threat to the world coming from the totalitarian challenge. This is as true today as it was then.

His call for Western unity and strength in the face of totalitarian evil is as relevant today as it was in the 1970s.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Bold, dissident work from the Cold War

By Paul-John Ramos

It is easy to forget those who were heavily involved in political landscapes of old. As our concerns shift from Eastern Europe to the Middle East and Far East, memories of our standoff with the USSR have faded or, at least, blurred.

With twenty years now dividing us from the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991, average people have largely forgotten the efforts of Andrei Dmitrievich Sakharov, a physicist who took part in the development of nuclear weapons during the 1940s and 50s. Sakharov, a product of Moscow State University who died in 1989, was a leading force in both diplomatic change and reform within his own country. His writings and political activism toed a very fine line when critics of the Soviet regime were regularly imprisoned or deported.

Political frontiers have built up and dissolved since the mid-1970s, so observers can easily lose sight of the courage behind Sakharov's outspokenness. 'My Country and the World,' first published in 1975, may read like a simple moral tract nowadays; but the essay was in stark contradiction to Soviet policy when it first appeared. The essay was critical of both Soviet life and foreign diplomatic relations, positions that could be fatal for those who voiced them. Sakharov fought on, however, by offering correctives toward disarmament, improved understanding between countries, and greater social freedoms for all involved.

Vintage Books' original run of 'My Country and the World' is a very readable translation by Guy V. Daniels, a French and Russian scholar known for works of other dissidents and the plays of Vladimir Mayakovsky. The five-section, 109-page book offers Sakharov's comprehensive views on the state of Soviet and international affairs at its time of publication.

Most impressive is the first section, an open critique of Soviet society. Here, Sakharov examines how the USSR's heavy-handed economics and lack of basic freedoms such as international travel and non-conformism have stilted enormous Soviet potentials. He is especially critical of the USSR's grossly mismanaged labor system, the Soviet justice system, and its harsh treatment of political prisoners. Other issues include the formation of a nomenklatura, a sort of 'inner party' that holds wealth and privilege in Soviet life, and the discrimination of various ethnic groups such as Germans and those in the Soviet republics.

The four remaining parts are international in approach. Section two discusses our human right to leave and reenter one's country at will. Section three is an account of disarmament issues, reflecting Sakharov's own experience in the Third Idea project. Sakharov goes on to defend the original aims of U.S. intervention in Vietnam through his section on Indochina and the Middle East before finishing out with criticism of Western intellectuals and journalists who hold naive (and, Sakharov concludes, politically dangerous) views on life in the Bloc nations.

On the surface, 'My Country and the World' is an idealistic tract that may now seem high-flown and preachy. When considering the state of affairs at its time of publication, however, Sakharov's essay was a courageous pearl of wisdom and it cost him dearly. Sakharov, who faced pressure from the Soviet authorities since becoming an activist in the 1950s, managed to avoid disappearing into prison or facing banishment from his country. Still, the relationship with his country became increasingly strained. When selected for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1975, he was not allowed to visit Oslo (his wife attended in his place). After protesting the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Sakharov was banished to Gorky, a city off-limits to foreigners, in 1980. He could not return to Moscow until 1986.

Though topical, 'My Country and the World' gives an interesting retrospective on political situations of the 1970s and Cold War tensions. Copies of the Vintage Books softcover from 1975 have circulated widely and are available on the Internet (including Amazon), in used book stores, and in libraries.

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