

Review - To Move the World

Written by Elizabeth Austin

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ELIZABETH AUSTIN, NOV 25 2013

To Move the Word: JFK's Quest for Peace

By: Jeffrey Sachs

London: Bodley Head, 2013

In his book, *To Move the World: JFK's Quest for Peace*, Dr. Jeffrey Sachs offers a tribute to his childhood idol by examining four speeches that U.S. President John F. Kennedy gave in the year before his assassination. The 50th anniversary of Kennedy's assassination is November 22, 2013, so a reflection on his legacy is appropriate and poignant. Kennedy was the youngest elected president. He came into office inexperienced in foreign policy and new to world leadership, and yet he learned quickly to trust his ideals. Kennedy sought to "arm to parley" and he used his words to spread a message of peace for all mankind, instead of fueling the Cold War nuclear arms race with anti-Soviet rhetoric. With his absorbing writing style, Sachs takes the reader on this journey with Kennedy, the quest for peace. By explaining the realities of the time period, Sachs makes it clear why Kennedy fought so hard for the passage of the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, which was the result of a year long campaign to promote peaceful negotiation over nuclear engagement. Sachs masterfully reveals how much of our world has been shaped by Kennedy's leadership, and emphasizes the responsibilities this presents for us today. It is a powerful message and it reminds the reader to value the privileges that come with freedom.

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Sachs first sets up the historical context (Chapters 1, 2 and 3), and explains Kennedy's speech writing techniques, emphasizing his relationship with speech writer Ted Sorenson (Chapter 4). He then examines Kennedy's Commencement Address at American University, "The Peace Speech," (Chapter 5), and Kennedy's campaign to have the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty signed and ratified (Chapter 6 and 7). In the final chapters, Sachs relays his own message of how Kennedy's quest for peace lived on, relating it to our time and the challenges facing our generation (Chapters 8 and 9). The book includes transcripts of the four speeches Sachs believes were most instrumental in Kennedy's quest for peace, as they were part of Kennedy's crusade to win support for the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty:

1. American University Commencement Address, "The Peace Speech", June 10, 1963
2. Speech to the Irish Dáil, June 28, 1963
3. Address to the Nation on the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, July 26, 1963
4. Speech to the 18th General Assembly of the United Nations, September 20, 1963

When John F. Kennedy was elected President of the United States, he was tasked with avoiding World War III: nuclear war with the Soviet Union which would result in global annihilation. A combat veteran of World War II, Kennedy knew first-hand the societal, moral, and economic costs of war. He also greatly admired Winston Churchill for his techniques in rallying the British people with ideals, while remaining a realist. Kennedy looked to the causes of World War I, an arms race, and World War II, appeasement, to inform his efforts to avoid World War III. As the Cold War with the Soviet Union became a nuclear arms race, any policy hinting of appeasement was taken as weakness. Kennedy knew he had to be a strong leader, but he was also aware of the difficulty of demonstrating that strength in a way that would not trigger the prisoner's dilemma or the security dilemma, which fueled the Cold War.[i]

Kennedy experienced a series of international crises in his first two years in office, and he learned from them. The Bay of Pigs operation in April 1961, when the U.S. attempted a secret invasion of Cuba that failed and resulted in world-wide embarrassment, was a plan inherited from Eisenhower. Kennedy also inherited the nuclear missiles stationed in Italy and Turkey. Then, on August 13, 1961, the Berlin Wall was erected by the Soviet Union, separating Communist East Berlin from Democratic West Berlin. Additionally, in retaliation for the Bay of Pigs and the presence of U.S. nuclear missiles in Turkey, in October 1961 Soviet leader Nikita Krushchev placed missiles in Cuba that could easily reach the U.S. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, Kennedy's top military advisors urged retaliatory nuclear action. Instead, Kennedy struck a secret deal with Krushchev: if the Soviet Union removed its missiles from Cuba, then the U.S. would withdraw its missiles from Turkey. Publicly, Kennedy also pledged that the U.S. would not invade Cuba again. Kennedy understood that the Soviet Union had to save face, and he did not see the Cold War as a "zero-sum game". These crises taught him to lead based on his ideals, and not to rely solely on his military advisors. Nuclear war has no winner.

After these crises, Kennedy began to lead from strength but negotiate with peace. As Sachs describes, "He had mastered the double-barreled strategy he much admired in Churchill." (pg. 41) Kennedy was simultaneously an idealist and a realist. He had also developed a rhythm and cadence in his speeches, with the aid of speech writer Ted Sorenson. One tactic they often used was *antimetabole* – the repetition of words in transposed order. (pg. 64) A famous example is from Kennedy's inaugural address on January 20, 1961, in which he stated: "Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country."

By this point in Sachs' book, the historical context has been so well established, and the speech format introduced, that the reader is eager for a Kennedy speech. Sachs dives into the first, and perhaps most important of the four speeches, "The Peace Speech", delivered as the commencement address at American University on June 10, 1963.

In this speech, Kennedy addressed peace, while simultaneously campaigning for the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty – a treaty with the Soviet Union and United Kingdom to ban nuclear weapons' testing. This was no easy task. He had to come from a place of strength, while humanizing the citizens of the Soviet Union and emphasizing the morality of global peace and human rights. Kennedy advocated: "...not merely peace for Americans but peace for all men and women, not merely peace in our time but peace in all time." And on the responsibilities of mankind, he noted: "Our problems are manmade; therefore, they can be solved by man."

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He also down played the “zero-sum game” theory and emphasized that peace with the Soviet Union could be achieved: “By defining our goal more clearly, by making it seem more manageable and less remote, we can help all people to see it, to draw hope from it, and to move irresistible towards it.” Sachs describes this quote as the “art of great leadership”. (pg. 78) Kennedy made the goal of peace manageable and in so doing inspired people to work towards it. The following day, Kennedy gave the Civil Rights Address, and then he was off to Europe from June 23-July 2 to campaign for the Treaty.

In Europe, Kennedy gave two famous speeches. He went to West Berlin and gave an impassioned speech advocating freedom and democracy. Then he went to Ireland and gave a speech to the Irish Dáil, the second speech highlighted by Sachs, emphasizing the role of smaller nations in the global peace process. He ended the trip at NATO headquarters in Naples, Italy.

Treaty negotiations in Moscow began on July 15, 1963 and the treaty was completed on July 25, 1963.[ii] The three negotiating parties – the United States, Soviet Union, and the United Kingdom initialed the treaty that day, and signed it on August 5, 1963. However, Kennedy still needed the U.S. Senate to ratify the Treaty before it could become law. To do that he needed the support of the American people, international support, and two-thirds of the U.S. Senate. Kennedy was very cognizant of the mistakes U.S. President Woodrow Wilson had made in failing to get enough support for the League of Nations, so he campaigned on all fronts.

To rally public support, Kennedy addressed the nation, the third speech highlighted by Sachs, on July 26, 1963, he began:

Good evening, my fellow citizens, I speak to you tonight in a spirit of hope. Eighteen years ago the advent of nuclear weapons changed the course of the world as well as the war. Since that time, all mankind has been struggling to escape from the darkening prospect of mass destruction on earth.

Kennedy emphasized that the Treaty was “a shaft of light cut into the darkness.” He stated that though it was not perfect, it created hope for future, peaceful negotiations with the Soviet Union. By the time the Treaty had reached the U.S. Senate on September 9, 1963, ninety countries had signed it. (pg. 127) While the Senate was deliberating, Kennedy addressed the UN General Assembly, the fourth speech highlighted by Sachs, on September 20, 1963: “It [the treaty] has been hailed by people the world over who are thankful to be free from the fears of nuclear fallout.”

Kennedy’s crusade paid off. The Treaty was finally ratified by the U.S. Senate on September 24, 1963, by a vote of 80 to 19. (pg. 126) Tragically, less than two months later, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963. His quest for peace, however, lived on.

The Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty laid a foundation for productive, peaceful negotiations between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, and set a precedent for open communication during the Cold War. There were several subsequent disarmament treaties that were negotiated as a result.

The Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT I) from 1969-1972 resulted in three major agreements signed by U.S. President Richard Nixon and Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev: Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, Interim Agreement on the Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms, and the Basic Principles of Relations Between the United States and the USSR. (pg.143)

SALT I was followed by SALT II from 1972-1979. SALT II aimed to limit strategic nuclear weapons; however, it was never ratified. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan created yet another security dilemma, and it was withdrawn from Senate consideration by U.S. President Jimmy Carter. The war in Afghanistan was one of several “proxy wars” during the Cold War; others included Vietnam and Cuba. (pg. 143)

After the Soviet Union dissolved in the late 1980s, the U.S. and Russia continued to negotiate on arms reduction with START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties): START I in 1991, START II in 1993,[iii] and New START in 2010. (pg. 148) These treaties are not enough, however, to ensure global security.

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At over seven billion people, the current global population is more than double what it was when Kennedy was president. The challenges we face in our time impact over twice as many people as they did then. Also, our world is vastly more interconnected due to globalization of trade, markets, and technology, including social networks and social media fueled by instantaneous communication via the internet. However, the U.S. continues to provide minimal economic aid to poorer countries. These countries are basically ignored until they erupt into violence, due to economic hardship, and then they are treated as threats to global security and dealt with militarily. According to Sachs: "There seems to be little Western policy in between these two extremes: complete neglect followed by panic and drones." (pg. 164)

Kennedy initiated several programs to address poverty in the developing world: the Peace Corps, the Alliance for Progress in Latin America, and other, similar development programs. However, his focus on poverty is not supported by U.S. financial aid, which currently hovers at around 0.2% of GDP. (pg. 165) According to Sachs, the lack of economic progress in poorer countries fuels more conflicts and the way to peace is through economic investment and development.

In *To Move the World: JFK's Quest for Peace*, Sachs brings the reader into Kennedy's era, allowing us to understand the challenges he faced and why his mission of peace is so important. Kennedy pursued a vision of peace through international cooperation and economic development. Through his analysis of Kennedy's approach to global security during his presidency, Sachs gives us lessons in understanding, and tackling, the challenges to global security that face us today. It is a book that made me proud to be an American, and also reminded me to be cognizant of the full weight of that responsibility. I recommend it for those in search of the resonance of Kennedy's legacy.

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Elizabeth Austin has a Master's in International Affairs from the American University of Paris (AUP), where she was awarded an AUP Travel Grant and completed her thesis field work in the South Caucasus. She then studied Russian Language and Literature in a year-long, multi-level course. Elizabeth also has a Master's in International Relations from the University of St. Andrews, where she completed her dissertation field work in Cambodia, and she is a graduate of New York University's School of Continuing and Professional Studies. Elizabeth has contributed articles to *International Policy Digest* and *Global Politics Magazine*, and book reviews to *e-International Relations*.

[i] "The prisoner's dilemma holds that in the absence of long-term trust or binding agreements, the logic of inter-state rivalry will push both sides to arms." "The security dilemma, propounded by Robert Jervis, a leading political theorist, is a corollary of the prisoner's dilemma. The security dilemma holds that a defensive action by one side will often be viewed by the other side as an offensive action." Sachs, pg. 7

[ii] The document is short, not even three pages. The preamble stated two purposes:

1. The speediest possible achievement of an agreement on general and complete disarmament.
2. The discontinuance of test explosions of nuclear weapons for all time.

Article I: calls on the parties to prohibit nuclear tests in the atmosphere, outer space, and underwater.

Article II: allows for amendments.

Article III: opens the treaty to all states for signature, and declares that the treaty enters into force after its ratification, by the three original parties.

Article IV: declares the option for withdrawal.

Sachs, pg. 111.

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[iii] The U.S. withdrew from the ABM Treaty on June 13, 2002, and in response Russia withdrew from START II on June 14, 2002. Wines, Michael, "After U.S. Scraps ABM Treaty, Russia Rejects Curbs of Start II", The New York Times, June 15, 2002.

About the author:

Elizabeth Austin is a writer in Los Angeles. Her debut novel, *Compass Rose*, was released in March 2017. Elizabeth has a master's in international affairs from the American University of Paris, where she was awarded a travel grant and completed thesis field work in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. She also has a master's in international relations from the University of St. Andrews, for which she completed dissertation field work in Cambodia. She has contributed articles to *International Policy Digest* and *Global Politics Magazine*, and book reviews to E-International Relations.