Scenarios for Survival: Representations of Nuclear War in American and Soviet
Civil Defense Manuals, 1954-1972

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Abstract

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This thesis examines the way in which American and Soviet civil defense manuals conceptualized the nuclear threat for ordinary citizens during the height of the nuclear arms race. The two programs were dramatically different in the way they perceived the nuclear threat, and as a result created radically different programs to combat it. Whereas American civil defense was obsessed with the prospect of a Soviet sneak attack and perturbed by the prospect of home front militarization for civil defense, its Soviet counterpart regarded nuclear war as a foreseeable catastrophe and reveled in its role as a militarized effort at mass mobilization. As a result of these differences, the Soviet Union was able to create a far more formidable system of civil defense propaganda than the United States.
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Civil defense is a personal responsibility.

\textit{\textbf{-Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization, 1960}}

\textit{Only in the socialist state does civil defense correspond to its name in the full sense of the term, serve the interests of the toiler masses and consequently possess a genuinely popular character. The democratic and humanitarian essence of Soviet civil defense is manifested in its purpose and aims, its fundamental principles of operation. The principal task among the many various ones handled by this organization consists of the defense of the nation’s entire population against weapons of mass destruction. Man constitutes the highest value in a socialist society. Therefore, Soviet civil defense focuses its principal efforts on defense and rescue of people. The Soviet state and its civil defense are religiously carrying out Lenin’s behest: “The first productive force of all mankind is the worker, the toiler. If he survives, we shall save and rebuild everything.”

\textit{- Colonel N.I. Basov, 1972}} ^1

Civil defense during the Cold War was a product of its cultural context. In both the United States and the Soviet Union, civil defense both shaped and was shaped by prevailing concepts of how nuclear war would be fought. Seeking some form of insurance against the prospect of nuclear annihilation, both governments created education programs to teach their citizens how to survive nuclear attack. ^2 The fundamental instrument of these campaigns was the civil defense manual. Cheap, portable, and accessible, these manuals presented radically different “scenarios for survival” that reflected the cultures and ideologies of the respective superpowers.

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2 “Civil defense,” for the purposes of this paper, is defined as the use of passive measures to limit damage to people and property from enemy action, particularly nuclear attack. Passive measures include shelter, evacuation, and dispersal. Over time, civil defense in both the US and USSR changed to encompass management of other kinds of disasters, including natural disasters. As a result, the name was ultimately changed to “emergency management.” Civil defense does not include active defenses against nuclear attack, such as anti-ballistic missiles, which attempt to prevent the enemy from attacking his targets. For instance, President Ronald Reagan’s proposed space-based antimissile defense, the Strategic Defense Initiative, was \textit{not} a form of civil defense.
Although historians have studied civil defense since the 1980s, so far civil
defense in the Communist bloc has escaped scrutiny, largely because the authors who
have attempted comparative studies did not read Russian or other East European
languages. The existing scholarship on American civil defense is also difficult to relate to
the Soviet context, as it deals primarily with the relationship of civil defense to the public
discourse. Scholars such as Guy Oakes and Dee Garrison argue that American civil
defense was a ploy to militarize American society and forestall public debate regarding
nuclear weapons policy.³ In recent years other historians of American civil defense have
challenged this view, charging that the historical record fails to support it. They argue
that the United States government pursued civil defense in response to genuine fear that
America's nuclear might would fail to deter a Soviet attack, even though these scholars
are generally incredulous about the ability of civil defense to save many lives in a nuclear
exchange.⁴

Both schools of thought, however, are preoccupied with the vociferous
controversy over civil defense that existed in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s.
While this focus is interesting and informative, it is not very useful for understanding
civil defense in the Soviet Union, where real debate about civil defense policy occurred
only within the government. This was merely the first of many “advantages” that Soviet
civil defense enjoyed over its American rival. Within the Soviet mobilization society the
state attempted to organize all areas of life- defending the Motherland was merely one of

³ See Guy Oakes, *The Imaginary War: Civil Defense and American Cold War Culture* (New York:
Oxford University Press, 1994), and Dee Garrison, *Bracing for Armageddon: Why Civil Defense Never

⁴ See Kenneth D. Rose, *One Nation Underground: The Fallout Shelter in American Culture* (New York:
New York University Press, 2001), Tracy C. Davis, *Stages of Emergency: Cold War Nuclear Civil
Defense* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), and Laura McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins At Home:
the numerous responsibilities expected of Soviet citizens. The Soviet regime had been in power for over three decades by 1954, and it had matured effective means of mass mobilization. This is the primary difference between American and Soviet civil defense: where American civil defense planners devoted most of their energy to contemplating how they would create a mobilization culture, their Soviet counterparts exploited existing cultural and political institutions to realize their goals. These allowed the Soviet Union to fortify and expand its massive civil defense enterprise even while civil defense faded into oblivion in the United States. Simultaneously, the Soviet leadership's conception of nuclear warfare contrasted markedly with that of either the American government or people. The divergent fates of civil defense in the two superpowers resulted from these cultural differences.

Thus the goal of this essay is not to provide a quantitative survey of American and Soviet civil defense literature, but to examine the place of civil defense within Cold War societal mobilization. In order to pursue this goal, I provide an overview of civil defense literature and close readings of several documents of critical significance. To this end, I spotlight two manuals: the American *Fallout Protection* and the Soviet *Kak zashchishchat'sia ot oruzhiia massovogo porazheniia* (How to Defend Oneself Against Weapons of Mass Destruction), the most important civil defense manuals in circulation at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. I hope that my description of these two volumes will impart to the reader not just an understanding of how civil defense fit into Cold War culture, but also some insight into how ordinary American and Soviet citizens experienced civil defense. I begin this study in 1954, as this year marked the beginning of

Soviet antinuclear civil defense efforts. The ending date is more arbitrary, and I chose it primarily as 1972 marked the last gasp of the American civil defense program of the 1960s. While preliminary, my conclusions have marked implications for the study of Cold War civil defense as an international phenomenon.

**Civil Defense Before 1954**

In the years leading up to the development of nuclear weapons, the United States and Soviet Union had radically different civil defense experiences. Even before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, Franklin Roosevelt sponsored the formation of the Office of Civilian Defense (OCD). Following Pearl Harbor, thousands of Americans volunteered to help the OCD, but as it became increasingly clear that Axis air attack on the United States was unlikely, enthusiasm waned. By the end of the war, many Americans had gained the impression that civil defense was a waste of time and effort—a sentiment they carried into the early Cold War years. In the Soviet Union, the German invasion ensured the primacy of civil defense. The wartime Soviet civil defense program, *Mestnaia protivovozdushnaia oborona* (Local Anti-Air Defense, or MPVO) organized millions of Soviet citizens to fight off German air attacks. This experience gave Soviet civil defense historical legitimacy that American civil defense lacked.

The United States entered the nuclear age without a civil defense agency, as President Harry S. Truman (1945-53) disbanded the wartime Office of Civilian Defense as a cost-saving measure in May 1945. As the international situation worsened over the

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next few years, various government agencies studied the prospect of creating a civil
defense to protect Americans from the Soviet nuclear threat. Civil defense planners
particularly concerned themselves with the prospect of a nuclear “sneak attack” from the
USSR. The ideas developed by these agencies rapidly found currency within the
government following the first Soviet nuclear test in 1949, and the first government civil
defense manual specifically addressing nuclear weapons appeared in 1950. Beginning in
1951, the newly-created Federal Civil Defense Agency (FCDA) began producing a wide
variety of civil defense manuals. The FCDA produced some of the most memorable US
civil defense propaganda ever produced in the United States, including *Duck and Cover*.
Despite this, the civil defense created by the FCDA bore almost no resemblance to what
its officials wanted. In fact, the civil defense measures and organization envisioned
during the early FCDA years (1950-52) bore a striking likeness to later Soviet efforts. As
of 1951, the FCDA planned to create a massive system of public blast shelters in
American cities. In the meantime, the FCDA promoted civil defense measures that it
knew to be minimally effective in the belief that they were better than nothing and that a
Soviet attack could come at any time. Unfortunately, the FCDA garnered little political
support and failed to implement its ambitious plans. In the 1951 budget, Congress
appropriated only $32 million of the $403 million dollars requested by the FCDA.

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9 *Duck and Cover* is a short instructional film produced by Archer Productions in 1951 at the behest of
the FCDA. Intended for schoolchildren, this film includes animated sequences featuring “Bert the
Turtle,” who admonished children to “duck and cover” when they saw the flash of a nuclear explosion.
The film’s message—that Soviet nuclear attack could come at any moment—reflected contemporary
FCDA thinking regarding how nuclear war would start. Widely criticized even in its own day, *Duck and
Cover* was immortalized in 1982 when it was featured in the classic antinuclear film *The Atomic Café*.
Contemporary observers generally attributed this to public apathy about civil defense and the overambitious scale of the FCDA's shelter scheme, but historians still debate the precise reasons for the agency's shortcomings.\footnote{In a speech delivered on May 25, 1961, President John F. Kennedy noted that the United States had “never squarely faced up to civil defense,” and explained this thusly: “Public considerations have been largely characterized by apathy, indifference, and skepticism; while, at the same time, many of the civil defense plans have been so far-reaching and unrealistic that they have not gained essential support.” Mitchell, Civil Defense: Planning for Survival and Recovery, 105.} Following President Dwight Eisenhower's election in 1952, the FCDA shifted its emphasis to a more cost-effective home shelter policy.\footnote{Ibid., 20.}

Astonishingly, the Soviet civil defense program of the late Stalin years (1945-53) did not address the threat posed by nuclear weapons, even though by the late 1940s U.S. war strategy envisioned the destruction of major Soviet cities with atomic bombs as the key to victory. During the 1950s, strategists and Kremlinologists argued about why this was the case. Henry Kissinger postulated in his 1957 monograph on nuclear strategy that the Soviet regime strictly limited the information about atomic bombs reaching the Soviet populace in an attempt to engineer public opinion. However, the fact that US nuclear war plans toward the USSR had become a recurring feature in Soviet propaganda outside of civil defense during the last years of Stalin's life complicates Kissinger’s viewpoint.\footnote{Henry Kissinger, Thermonuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), 390. For an example of Stalin-era propaganda about American offensive war plans, see V. Korionov, Amerikanskii imperializm- zaleshii vrag narodov (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1952). Korionov argued that a “Cult of Atomic Weapons” was a major part of American strategic thinking. General Omar Bradley was quoted at length expressing US willingness to use nuclear weapons against “peaceful targets.” Interestingly, the author also blasted early FCDA education efforts in schools as an example of the militarist brutality of American schooling. These efforts are characterized on page 231 as part of a systematic effort by the American military to reduce children's “capacity for independent thought” and inspire them to follow “an ideology of slavish submission.”}

Leon Gouré, the foremost US expert on Soviet civil defense for most of the Cold War,
theorized that the failure of MPVO to address nuclear weapons was an outgrowth of Stalin's dismissal of the strategic importance of the new technology.\textsuperscript{14} This may have been the case, as the Politburo decided a few months after Stalin's March 1953 death to revamp Soviet civil defense to focus on nuclear weapons.\textsuperscript{15} A tremendous sea change in Soviet civil defense propaganda followed, and training materials shifted almost overnight from ignoring nuclear weapons to concentrating on them.

Nineteen fifty-four marked a watershed for the civil defense programs of both the United States and Soviet Union, as both programs scrambled to catch up with advancements in military technology. In the United States, the FCDA had to develop a new strategy to defend Americans against the dangers posed by thermonuclear weapons, particularly fallout. The FCDA also had to deal with the Eisenhower Administration's lack of enthusiasm for civil defense. As part of the president's “New Look” strategy to reduce defense spending, he ordered the FCDA to abandon the multi-billion dollar shelter schemes of the Truman years in favor of cheaper measures such as evacuation.

Meanwhile, the Soviet government launched the first campaign to educate Soviet citizens about nuclear weapons and antinuclear defense in early 1955. In 1956 it required millions of Soviet citizens were required to attend a twelve-hour compulsory education course.\textsuperscript{16} Although the American and Soviet governments both told their citizens that they could survive nuclear war, the nuclear conflict the respective governments portrayed to them and the means by which they were to survive it differed drastically.

\textsuperscript{14} Gouré, \textit{Civil Defense in the Soviet Union}, 8.

\textsuperscript{15} V.A. Vladimirov, et al. \textit{Ot MPVO k grazhdanskoï zashchite. Stranitsy iz istorii MPVO-GO-PSChs sub’ektov Rossiiskoi Federatsii} (Moscow: In-oktavo, 2004), 25.

\textsuperscript{16} K. G. Kotlukov, et al., \textit{Ot MPVO k grazhdanskoï oborone} (Moscow: Atomizdat, 1968), 63-64.
American Civil Defense, 1954-62

The quick weaponization of the hydrogen bomb caught American civil defense planners by surprise. In the early 1950s, American civil defense experts had been convinced that these weapons were a concern for the distant future, assuring readers of manuals such as Survival Under Atomic Attack (1950) that the threat of hypothetical weapons thousand of times more powerful than the bombs dropped on Japan was “exaggerated.” Besides making the early efforts of the FCDA look inadequate, the hydrogen bomb revolutionized the mission of the organization. In 1951, the FCDA had conceived its primary goal as saving the inhabitants of America's large cities from nuclear attack. Since early nuclear weapons produced negligible fallout in airbursts, radiation hazards to areas outside cities were not a major concern--this is why there were no pronounced fallout effects in Japan in 1945. Unfortunately, thermonuclear weapons tests in1954 demonstrated that fallout posed one of the most important dangers of the new bombs, as Pacific Islanders and Japanese sailors hundreds of miles from ground zero fell victim to radiation sickness following U.S. thermonuclear tests. Experts quickly realized that fallout vastly expanded the area and number of people threatened by individual bombs. In light of this unsettling new strategic reality, the FCDA revised its


18 “Fallout” is the term used in the United States for radioactive contamination resulting from nuclear explosions. This contamination comes from two sources: fission products from the bomb explosion and materials irradiated by the bomb's neutron flux. These radioactive particles are sucked up into the atmosphere by the rising fireball, where they can become entwined with particles of dirt, smoke, and other detritus from the explosion. These particles can either return to the earth in a matter of hours or remain in the stratosphere for months, depending on particle size, weather, and the altitude to which they were lofted by the initial explosion. Fallout is far worse from ground bursts than from air bursts, and far greater from larger weapons than smaller ones. As radiation hazards from fallout can exceed hundreds of roentgens an hour even in areas that escaped the damage of the bomb's blast and fire effects, people in these areas would need fallout shelters to protect them from radiation sickness or death. In Russian, fallout is called “radioactive contamination.”
civil defense propaganda to address the fallout problem.

In order to protect Americans from thermonuclear weapons, the FCDA emphasized evacuation and home fallout shelters. The Eisenhower Administration enthusiastically endorsed the former even before scientists identified the fallout problem, as it offered a cheaper alternative to mass shelters in American cities.\textsuperscript{19} The way in which the FCDA conceived of evacuation under Eisenhower reveals the way in which its leadership imagined a nuclear war would start. Planners demanded complete evacuation of urban centers in the time between when Soviet bombers appeared on radar and when they arrived at their targets in the continental United States--a few hours at most. Conceiving of a “nuclear Pearl Harbor” as the most likely scenario for a Soviet nuclear strike, the FCDA told citizens to prepare in advance for a surprise attack. To this end, they prepared a variety of films, pamphlets, and manuals for mass consumption.

To inform Americans about the dangers of fallout, in 1955 the FCDA issued a pamphlet and short film entitled “Facts About Fallout.” Intended to give an accessible description of fallout dangers to American citizens, this brief pamphlet is profusely illustrated with cartoons, that portrayed a middle-class white male surviving fallout. The text points out that “radioactivity is nothing new,” and that “the whole world is radioactive.” The pamphlet informs readers that only large concentrations of radioactivity were hazardous, and that if they were exposed to too much fallout, “it will hurt you! It could even kill you!” Fallout could not be heard, smelled, or tasted, and was normally invisible. Luckily, the FCDA would monitor the situation and inform citizens of imminent radiation hazards via CONELRAD, the forerunner to the Emergency

\textsuperscript{19} McEnaney, \textit{Civil Defense Begins at Home}, 48-49.
Broadcasting System. The pamphlet suggests evacuation as the first measure for escaping the ravages of fallout. “If there is enough warning time, your local Civil Defense director may order an evacuation in order to get away from the bomb or its effects before it hits.” But the bulk of the pamphlet concentrates on other means of fallout protection—namely shelter. An ordinary frame house might “reduce radiation exposure by one-half,” while a basement could do much more. “Facts About Fallout” encouraged Americans to create a home fallout shelter with supplies for seven days. One of the final illustrations shows the balding protagonist of the implicit nuclear narrative sitting in his basement shelter reading a book and contentedly munching on an apple, presumably as a nuclear war is taking place outside his subterranean cocoon. The pamphlet concludes that the problem of fallout “can be solved—as others have been—by American ingenuity and careful preparation.”

Unfortunately, the challenges posed by improvements in nuclear delivery systems soon stretched American ingenuity to the breaking point. The development of the R-7 intercontinental ballistic missile by the Soviet Union in 1957 and ever-larger thermonuclear weapons led to major changes in both American and Soviet civil defense. American civil defense planners, with their insistence that nuclear war would likely begin with a Soviet first strike, expressed horror that the Soviet Union was apparently able to deliver thermonuclear warheads to American cities in a matter of minutes. Because of this, the government abandoned plans to evacuate potential

20 CONELRAD was one of the major features of American civil defense in the 1950s. It was intended both to inform Americans of important emergency information in circumstances of nuclear war and to prevent Soviet bombers from using civilian radio transmitters to home in on their targets. This system worked by having every radio station switch to one of two frequencies (640 or 1240 kilocycles) and transmitting on low power. Although it was rendered obsolete by the 1960s, CONELRAD was the forerunner of the present-day Emergency Broadcasting System.

targets before nuclear attack. Following the recommendations of a Congressional committee, the Eisenhower administration disbanded the FCDA and created the Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization (OCDM). Publicly, the OCDM devoted itself almost exclusively to the promotion of home fallout shelters. Although civil defense experts and advocates almost universally endorsed community shelters, there was little funding or political will in support of public shelter construction. While most of the OCDM bureaucracy devoted to ensuring that the Federal government would continue to function after a nuclear war, its Training, Education, and Public Affairs division promoted home shelters. Its propaganda campaign showed a marked continuity from that of the late FCDA years.  

The most significant American civil defense manual of the late Eisenhower years, *The Family Fallout Shelter*, provides detailed instructions on how to construct and stock a home fallout shelter. This short manual makes the same assumptions regarding nuclear war as “Facts About Fallout,” issued in 1955. The same issues of applicability still applied--for anyone other than white middle-class Americans who owned their own homes, the manual offered little advice on how to survive thermonuclear war. *The Family Fallout Shelter* also left residents of large cities or potential target areas bereft of survival tips. Even though it was not the intent of the OCDM, one could interpret the implicit narrative of *The Family Fallout Shelter* as an argument that *only* middle and upper-class people had any hope of surviving nuclear war.  

The home fallout shelter concept is elegantly simple: it made individual

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Americans responsible for their own survival. In theory, individual citizens would construct simple shelters to protect their families from radiation exposure following thermonuclear attack. While a few houses built at the time had dedicated shelters integrated into their basements, most shelter designs were far less complex and expensive. Most of the improvised shelters offered only minimal protection from radiation hazards. Public debate about the policy focused on such sticking points as whether it was moral to shoot and kill any intruders into one's shelter. These shelters also had no appeal to those Americans who did not own their own homes or lacked yards or basements in which to construct them. In short, the home shelter policy was ineffective, inequitable, and psychologically disturbing. However, this policy resulted in a plethora of civil defense propaganda, because the home shelter policy was essentially a propaganda campaign.

The home shelter policy found few supporters. Civil defense advocates like the famous strategist Herman Kahn and Donald W. Mitchell recognized the home shelter as a half-baked measure of exceedingly limited effectiveness. While they found it preferable to no civil defense at all, they advocated the construction of a massive public shelter system. Civil defense critics pointed to the impotence of home shelters, ridiculing them as a completely unworkable concept. The OCDM defended home shelters, but it appears likely that the OCDM staff was disappointed to be promoting such an inadequate measure.24 Indeed, home shelters proved a disaster for American civil defense, particularly from a public relations standpoint. This left a difficult legacy for the administration of President John F. Kennedy (1961-63) to overcome.

24 Ibid., 52. The OCDM’s 1958 National Shelter Policy endorsed community shelters and the agency portrayed them in some of its literature, but the Eisenhower Administration did not appropriate funding for a national shelter program.
Kennedy was by far the most enthusiastic presidential proponent of civil defense measures. Soon after he entered office, Kennedy announced a new initiative to develop a fallout shelter system for American citizens. In a speech to Congress on May 25, 1961, Kennedy argued that his new shelter program was “an insurance we trust will never be needed— but insurance we will never forgive ourselves of forgoing in case of a catastrophe.” Noting that Americans greeted earlier civil defense plans with “apathy, indifference, and skepticism,” and that many proposed plans had been too “far-reaching and unrealistic,” the president announced a relatively modest scheme for fallout protection. The government would identify and equip shelter space in existing structures, and the addition of shelters to new buildings would be encouraged by Federal policy.  

Published a few months after Kennedy’s speech, *Fallout Protection* was both a means of publicizing Kennedy’s new shelter program and of informing Americans about nuclear survival. Originally, the administration planned to mail a copy of the manual to every American home, but it abandoned this plan when it received withering criticism from both inside and outside the government. The manual oversold measures that did not exist (community shelters) and expressed uncertainty and despair about the post-attack environment. At the same time, it offered surprisingly little advice on how to survive nuclear war. *Fallout Protection* presented a nightmarish scenario in which thermonuclear weapons annihilate America’s urban centers, and the survival of individual Americans is dependent on their individual initiative and luck.

On the first page the manual assures readers that “the factual information in this booklet has been verified by independent scientific authority, and represents the best consensus of the scientific community that we can establish.” Despite these pretensions

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of strict scientific factuality, a noticeable peculiarity of *Fallout Protection* is the authors' indelicate use of the subjunctive. While this was probably meant to convey a sense that nuclear war was not inevitable, in practice it often challenges the credibility or existence of civil defense measures. According to the manual, “The world and your community would be shattered by a nuclear war. . . . You would face the aftermath of a catastrophe, but if there had been previous planning, you need not face it alone” (emphasis mine).\(^{26}\) This suggests not only that the social and political order would be destroyed by a nuclear attack, but also that planning for postnuclear recovery was inadequate. At other times, the authors seem to doubt their own knowledge. “There are no total answers, no easy answers, no cheap answers to the question of protection from nuclear attack. But there are answers. Some of them are in this booklet.”\(^ {27}\) By admitting that *Fallout Protection* did not provide all the information needed to survive nuclear war, the authors undermined their argument that nuclear war was survivable.

In order to survive nuclear attack, *Fallout Protection* recommends that Americans make use of fallout shelters. Community shelters were best, because larger groups would be better equipped to survive, larger shelters cost less per person, and they would protect those who were away from their homes at the time of the attack. Unfortunately for readers hoping to ride out a Soviet nuclear attack in one of these shelters in the near term, they were not yet available. *Fallout Protection* emphasizes that shelters also serve other socially useful purposes, providing an illustration of a hypothetical shelter: “Gregarious teenagers often have no after-school hangout where they can relax with sodas and play the jukebox. This shelter can serve such purposes admirably; here a Scout meeting is


\(^{27}\) Ibid., 7.
going on in one section while adults attend an illustrated lecture in another.”  

These imagined shelters would not only provide excellent protection against fallout, but would also help alleviate America's social problems. A more practical suggestion was that of using space in the central areas or basements of large multistory buildings as improvised shelter space. The text notes that the illustrated fallout survivors had avoided the top and ground floors, because fallout protection there was inadequate. According to one of the authors, ten miles or more from the explosion such a building might offer one of the “safest refuges” against nuclear fallout. Although such buildings did not offer comparable protection to dedicated shelters, they had the distinct advantage of actually existing.

The next proposed defense against nuclear fallout consisted of prebuilt family shelters. The manual describes five types of shelters, including three types of basement shelters. The authors claim that all of the illustrated shelters reduced radiation exposure by a factor of at least 100, and that could build one for $150 or less. The illustrations of these, like those in earlier American fallout manuals, include a stereotypical middle-class white family constructing or occupying the various shelters. The text reminds readers that they would need to be prepared to spend up to two weeks in their shelter and that even with shelter they would probably receive some radiation exposure. In the postnuclear environment, “your freedom of action would depend on your radiation exposure during the critical period after the fallout descends. So, never expose yourself unnecessarily to radiation.”  

As with the earlier fallout shelter manuals, Fallout Protection suggests that middle-class people who owned their own suburban homes and could afford to build shelters were more likely to survive than those less wealthy or well-situated.

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28 Ibid., 16.
29 Ibid., 22.
For those Americans caught during a nuclear war bereft of a prepared fallout shelter, the authors of *Fallout Protection* offered a section entitled “Last-Minute Improvised Measures.” Owing to circumstances prevailing in 1961-62, these techniques are those that the booklet recommended to the vast majority of Americans. Community shelters were nonexistent, and only a tiny minority of Americans built shelters: according to one survey, only 0.4% of the population.\(^{30}\) Had the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962 developed into thermonuclear war, those citizens lucky enough to possess a copy of *Fallout Protection* would probably have relied on this section in their attempts to survive the nuclear onslaught. Unfortunately, this vitally important part of the manual was also surprisingly brief. The section has two sub-sections: “A plan but not time,” and “Time but no plan.” The former describes what Americans should do if they received no warning whatsoever before a nuclear attack. The authors warned readers not to look into the flash and quickly assume a curled-up position in a protected location, be it a corner in a room or a ditch outdoors. After waiting five minutes for the blast wave to pass, they would have “at least half an hour” to find shelter against fallout. The other subsection is devoted to those Americans who received warning of impending attack but lacked any plan for dealing with it. The manual advises that their first priority was to “guard against the hazards of fires set by the heat of a nuclear explosion.” At this point, readers needed to improvise fallout protection. Illustrated means of doing so included a basement shelter assembled out of ordinary household material and, for those without basements, a trench dug next to the house covered by a door, itself covered with dirt. Those caught in the open were told to try and find a “substantial structure, such as a large commercial or civic

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building, a tunnel, or a cave.” Failing that, they were to find a culvert, underpass, or ditch.  

_Fallout Protection_ also discusses shelter supplies and “emergency housekeeping.” The former largely consists of an illustrated chart, with the most essential shelter supplies circled in yellow. Readers needed to possess enough supplies to be “completely self-sustaining for at least two weeks.” The “Emergency Housekeeping” section elucidates the needs of shelter occupants in greater detail, recommending stocking one gallon of water per person per day in the shelter, stored in containers as large as possible to save space. Radiological instruments were another shelter essential, including ratemeters and dosimeters, as was food. The authors urged all citizens to keep a two-week food supply on hand, including urban residents. Ten thousand calories would be adequate for each adult, because individuals would be inactive during their shelter stay. Like _Facts About Fallout_ six years earlier, _Fallout Protection_ emphasizes the psychological importance of shelter food; besides being non-perishable, food items needed to be “familiar,” so they would be “more heartening and acceptable in times of stress.” In a pinch, shelter survivors could also eat pet food. For treating radiation sickness, the manual advises rest, aspirin, motion-sickness tablets, and a diluted salt-water solution. A brief first-aid section provides a brief overview of how to treat bleeding, fractures, burns, and breathing problems. Sanitation advice also assumes great importance, as “the familiar, old-fashioned diseases can kill just as easily as blast or radiation.” To avoid diseases such as typhoid, human waste would be isolated in plastic bags stored in a garbage can. To


32 Ibid., 28.

33 Ibid., 32.
control of vermin within the shelter, *Fallout Protection* suggests the liberal use of DDT or similar insecticides both on the shelter walls and on the body and clothing of shelter inhabitants. All in all, the “Emergency Housekeeping” chapter intimates that even in a well-stocked and well-designed home shelter, life would be a vermin-infested living hell of canned food, injury, and poorly disposed human waste. In contrast with the drawings of domesticated shelter life featured just a few pages earlier, it presents a nuclear world that was anything but the subterranean continuation of idealized middle-class American existence.\(^{34}\)

The chapter on post-attack recovery also offers only limited hope to those seeking reassurance about the post-nuclear environment. The measures advised often assumed a high degree of local preparedness or were still under development. Descriptions of how the recovery would continue are vague; the authors advise that readers stay in their shelters until the radiation level outside dropped to a few roentgens an hour before heading out to a predetermined local rallying point, such as school or shopping center. Overall, the chapter suggests that government authority would break down in many areas, and that agricultural recovery would be left up to individual farmers. Despite all the hypothetical talk of community assistance, in the end all of the concrete measures prescribed in *Fallout Protection* for nuclear survival were those that Americans would take alone.\(^{35}\)

The Kennedy Administration rapidly realized that, from a publicity standpoint,

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\(^{34}\) Ibid., 29-37.

\(^{35}\) Ibid., 41.
*Fallout Protection* was a catastrophe. Civil defense advocates were pleased that Kennedy was more supportive of civil defense than previous presidents, but believed that his public shelter program was insufficiently aggressive. Another strain of criticism directed against the manual came from those concerned about its implicit economic and racial bias. All of the home shelter scenarios imagined a middle-class, suburban, white family. Then-ambassador to India John Kenneth Galbraith encapsulated the sociopolitical message of *Fallout Protection* as follows: “The present pamphlet is a design for saving Republicans and sacrificing Democrats. . . .I am not at all attracted by a pamphlet which seeks to save the better elements of the population, but in the main writes off those who voted for you.” Predictably, antinuclear activists also blasted *Fallout Protection*. The Pittsburgh Study Group for Nuclear Information concluded that “the government booklet lacks sufficient scope to be used as a basis for sound planning or responsible decisions by local governments, school boards, civic groups, or private citizens.” The group also challenged some of the factual information in the book, charging that it presented too rosy a picture of nuclear war by largely ignoring blast and fire effects. Despite these flaws, the OCD distributed 25 million copies of *Fallout Protection* through post offices and defense agencies. Although benign compared to the visions of nuclear war presented by popular books and films such as *On The Beach, Fallout Protection* nonetheless presented nuclear war as a nightmare that Americans would have to face with


37 Ibid., 33.


little or no government help. Until Kennedy's hypothetical shelters were completed, civil
defense would remain a personal responsibility.

**Soviet Civil Defense, 1954-62**

Despite its relatively late start, the USSR rapidly built up a system of antinuclear civil defense. When the earliest materials on anti-atomic defense appeared in the Soviet Union in mid-1954, they reflected an ongoing political debate within the Soviet government. The development of the hydrogen bomb had caused some individuals in the Soviet leadership to ask whether a nuclear war could destroy world civilization. Georgii Malenkov famously took this position, only to have other powerful Politburo figures such as Nikita Khrushchev and Viacheslav Molotov denounce him.\(^{40}\) After Khrushchev's faction marginalized Malenkov, the stance taken by Khrushchev and Molotov became the Soviet government's official policy regarding the possibility of nuclear warfare. In their view, nuclear weapons could not, and did not, alter the basic laws of social development elucidated by Marxism-Leninism. Any attempt to change the course of human progress by means of nuclear weapons would fail, and the Soviet military would destroy any aggressors. The Soviet military possessed weapons equal in sophistication to those of the United States, but they alone could not deter an enemy the Soviet leadership considered irrational. Because a nuclear war thus could not be ruled out, the Soviet people needed to be ready to fight and win such a war.\(^{41}\) Civil defense thus became an essential part of the Soviet Union's defense capability—a point that Soviet civil defense manuals emphasized.

Even though Soviet publications regularly discussed nuclear weapons before

\(^{40}\) Kissinger, *Thermonuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*, 383-5.

Stalin’s death, the first published materials about antinuclear civil defense did not appear there until mid-1954, when the MPVO published a handbook entitled *Pamiatka naseleniiu po zashchite ot atomnogo oruzhiia* (Handbook for the Population About Defense Against Atomic Weapons). The government quickly published dozens of other manuals in a surprising range of venues, all of which share a similar portrayal of nuclear war. The nuclear scenario imagined by Soviet civil defense manuals in the mid-1950s differed from that found in FCDA manuals of the same period. While the American side believed that nuclear war would almost certainly be a surprise, the MPVO expected nuclear war to be an outgrowth of a long period of mounting international tensions that would allow for time to put existing shelters in a high state of readiness, as well as to possibly improvise new shelters. In fact, the earliest Soviet anti-atomic defense manuals ignored the possibility of surprise nuclear attack. In 1955, manuals did not tell Soviet citizens what to do when they saw the “flash,” because they assumed that citizens would already be inside of some sort of shelter. Civil defense propagandists seem to have rethought this position by the end of the 1950s, but Soviet civil defense always treated the prospect of a surprise nuclear attack as one of the less likely scenarios for nuclear war.

The Soviet government took great pains to control media portrayals of the nuclear threat. For instance, a 1958 novel entitled *Atomnaia krepost’* (Atomic Fortress) describes the prospect of nuclear war in the exact same terms as those found in contemporary Soviet civil defense manuals. The book’s antagonist, the American “Uranium Baron” William Price, sadly replies when asked about the possibility of war with the USSR: “We will lose the war. Unfortunately, they don’t want to believe that in Washington--some out

of stupidity, and some out of self-interest. But believe me, Allen, we will be beaten.”

Actual portrayals of nuclear war were almost unknown in Soviet literature, in part because propaganda emphasized that official policy was to avoid such a conflict. Disarmament propaganda best embodied this position, which memorably found its voice in the 1961 film *Sud sumasshedshykh* (Trial of the Insane). Set in the United States, this poorly-received product of the Mosfil'm studio portrayed the American masses as being in full sympathy with Soviet-led efforts to ban nuclear weapons. According to *Sud sumasshedshykh*, the American government seriously entertained the possibility of exterminating the people of the Soviet bloc due to its irrational and immoral nature.

While nuclear weapons were immoral, they were necessary to deter or fight a potential war with the United States. The Soviet government had mixed feelings about products of Western atomic culture that sympathized with Soviet disarmament proposals while contradicting the regime's official position that nuclear war was survivable and winnable. For instance, the 1959 Stanley Kramer film *On the Beach* premiered for Soviet elites in Moscow, but the Party deemed it unsuitable for release to ordinary audiences, probably due in part to the film's assertion that nuclear war was not only unwinnable, but that it would render the earth uninhabitable.

In contrast to the efforts of the FCDA and OCDM, the Soviet civil defense program emphasized the importance of state-led collective action in nuclear survival. While the OCDM declared in its 1960 television show *Retrospect* that “civil defense is a personal responsibility touching every American life,” Soviet propagandists declared that

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44 *Sud sumasshedshykh*, directed by Grigorii Roshal' (Moscow: Mosfil'm, 1961).
“civil defense is the business of the entire people!” As the Soviet government expanded its education campaign in the late 1950s, civil defense planners quickly corrected some of the shortcomings of the early anti-atomic defense manuals. Authors paid more attention to the problem of fallout and the need to defend against it, although they provided information that was less current than that in contemporary American manuals. The new twenty-two-hour civil defense training course initiated in 1958 exposed millions of Soviet citizens to MPVO training manuals. Many received the badge Gotov k PVO 1-oi stepeni (“ready for anti-air defense first class”) following their completion of civil defense training courses. Intended to reach the full spectrum of the Soviet population, this training course exempted only the very young and very old were from attending it.

Modern observers may scoff at many of the MPVO’s proposed civil defense measures, but they offered considerable reassurance to readers. The decontamination, rescue, and firefighting operations that the MPVO described in its manual assured ordinary citizens that they would never face nuclear war alone. The government did not tell them that finding shelter was their own personal responsibility, but instead included shelters in the new apartment buildings under construction in Soviet cities. In case of war, MPVO workers would guide them to a shelter. If pre-existing shelters were unavailable, the MPVO would build more. If people found themselves trapped in a damaged building

45 Grazhdanskaia oborona--vsenarodnoe delo! This is the title two Soviet pamphlets published in the 1960s. See S.F. Markov, Grazhdanskaia oborona--vsenarodnoe delo (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo DOSAAF, 1964), and V.A. Beliavskii, Grazhdanskaia oborona SSSR--vsenarodnoe delo (Moscow: Atomizdat, 1968).


47 K.G. Kotlukov, K.S. Ogloblin, and A.I. Sgilevskii, Grazhdanskaia oborona--vchera i segodnia (Moscow: Atomizdat, 1975), 59.

48 Gouré, Civil Defense in the Soviet Union, 45-46.
or shelter following a nuclear attack, civil defense teams would rescue them and guide them to a safer location. If they were injured, the MPVO would provide first aid and take them to emergency civil defense medical stations. Millions of people belonged to the MPVO, and most of the Soviet population received some civil defense training. Just as with every other challenge, nuclear war was something that Homo sovieticus could withstand through Party-led collective effort.\textsuperscript{49} Even though the technical material in some civil defense manuals revealed the shortcomings in Soviet civil defense, only those who took an intense interest in the subject were likely to recognize the deficiencies of the Soviet program. Soviet civil defense propaganda was far more successful than its American counterpart at creating a narrative assuring citizens that their government would go to enormous lengths to guarantee their survival in a nuclear war.

Nikita Khrushchev's incessant reorganization of government agencies and the growing influence of the military resulted in the transfer of civil defense to military control. The fact that civil defense passed from Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) control was inescapable, given that Khrushchev abolished that organization in 1960. It appears that civil defense existed in some kind of administrative limbo until 1961, when the Politburo formally transferred it to the Ministry of Defense, becoming the latest nuclear-related responsibility to come under Ministry of Defense authority. Two years earlier, the Kremlin granted the Ministry of Defense formal control over the USSR's nuclear arsenal, which had previously been the province of a special agency responsible directly to the Politburo.\textsuperscript{50} The shift to military control had profound implications for the

\textsuperscript{49} Moisei Levin, Valentin Sinitsyn, and G. Malinin, \textit{Zashchita ot sredstv massovogo porazheniia} (Moscow: Uchpedigiz, 1960).

\textsuperscript{50} Pavel Podvig, ed., \textit{Russian Strategic Nuclear Forces} (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 111. The fact that
way in which the Soviet Union organized civil defense and the way Soviet propagandists portrayed civil defense to the public. Most importantly, while the Communist Party sought to mobilize the Soviet populace for everything from agriculture to hygiene, the military possessed authority and legitimacy that other government agencies lacked. In a culture where World War II had redefined the defense of the Motherland as the most virtuous of all pursuits, the redefinition of civil defense as a military enterprise ensured that it would have the resources available to the Soviet armed forces to mobilize the populace for nuclear survival.

Another significant development related to Soviet civil defense occurred in 1962 with the promulgation of a new military doctrine formally acknowledging the centrality of nuclear weapons in modern warfare. This marked an important shift from the period before 1962, when the role of nuclear weapons within Soviet strategic thought was unclear. Even though the Soviet Union had possessed nuclear weapons since 1949, under Stalin the regime had publicly denigrated the new technology, claiming that “constantly operating factors” such as morale and sociopolitical organization denied the US the ability to defeat the USSR even with its vast superiority in nuclear arms. After Stalin's death, the Soviet government moved away from this position, but the military formally settled on a strategy that emphasized the nuclear missiles favored by Khrushchev and other Soviet rulers only in the early 1960s. Soviet military literature dubs this shift “the scientific-technical revolution in military affairs.”

51 It took some time, however, for

Lavrentii Beria had overall responsibility for the Soviet nuclear program led many western observers to believe that the NKVD/KGB had direct control of the Soviet nuclear arsenal before 1959. In fact, this was the responsibility of the Pervoe Glavnoe Upravlenie (First Primary Directorate), created in 1946 as part of the Council of People's Commissars.

Soviet civil defense literature to digest this “revolution” fully.

Published in April 1962, Kak zashchishchat'sia ot oruzhiia massovogo porazheniia (How to Defend Oneself Against Weapons of Mass Destruction) is a product of this transitional period. Even though the pamphlet maintains many of the assumptions about nuclear war found in the MPVO manuals of the 1950s, it differs from them in several important ways. The greatest departure from earlier Soviet civil defense propaganda is stylistic; in contrast with earlier Soviet manuals, How to Defend Oneself Against Weapons of Mass Destruction is heavily illustrated, down to the orange mushroom cloud on the cover. The manual also devotes the bulk of its attention to nuclear weapons, unlike earlier manuals that often devoted equal space to chemical and biological weapons. Instead, the authors provide practical information that readers could use to prepare for and survive a nuclear attack. It mentions dispersal as one of the primary means of protecting the inhabitants of major cities, but at the same time, it does not give evacuation and dispersal the emphasis found in manuals published later. In doing so the authors presented a nuclear scenario that contrasted powerfully with the “domestic” world of American civil defense propaganda.

Like all Soviet civil defense propaganda, How to Defend Oneself Against Weapons of Mass Destruction conceives of nuclear survival as a collective endeavor of the Soviet people through an active, state-led effort. The government obligated every Soviet citizen to take part in civil defense, but this did not mean that individuals were ever to be solely responsible for their own survival. The main responsibility of Soviet citizens was to obey the state and assist Grazhdanskaia Oborona both before and after nuclear war. How to Defend Oneself Against Weapons of Mass Destruction argues that,
with the highly organized total mobilization of the Soviet population, every citizen had a chance of surviving nuclear attack, especially if he or she had considerable warning.52

The authors of *How to Defend Oneself Against Weapons of Mass Destruction* followed current Party doctrine in characterizing nuclear war. Citing Khrushchev's campaign to build communism by 1980, the first sentence in the booklet begins: “While building a communist society, the Soviet people need peace.” 53 “Imperialism” in general, and the United States in particular, jeopardized this necessary peace and, according to the Program of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, would continue to threaten the world so long as it existed. The USSR, meanwhile, stood for the forces of world peace and total disarmament. Soviet citizens could therefore assume that any nuclear war would be the result of western aggression.54

Although imperialist nuclear attack might come as a surprise, *How to Defend Oneself Against Weapons of Mass Destruction* follows the thinking of the Soviet military and civil defense leadership in assuming that this was unlikely. Instead, there would be a period of rising international tensions leading to war, giving citizens time to prepare. This is the topic of the booklet's second section, “What Needs to Be Done under the Threat of Attack.” Radio, television, and print media would warn citizens of this threat. Those without a prepared shelter nearby would find improvised shelters around them, or build a simple trench shelter with their neighbors. Another responsibility of Soviet citizens was acquiring or making “means of individual protection.” In Soviet civil defense parlance, this means either industrially-produced gas masks or homemade cotton masks to protect

52 Lebedeva., *Kak zashchishchat'sia ot oruzhiia massovogo porazheniia*, 31.

53 Ibid., 2.

54 Ibid., 2.
the respiratory organs from fallout. A boxed warning printed in bold-faced capital letters reminds readers that, under threat of attack, they needed to carry their gas mask at all times. Before nuclear attack, citizens also needed to put their house in order by cleaning up fire hazards and securing food and water against radioactive contamination. At this time, the government might disperse populations of major cities to surrounding areas. While each Soviet citizen had responsibilities to themselves and their families, the larger civil defense effort subsumed these.\textsuperscript{55}

The third section of the manual, “Actions Responding to the Signals of Civil Defense” describes two signals, \textit{vozdushnaia trevoga} (“air attack”) and \textit{otboi vozdushnoi trevogi} (“all clear.”) The authors explain that the former signal means that enemy planes or missiles had entered Soviet air space and that an attack could therefore occur within minutes. Under such circumstances, the activities of everyday life would come to a screeching halt. Factory workers would need to shut down and secure equipment. Public transportation would be stopped, and \textit{Grazhdanskaia Oborona} would guide passengers to the nearest shelter. Ordinary citizens would make their way to the nearest blast shelter or basement, taking their families with them and leaving pets behind. Readers needed to help shelter leaders maintain order, and to obey all commands they received. Within the shelter, regulations forbade smoking or using kerosene lamps. When the danger of attack abated, the \textit{otboi vozdushnoi trevogi} (“all clear”) signal would sound, at which time shelter occupants would follow the instructions of the shelter leader.\textsuperscript{56}

Unlike \textit{Fallout Protection, How to Defend Oneself Against Weapons of Mass Destruction} devotes a great deal of text and a large number of images to portraying the

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 8-14.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 15-17.
post-attack environment. Illustrations include five representations of people escaping from damaged shelters on their own, and one image of a rescue team digging its way to free buried shelter occupants. The post-attack environment would be manageable because Grazhdanskaia Oborona was prepared to render assistance to Soviet citizens in all scenarios, and the government expected Soviet citizens to help one another in all ways possible. Citizens were shown using natural cover during a surprise attack, after which they were to put on their gas masks, help the injured, and then proceed to exit the “zone of destruction.” They might be able to follow signs posting a safe path away from danger posted by civil defense workers, but if these were nowhere to be found, survivors could simply walk in whatever direction exhibited less damage. The authors also warn survivors not to enter damaged structures, because of the danger of collapse, and to be aware that radiation hazards might be present. The manual warns readers to assume that they were in a contaminated area unless civil defense workers told them otherwise. After their exodus from the contaminated zone, the manual provides readers with methods for decontaminating their clothes. An illustration of this activity shows a figure wearing a gas mask brushing himself with a birch branch. Although the text and illustrations clearly portray a destroyed cityscape, they provide measures by which the reader could expect to escape the destruction and move into a less damaged area.

Before leaving the “zone of destruction,” however, the government expected citizens to help their comrades by assisting ongoing rescue operations organized by civil defense formations. The booklet's fourth section, “How to Help the Injured,” lays it out in no uncertain terms: “If you are not injured, take part in the work of civil defense formations after leaving the shelter. If they have not yet arrived, you and other able-
bodied individuals can take part in an organized effort for rescue and other work.”

Citizens needed to respond both quickly and carefully in this critical task. They would free people trapped in damaged shelters and buildings, provide first aid to the injured, and assist in the efforts of Grazhdanskaia Obarona to limit fire damage. The manual’s brief section on emergency medical treatment tells readers that after providing first aid they would transport the injured to civil defense medical centers. An illustration shows various methods of carrying injured citizens among the rubble of demolished buildings. Although the scenario described by the text and illustrations is obviously unpleasant, it also reassures readers that they could expect help in the aftermath of a nuclear attack. If they were injured or trapped, the efforts of their fellow citizens and Grazhdankaia Obarona would come to their aid. If they emerged from the attack unscathed, they would assist in the heroic rescue effort. How to Defend Oneself Against Weapons of Mass Destruction implies that residents of the Soviet Union could trust the actions of civil defense and their fellow citizens to manage the post-attack environment and save them from death.

The final section of the pamphlet deals with defense against chemical weapons, biological weapons, and fallout. The authors presented all of these as being manageable. Civil defense would lead the effort to decontaminate or disinfect an area and make it livable. Fallout, which was the focus of contemporary American manuals, receives less than one page in How to Defend Oneself Against Weapons of Mass Destruction. Civil defense would warn citizens of the impending radiological hazard, after which they would quickly prepare shelter spaces within existing buildings, supply themselves with a two-to-three day supply of food, and secure themselves. Shelter occupants would emerge

57 Ibid., 22.
58 Ibid., 22-26.
only upon receiving orders from civil defense. The manual closes with another message delivered entirely in boldface, capital letters: “Remember, that organization, stringent adherence to all rules of action, and decisive action in the zone of destruction are key to rescuing many people!” These traits, which the Marxist-Leninist belief system valued highly, were thus emphasized as the foundation of nuclear survival.59

In 1962, on the eve of the Cuban Missile Crisis, ordinary citizens of both the United States and Soviet Union received civil defense manuals containing implicit messages about nuclear war. These messages encapsulate the beliefs that civil defense propagandists wanted citizens to have about nuclear war. *How to Defend Oneself Against Weapons of Mass Destruction* presented a nuclear scenario entirely unlike that of *Fallout Protection*. Where *Fallout Protection* implies to Americans that their government is going to leave them to their own devices in a nuclear war, the Soviet manual assures citizens that the government and people would go to extreme lengths to rescue everyone in a nuclear disaster. Although neither manual provides an in-depth discussion of nuclear weapons, only *How to Defend Oneself Against Weapons of Mass Destruction* tells its readers how to protect themselves from weapons effects other than fallout. *Fallout Protection* portrays the post-nuclear environment as a world of uncertainty, in which Americans could not depend on the government for assistance. *How to Defend Oneself Against Weapons of Mass Destruction* informs Soviet readers that even in a nuclear war, they could depend on their government and their fellow citizens. While *Fallout Protection* fails to reinforce public faith in civil defense and implies that many Americans would face certain doom in nuclear war, its Soviet rival did the opposite. It portrays nuclear war as something that the Soviet state could overcome and suggests that every

59 Ibid., 27-32.
citizen has a chance of survival. Even though both manuals have a tenuous relationship with the physical reality of nuclear war, *How to Defend Oneself Against Weapons of Mass Destruction* crafts a nuclear scenario that is more likely to convince readers of the utility of civil defense.

**American and Soviet Civil Defense, 1963-72**

Historians have traditionally identified the Cuban Missile Crisis as a turning point in the history of the American civil defense program. Indeed, this is the date where many studies of the subject end, as the profile of civil defense in American public discourse rapidly faded after 1962. The well-justified distinction misleads in several ways. It is true that in the mid-1960s civil defense lost its sense of public urgency without regular international crises such as those in Cuba and Berlin, and the pervasive civil defense education campaigns of earlier years became much less pronounced. Civil defense mobilization efforts of the 1950s like “Duck and Cover” and the national “Operation Alert” nuclear preparedness drills became a thing of the past. Manufacturers of home fallout shelters saw their business evaporate, and other areas of government policy increasingly attracted the attention of protesters, particularly escalating U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Yet there was no immediate break in civil defense policy. The policies set down by the Kennedy Administration continued in some form through the end of the LBJ Administration, with distinct changes occurring only in 1968, when civil defense began to expand its focus to include natural disasters. Ironically, American civil defense capabilities probably peaked in the early years of the Johnson Administration (1963-69) as the policies that President Kennedy had hastily enacted during the nuclear crises of the early 1960s finally reached fruition, despite the fact that civil defense had lost the sense
of political urgency it had possessed just a few years earlier.

An excellent representative example of an American civil defense manual from the Johnson Administration is *Personal and Family Survival*, published in several different versions during the mid-1960s.\(^60\) *Personal and Family Survival* bears considerable resemblance to *Fallout Protection*, the problematic OCD manual published in 1961. The 1966 version of *Personal and Family Survival* also discusses home shelters, devoting 28 of its 127 pages to the subject, but these shelters are now secondary to the new community shelters: “while private shelters will protect some of the people in a community, the major part of the population will need protection in public shelters.”\(^61\) Thus the public shelter experience became the default way in which American civil defense imagined nuclear survival. Thanks to this innovation, *Personal and Family Survival* offered readers hope that its predecessors like *Fallout Protection* had not.

*Personal and Family Survival* portrays nuclear survival as an endeavor organized by the government and endured by Americans collectively in public shelters. Where the civil defense of the Eisenhower Administration had famously declared that “civil defense is a personal responsibility,” *Personal and Family Survival* postulates that “civil defense is civil government—Federal, State, local—prepared for effective action to limit damage and speed recovery in the event of attack.”\(^62\) This represents a massive rhetorical shift from the civil defense propaganda of the late 1950s, but one well in keeping with the overall governmental philosophy of the Johnson Administration. The OCD could now assure

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61 Ibid., 33.

62 Ibid., 7.
Americans that the government was taking meaningful action to save civilians' lives in the event of nuclear war.

U.S. civil defense capabilities reached their height during the Johnson Administration. The public shelter identification program, for all its faults, offered some credible protection from fallout hazards to millions of Americans outside of direct target areas. Despite this apparent success, the popular profile of civil defense faltered during the late 1960s, as changing attitudes among both nuclear strategists and the public made the idea less attractive. The ubiquitous civil defense propaganda of earlier administrations disappeared, and civil defense planners had to admit that their efforts to mobilize Americans for civil defense had failed. By early 1968, the Office of Civil Defense devoted considerable attention to the problem of natural disasters. Subsequently, the Nixon Administration's apathetic attitude toward civil defense resulted in the essential abandonment of the program by 1974, although Defense Secretary James R. Schlesinger tried to revive the evacuation concept without any results. 63 Civil defense propaganda disappeared from the United States even as it became more ubiquitous than ever in the USSR.

The early years of Leonid Brezhnev's rule (1964-82) saw the maturation of Soviet Civil Defense. While American civil defense devoted attention to its shelter program and to contemplating how it would accomplish mass mobilization, Soviet civil defense authorities busily attacked the problem of civil defense on multiple fronts. Nearly all Soviet citizens received mandatory civil defense training, and the new buildings under construction in the USSR included dedicated shelters. Empowered by the existence of an

actual civil defense infrastructure, Soviet propagandists had much more to talk about than their American counterparts. Ubiquitous posters, manuals, film, radio, and television programs conveyed civil defense propaganda. From 1964-68 these materials took the form that they would retain until the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster in 1986.

The most universal venue for civil defense training in the USSR was primary school. Although older Soviet citizens also received compulsory civil defense training in their places of residence or employment, these courses were easier to shirk than their school counterparts. A good example of one kind of Soviet civil defense propaganda for school use is *Shkolniku o grazhdanskoj oborone* (To the Primary School Student about Civil Defense), published in 1968. This glorified brochure provides invaluable insights into the means that the Soviet regime used to socialize its schoolchildren as members of the mobilization society. Its author, G. I. Goncharenko, however, had ambitious goals for its thirty pages: “to explain in popular language the discovery of nuclear energy, the primary destructive effects of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, and also means of defense against them.” Goncharenko's introduction provides a fascinating look at the role Soviet propagandists imagined that civil defense would play in the role of schoolchildren: “Young friend! Today you are still sitting at your desk, studying at school, but the years will pass and you will go to work. Today you took your first step into national life--you are a Pioneer--but tomorrow you could become a Komsomol member, receive your passport, and become a full citizen of the Soviet Motherland.” The author reminds readers of the importance of military service in Soviet


life: “Perpetual readiness for the defense of the socialist Motherland is the highest manifestation of the patriotic duty of every Soviet citizen.” Goncharenko maintains that “civil defense is an integral part of the defense of our state. It is the duty of every Soviet person, including schoolchildren, to strengthen civil defense and to take an active part in its measures.” Retaining his familiar tone, the author concluded that “this little booklet, young friend, will introduce you to civil defense and provide a few practical suggestions, which you can use under the threat of the use of weapons of mass destruction by the enemy and provide assistance to comrades within the zone of destruction.”

Leaving aside the unanswerable question of whether civil defense was viable as a way of saving lives during a nuclear war, it is apparent that the Soviet leadership succeeded in bombarding the population with civil defense propaganda, even if people did not necessarily interpret it as the regime wanted. The available evidence shows that Cold War-era allegations that the Soviet civil defense program existed largely in the imaginations of Western defense specialists are false. At the same time, it is apparent that implementation was imperfect, and that ordinary Soviets were often either incredulous or apathetic towards civil defense. The Soviet Interview Project, which conducted comprehensive surveys of former Soviet citizens who had immigrated to the US, asked expatriates in the 1980s whether they remembered the location of the nearest shelter to their job or school. Only 41.3% responded that they did. Even fewer

66 Ibid., 3.

67 For an example of these, see Andrew Cockburn, The Threat: Inside the Soviet Military Machine (Sevenoaks, England: New English Library, 1985). Post-Cold War interviews with figures involved in Soviet nuclear war planning indicate that the Soviet military believed that civil defense could allow civilization to survive in the less-damaged parts of the USSR following a thermonuclear war, but that they did not believe that civil defense made nuclear war “winnable.” See Henry D. Sokolski, ed., Getting MAD: Nuclear Mutual Assured Destruction, Its Origins and Practice (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Strategic Studies Institute, 2004), 151-66.
respondents, 29.3%, said that they had been inside of the shelter for a drill during their last two years in the USSR. Presuming that these numbers are roughly representative of the Soviet Union as a whole, they imply that tens of millions of people were taking part in civil defense drills involving shelters in a period when American civil defense was almost totally moribund. While the figures demonstrate widespread apathy regarding civil defense readiness, they also show that large numbers of shelters existed and that civil defense exercises were ongoing, if at levels markedly lower than Moscow intended.

On the whole, Soviet civil defense propaganda of the early Brezhnev years reflected the civil defense program it promoted and defended. The regime intended Grazhdanskaia Oborona to limit damage and casualties in a nuclear war that Soviet political and military leaders genuinely feared. Belief that nuclear war would not come as a surprise made it possible to craft elaborate schemes to evacuate cities and construct improvised shelters. Far from being an excuse to militarize the population, Soviet civil defense advertised its integration into the defense establishment in order to attain the prestige and legitimacy accorded to the military in Soviet society. Although implementation of civil defense plans was spotty and public engagement was lacking, the propaganda effort touched the lives of all Soviet citizens, particularly those of school age. Only rare individuals were able to escape the civil defense courses required of workers and students. Administrative personnel were required to become the leaders of civil defense staffs and formations. Whether any of this would be useful during a nuclear exchange is unknowable, but the Soviet government succeeded at mobilizing society for civil defense to a much greater degree than its American counterpart.

Conclusion

Propaganda was a critical aspect of civil defense, but it was not necessarily the essence of civil defense. While American civil defense under Truman and Eisenhower amounted to a propaganda effort, the development of President Kennedy's public shelter program finally offered some physical protection to millions of ordinary Americans. Despite this success, American civil defense rapidly faltered during the Johnson and Nixon Administrations; by the mid-1970s, both civil defense propaganda and shelters had disappeared in most of the United States. The fate of the Soviet program could not have been more different. During the same years, it entrenched its position in Soviet politics, becoming part of the education and socialization of Soviet citizens. If anything, by 1972 Soviet civil defense propaganda was more ubiquitous than ever.

Civil defense did not fail in the United States because civil defense was physically impossible. It failed because civil defense was unworkable in the American cultural context. Americans found the prospects of mass mobilization and home front militarization distasteful, and they developed a vibrant and spontaneous atomic culture that undermined the message of civil defense.\(^69\) The conception of nuclear war shared by Americans everywhere from Madison Avenue to the Oval Office--that nuclear war would begin as the result of a surprise attack from the Soviet Union--further hindered civil defense. This assumption made the development of credible civil defense measures impossibly difficult. Therefore, the propaganda efforts of American civil defense were

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doomed to appear ironic and silly. But as the Soviet case demonstrates, this was the result of cultural contingency rather than a foreordained outcome. The cultural differences between the US and USSR resulted in the development of “two worlds of civil defense” that bore surprisingly little resemblance to one another.

Why did the Soviet civil defense escape the pitfalls that ensnared its American counterpart? There are several obvious reasons. The single most important one is the fact that the Soviet Union was a “mobilization society,” in which civil defense was just one of a myriad of state-sponsored causes in which citizens were obligated to participate. Another critical reason is that Soviet and American expectations of how nuclear war would begin were radically different. The Soviet belief that nuclear war would come after a warning period of days or weeks made civil defense far more plausible than in the American political context, where planners expected a surprise attack. And while political support for civil defense was lacking in the United States, under Khrushchev and Brezhnev the political fortunes of Grazhdanskaja Oborona were remarkably robust. Without these critical cultural and political differences, Soviet civil defense would not have enjoyed the success that it did. Whether Soviet civil defense was a workable response to nuclear attack is irrelevant; what matters is that it could thrive within the dominant ideological and cultural discourse in a way its American counterpart could not.

This, of course, raises the fundamental question of why Soviet atomic culture developed so differently from its American cousin. There are no simple answers to this quandary, but it is likely to prove a fruitful avenue for further inquiry. Although scholars such as Paul Boyer began exploring the historical origins of American atomic culture its relationship to civil defense decades ago, a similar study has not yet been made of Soviet
culture. Only by charting the changing conceptions of nuclear warfare among Soviet leaders, scientists, intellectuals, and ordinary citizens will we be able to understand the way in which the Soviet people experienced the arms race. It is my hope that this study marks a small first step toward this goal, which I intend to pursue as I continue my research.
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