

THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

Module prepared for CIAO

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August 2000

The Cuban missile crisis of October 1962 is generally regarded as the most serious military confrontation of the Cold War. American destroyers deployed along a picket line to intercept Soviet ships transporting missiles and nuclear warheads to Cuba while American air, ground and naval forces prepared for air strikes against Soviet missile sites under construction in Cuba and a follow-up invasion. The Strategic Air Command was put on an unprecedented state of alert – “DEFCON II,” only one step away from “war is imminent.” On Saturday morning, October 27, President Kennedy and his advisors were pessimistic about their ability to preserve the peace. Robert Kennedy, the President’s brother and Attorney General of the U.S., had “the feeling that the noose was tightening on all of us, on Americans, on mankind, and that the bridges to escape were crumbling.”¹ In Moscow, the tension was “phenomenal.” On Sunday morning, General Secretary Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev and his advisors worried “that Kennedy intended to declare war, to launch an attack” against the Soviet Union.² That same day, the two leaders reached an accommodation that, in retrospect, turned out to be one of the key turning points of the Cold War.

OVERVIEW

The “Caribbean crisis,” as it was known in the former Soviet Union, was attributed to the Kennedy administration’s unwillingness to accept the status quo in Cuba. Unalterably opposed to Fidel Castro, the administration organized an ill-fated invasion of Cuba by anti-Castro refugees in April 1961. After the “Bay of Pigs” fiasco, the Central Intelligence Agency tried to assassinate Castro and sponsored covert operations against Cuba, the Department of State organized an economic and political boycott of the country, and the Pentagon prepared and rehearsed a full-scale invasion of Cuba. The Soviet Union had become deeply involved with the Castro regime, and was especially pleased by its turn toward socialism. By helping Castro, whom he viewed as “a modern-day Lenin,” Khrushchev thought he was doing something of historical importance.³ Moscow also had more practical reasons for supporting Cuba; the triumph of socialism in Cuba made good propaganda elsewhere in Latin America and demonstrated to Beijing that the Soviet Union was not a “paper tiger.” The fall of Castro, were it to occur, was expected to have “a devastating effect on the revolutionary world movement.”⁴ The prospect of a second American invasion troubled Khrushchev and his advisors throughout the summer and fall of 1961. The Cubans were even more worried, and kept Moscow fully informed of American covert operations and military preparations. In the spring of 1962, Khrushchev decided that as the Soviet Union was too far away to save Cuba by conventional means, a second invasion could only be deterred by deploying nuclear weapons capable of reaching the United States on the island. They “would force Kennedy to choose between accepting Cuba or fighting a nuclear war.” And, as the American President was a reasonable man,

he would choose the former.⁵

Khrushchev's decision also seems to have been influenced by his desire to establish the psychological basis for political equality with the United States. After the Soviet launch of *Sputnik* in 1957, the Eisenhower Administration sought to reassure its allies by deploying intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBMs) in Europe. Turkey and Italy agreed to accept the missiles, but President Eisenhower had second thoughts about the political wisdom of the deployment; he worried that Khrushchev would regard them as extraordinarily provocative, "just as we would if he put missiles in our backyard."⁶ Against Khrushchev's advice, President Kennedy decided to persevere with the installation of Jupiter missiles in Turkey, and Khrushchev was furious. He complained at length to Kennedy about the missiles at the June 1961 Vienna Summit, as well as about other efforts the United States was making "to surround the Soviet Union with bases."⁷ During the 1962 crisis, Khrushchev wrote a private letter to Kennedy suggesting that the Cuban missiles were an appropriate tit-for-tat response to the Jupiter missiles in Turkey.⁸

Khrushchev appears to have decided to send missiles to Cuba in May 1961 after a trip to Bulgaria. He confided his intention to Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko and Deputy Prime Minister Anastas I. Mikoyan, both of whom doubted that missiles could be deployed secretly and warned that their discovery might provoke a crisis with the United States.⁹ Khrushchev nevertheless persevered, and compelled a reluctant Presidium to vote its support for the missile deployment after he had gained the acquiescence of Fidel Castro. Defense Minister Rodion Ya. Malinovsky, who also had doubts about the wisdom of the deployment, was put in charge of

operational planning. The most enthusiastic supporter was Marshal Sergei S. Biryuzov, recently appointed commander of the Strategic Rocket Forces, who maintained that the rockets “would look like palm trees” to American reconnaissance aircraft.¹⁰

A Soviet delegation, led by Marshal Biryuzov, was sent to Havana in late May to consult with the Cuban government. The Cuban Central Committee thought their defense would be better served by conventional weapons, and feared that the missile deployment would damage their reputation in Latin America by turning Cuba into “a Soviet military base.” They nevertheless felt they had no choice but to accept the missiles because of the material assistance they were receiving from the Soviet Union.¹¹ On July 2, Raúl Castro arrived in Moscow for talks and to negotiate a draft treaty. In early August, Fidel Castro sent Che Guevara and Emilio Aragonés back to Moscow to plead with Khrushchev to deploy the missiles openly. The Cubans feared that Kennedy would react violently to a secret *fait accompli*.¹² Khrushchev made light of their concerns, and brushed aside the continued misgivings of Mikoyan, Gromyko and Polish leader Wladyslaw Gomulka, who had been let in on the secret earlier in the summer.¹³

Khrushchev had initially intended to send only a small number of missiles, but the Ministry of Defense plan called for 24 R-12 launchers with 36 SS-4 medium-range ballistic missiles (MRBMs) and 6 training missiles, 16 launchers with 24 SS-5 intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBMs), and nuclear warheads for all the operational missiles. Also to be sent were four motorized rifle regiments, two air-defense missile divisions comprising 24 missile sites, two regiments of tactical cruise missiles, a regiment of 40 MiG-21 aircraft, a regiment of 33 IL-28 light bombers, an Mi-8 transport helicopter regiment, a transport air squadron, and a coastal defense

force consisting of land-based missiles, a squadron each of surface ships and submarines, and a brigade of missile-launching patrol boats. By mid-October, the total deployment would reach forty-two thousand of the planned forty-five thousand men.¹⁴

From Washington's perspective, the Cuban missile crisis was the result of the Soviet Union's nearly successful attempt to deploy nuclear-tipped missiles in Cuba that were capable of reaching targets in the United States. The deployment challenged the strategic status quo (which at the time was overwhelmingly favorable to the United States), made it appear that Khrushchev did not respect American resolve, and threatened the domestic standing of the President and the Democratic Party on the eve of Congressional elections. President Kennedy and Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara were less worried by the strategic than by the political implications of the deployment. They reasoned that the Soviet Union would sooner or later deploy intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) capable of hitting targets anywhere in North America. The President believed that, "The Soviet move had been undertaken so swiftly, so secretly and with so much deliberate deception — it was so sudden a departure from Soviet practice — that it represented a provocative change in the delicate status quo."¹⁵ Kennedy and his advisors reasoned that if Khrushchev succeeded with the missile deployment, he would raise doubts in Europe about America's defense commitment and launch a new political offensive against the Western position in Berlin, perhaps demanding a retreat from that city in return for withdrawing Soviet missiles from Cuba.¹⁶

Kennedy had been under great public pressure to take a firm stand against Castro; senators from his own party had joined Republicans in calling for an invasion of Cuba.¹⁷ He had

sought to deflect these pressures and avoid a crisis with the Soviet Union by walking a fine line on the Cuban question. In September 1962, he publicly committed his administration to oppose the introduction into Cuba of “offensive weapons” — defined to include missiles — and thus to deflect Republican charges that he was “soft” on Cuba. By drawing the line here, he in effect told Khrushchev that he would not oppose the continuing buildup of Soviet conventional forces in Cuba, a major concession given the state of American public opinion. Presidential counsel and advisor Theodore Sorensen later admitted that this strategy was based on the assumption that the Soviet Union had no intention whatsoever of sending missiles to Cuba.¹⁸ If Kennedy had now accepted the missiles, National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy reasoned, Republican opponents would have a triple indictment against him: “You said it wouldn’t happen, and you were wrong; you said you would know how to stop it if it did happen, and you were wrong; and now you say it doesn’t matter, and it does.”¹⁹

The Cuban missile crisis began for the United States on the morning of October 16, when President Kennedy was informed of the discovery of missile sites in Cuba by U-2 surveillance aircraft. Kennedy convened an informal group of cabinet officials and top civilian and military advisors (the Ex Comm) to consider and plan an appropriate response. “Hawks” on the Ex Comm pushed for an air strike or an invasion, and at first, the President was receptive to the idea of an air strike. After several days of deliberation, his preferences changed, and he opted for a “naval quarantine”; it signaled resolve to Khrushchev while avoiding the kind of military action that might compel Soviet retaliation and escalate to a conventional or nuclear war. On the evening of Monday, October 22, the President having previously secured the support of key allies,

announced the discovery of the missiles and the imposition of a blockade of Cuba to the nation and the world.²⁰ By then, American destroyers and submarines were strung out on a picket line five hundred miles distant from Cuba waiting to interdict any ships carrying weapons and military supplies to that island.²¹ The armed forces also prepared for possible military action, and assembled an invasion force of more than 140,000 troops and 579 ground- and carrier-based combat aircraft. The Strategic Air Command sent a maximum number of bombers aloft and brought as many ICBM silos as possible to full alert status²²

The blockade put Khrushchev in a thoroughly unenviable position. The Soviet missiles in Cuba were vulnerable to American attack, as was the Castro regime. Prudence dictated accommodation, but withdrawal of the missiles under American pressure would involve serious domestic and foreign policy costs, and would require Castro's acquiescence. Khrushchev had Soviet work crews in Cuba step up the pace of construction at the missile sites. He instructed one ship, not carrying any proscribed cargo, to challenge the blockade, fully expecting the Americans to fire on it. He did not want to run the blockade, but felt he had to make a symbolic challenge to preserve national honor and his political standing.²³ To minimize the risks of confrontation, he ordered Soviet ships en route to Cuba to stop, and the sixteen ships carrying arms to return to the Soviet Union. As much by default as design, Khrushchev pursued a two-pronged strategy. By appearing tough and uncompromising, he tried to extract concessions from Kennedy in return for withdrawing the missiles. At home, he sought to convince his Presidium colleagues that failure to remove the missiles would provoke an American invasion of Cuba.²⁴

Kennedy and his advisors breathed a sigh of relief when the Soviet ships carrying

weapons to Cuba halted before the blockade line. But they recognized that the blockade did nothing to prevent construction on the missile sites, and more and more missiles reached a state of readiness as the week wore on.²⁵ The hawks pressed for an air strike, convinced the Soviets would not dare to retaliate because the United States possessed overwhelming strategic nuclear superiority and equally great conventional military advantages in and around the Caribbean. President Kennedy and Secretary of State McNamara resisted these pressures, convinced that even a limited strike against the Soviet missile bases in Cuba would provoke a counter-strike against the American missile bases in Turkey.²⁶ The first real break in the crisis came on Friday evening, when the State Department received a letter from General Secretary Khrushchev addressed to the President stating his willingness to cease military shipments to Cuba and withdraw the forces already there if the United States committed itself not to invade or support any invasion of Cuba.²⁷

Optimism gave way to pessimism on Saturday morning in response to a series of incidents that suggested to Ex Comm members, in the words of Robert Kennedy, that “the noose was tightening on all of us.”²⁸ The Federal Bureau of Investigation reported that the previous evening Soviet diplomats in New York had prepared to destroy sensitive documents in the expectation that war was imminent. The latest CIA and military intelligence indicated that a Soviet ship was approaching the blockade line and that Soviet construction crews were still working round-the-clock at the missile sites. At 10:17 that morning, the news ticker began to print out a message from Khrushchev demanding withdrawal of the American missiles in Turkey as a precondition for the removal of the Soviet missiles in Cuba. A few minutes later, the Ex

Comm learned that an American U-2 had been shot down over Cuba, probably by a Soviet surface-to-air missile (SAM). The Soviet air-defense network in Cuba was apparently operational, and Moscow seemed to have no compunction about shooting down unarmed American aircraft. To the annoyance of the hawks, the President refused to authorize a retaliatory air strike. Instead, he decided to respond positively to Khrushchev's letter of the night before, ignoring the message of that morning that had insisted on the additional condition of the missile swap.²⁹

After the Ex Comm adjourned, the President met early in the evening with key advisors — none of them hawks — to discuss the content of an oral message Robert Kennedy would convey to the Soviet ambassador to the U.S., Anatoliy Dobrynin: the United States would not enter into any agreement about the Jupiter missiles, but would withdraw them sometime after the Soviet missiles were removed from Cuba.³⁰ Secretary of State Dean Rusk remained behind for a private talk with the President, and the two men worked out a fall-back position if the offer to Dobrynin did not resolve the crisis. Rusk suggested, and Kennedy agreed, that a request from United Nations' Secretary General U Thant to both superpowers to withdraw their respective missiles from Cuba and Turkey would provide a face-saving way for the United States to accept a public missile trade. Rusk was authorized to prepare the initiative in case it became necessary.³¹

Khrushchev's overriding concern was to prevent an invasion of Cuba and a possible attack on the Soviet Union. His Saturday cable was intended to facilitate a settlement by stipulating, which the Friday cable had not, that the Soviet Union would remove its missiles from

Cuba. Khrushchev added the new demand about the Jupiters because he had been advised by the Washington embassy that the administration was prepared to remove them. He had no inkling of the consternation that his Saturday cable would cause in Washington and Havana.³² Nor was he aware of most of the incidents that had raised concerns in the Ex Comm that the two countries were close to war. He knew about the U-2, which Castro claimed credit for having shot down, a story the Soviet military did nothing to discredit because they had shot down the plane in violation of standing orders from Defense Minister Malinovsky.³³

At 3:00 a.m. Sunday morning, local time, Khrushchev summoned key officials to his dacha for a meeting that later moved to a government mansion on the outskirts of Moscow. According to participants, the tension was “phenomenal.” Soviet and Cuban intelligence had reported that American armed forces were ready to invade Cuba, and some officials worried that they would attack the Soviet Union as well with nuclear weapons. They were in receipt of Ambassador’s Dobrynin’s report, which stressed the urgency of a settlement in order to forestall an invasion. Robert Kennedy had told him that “hot heads” in the government were clamoring for an immediate assault, and the destruction of the U-2 had made it more difficult to resist their demands. Khrushchev had also received a disturbing cable from Ambassador Alekseev in Havana reporting that Fidel Castro had panicked and sought refuge in the underground bomb shelter of the Soviet Embassy in the belief that an attack was imminent. Castro urged Khrushchev to launch a preemptive nuclear strike against the United States.³⁴

Khrushchev and his advisors were convinced that Kennedy’s promise to remove the Jupiters, as communicated by Dobrynin, was his “last concession.” At 10:00 a.m. he created

two working groups to prepare a positive response to Kennedy's Saturday cable. He took the extraordinary step of having one of these groups prepare a message to be broadcast that afternoon over Radio Moscow to ensure that it would reach the White House before Kennedy was scheduled to address the American people on television that evening.³⁵ President Kennedy was informed of Khrushchev's message at 10:00 a.m. in Washington, just before leaving for church. The following day, Ambassador Dobrynin presented Robert Kennedy with a letter from Khrushchev spelling out the missile swap. On instructions from his brother, Robert Kennedy returned the letter to Dobrynin and explained that the administration was committed to the arrangement but did not want any document acknowledging it on file.³⁶ The immediate crisis was over, but negotiations continued for some months between representatives of the superpowers over the implementation of their understanding. Vice Premier Mikoyan had to travel to Havana to convince a reluctant Fidel Castro to permit withdrawal of the Soviet missiles.

HISTORICAL CONTROVERSIES

The early Western literature on the crisis could only speculate about Khrushchev's motives for deploying missiles in Cuba. Ex Comm officials and scholars proposed a series of motives (e.g., to force concessions in Berlin, spread revolution in Latin America, offset American strategic superiority, build support against China in the socialist camp), most of them offensive.³⁷ It now appears that Khrushchev was moved primarily by defensive concerns; he was intent on defending Cuba, offsetting American strategic superiority, and reducing, or at least equalizing, the vulnerability created by the deployment of American strategic weapons on the

Soviet periphery.³⁸

In addition to these foreign policy motives, Khrushchev may also have been influenced by domestic considerations. He was extremely frustrated by the apparent failure of many of his key domestic programs. To sweep away the obstacles he believed stood in the way of their success, he took dramatic and risky actions. The missile deployment fits this pattern; its most important purpose may have been to compel the United States toward a political accommodation. This would strengthen Khrushchev's hand at home and free scarce economic resources for agricultural and industrial development.³⁹ Determining Khrushchev's motives and their priority is nevertheless difficult, because Khrushchev told the officials around him what he thought was mostly likely to win their support.

Kennedy and the Ex Comm, and many of the Cold War studies of the missile crisis, attributed the missile deployment to Khrushchev's belief that Kennedy lacked the resolve to oppose it.⁴⁰ Proponents of this explanation maintained that Kennedy's youth and personality conveyed the impression of inexperience and indecision, and that his refusal to commit American troops to the faltering Bay of Pigs invasion, his poor performance at the Vienna Summit, and his failure to prevent construction of the Berlin Wall all conveyed lack of resolve.⁴¹ There is little evidence in support of this interpretation; all of Khrushchev's comments, both at the time and later, indicate that he thought Kennedy tough and resolute. In this connection it is revealing that he categorically rejected Castro's appeal for a publicly-announced missile deployment on the grounds that Kennedy would send out the American navy and stop or sink the ships en route to Cuba with the missiles. Khrushchev insisted on a secret deployment because he had no doubt

about Kennedy's resolve, but had considerable respect, after the Berlin crisis, for his good sense.

He was convinced that, if the missiles were only discovered after they were operational, Kennedy would "think twice before trying to liquidate our installations by military means," because he knew that "there could be no winners in nuclear war."⁴²

Khrushchev's behavior before the crisis was irrational. He regarded secrecy as essential, but never seriously investigated its feasibility and brushed aside the complaints of Mikoyan and others who said a large, elaborate operation could never be kept secret. He consulted few officials before committing himself to the deployment, and compelled a reluctant Presidium to sign off on the operation. It was also illusory to think that a missile deployment could serve as a catalyst for accommodation, and that Soviet-American relations would *improve* after Kennedy was informed of the missiles. This expectation entirely ignored the domestic and foreign policy costs to Kennedy of accepting the missiles after he had publicly committed himself to opposing the introduction of missiles into Cuba and had received private assurances from Khrushchev that there would be no such deployment.⁴³

For most Western scholars, the outcome of the crisis was unproblematic: American military superiority, nuclear and conventional, compelled Khrushchev to withdraw the missiles. Recent evidence indicates that the crisis was resolved because *both* leaders rejected any course of action they thought might lead to an unstoppable spiral of military escalation. Their mutual commitment to settle the crisis peacefully grew in intensity as the crisis deepened, and they devised a public-private deal to protect them both from reprisals from allies and domestic adversaries.

Diplomacy triumphed because of mutual learning. Three reinforcing factors were responsible. Leaders had time to learn, to overcome their anger, and formulate policy in terms of broader conceptions of their national interest. Learning was facilitated by information each leader received during the crisis. Kennedy's correspondence with Khrushchev prompted him to revise his conception of the Soviet leader and his objectives. He came to believe that Khrushchev had most likely stumbled into the crisis, and was desperately searching for a face-saving way out. This realization made it easier for Kennedy to make the concessions necessary to end the crisis. He no longer thought that Khrushchev would interpret concessions as a sign of weakness and respond by becoming more aggressive toward Berlin. Instead, he expected Khrushchev to see his concessions as proof of his own commitment to avoid war, and to reciprocate with concessions of his own. Khrushchev also rethought his understanding of Kennedy. He was impressed by Kennedy's caution and ability to restrain the American military. He later told his son-in-law, Alexei Adzhubei, that, "He had us by the balls and didn't squeeze."⁴⁴ The final stimulus was fear of war, and here compulsion played a role. By Saturday night and Sunday morning, both leaders and many of their advisors thought that war might be imminent. There is an old saying that nothing so concentrates the mind as the thought of one's impending execution. In this instance, it inspired a creative search for accommodation, as the would-be victims sought desperately to cheat the hangman.⁴⁵

The threat of war remains a controversial issue. The Ex Comm hawks, then and now, insist that the risk of war was remote.⁴⁶ The "doves" felt the threat of war to be very real, although some of these former officials, and some scholars, now regard their fears as

exaggerated.⁴⁷ Other doves — Robert McNamara is the most prominent example — and some scholars think the risk of war was greater than any officials supposed. In 1962, hawks and doves alike speculated that Khrushchev, or a successor, could be pressured into making a deliberate decision to go to war, while their Soviet counterparts had the same fear about Kennedy being pushed into war by right wing political forces and the military. McNamara and Kennedy also worried about runaway escalation once either side engaged in violence. The new evidence suggests that their concern was realistic, and that war could have been triggered by a cycle of tit-for-tat reprisals, some of them unauthorized.⁴⁸

The crisis was plagued by a series of incidents that indicated how difficult alerted military forces were to control. On the morning of Saturday, October 27, the *Grozny*, a *Kazbeck*-class oil tanker, attempted to challenge the blockade, and was successfully recalled by Moscow at the last minute. To this day, nobody in the West knows why the captain disobeyed his orders to hold his position. Later that morning, Soviet air defense forces shot down an American U-2 and killed its pilot. Soviet commanders in Cuba gave the order to fire in violation of a standing order from Moscow not to use any force unless fired on by the Americans.⁴⁹ Moscow in turn was troubled by the American broadcast of the DEFCON II alert *en clair* — a deliberate and unauthorized attempt at intimidation by the commander of the Strategic Air Command (SAC).⁵⁰ A more serious American mishap occurred on Sunday morning, when a U-2 operated by SAC strayed into Soviet air space over the Chukotski Peninsula in eastern Siberia. Khrushchev and his advisors worried that it was on a last-minute intelligence-gathering mission before a nuclear attack.⁵¹

By far the most serious threat to the peace was the presence in Cuba of three tactical nuclear missile batteries with six launchers for *Luna* missiles with a 60-kilometer range. Soviet forces were prepared to use these missiles against an American invasion force when “the American ships were 10 to 12 miles from Cuban shores, that is, when their concentration was high.”⁵² These weapons were only to be used on receipt of explicit orders from Khrushchev, but former Soviet military officials speculate that these weapons might have been used without such authorization in the case of an American attack.⁵³ It is conceivable that American retaliation for the destruction of the U-2 would have led to the loss of further American aircraft and intensified pressure — as President Kennedy feared — for additional air attacks, followed by an invasion of Cuba. If a substantial portion of that invasion force had been destroyed by nuclear weapons, the next step is anybody’s guess.

THEORETICAL RELEVANCE

The Cuban missile crisis has been intensively mined as a case study of deterrence. For many years, the conventional wisdom was that it was a deterrence failure and a compellence success.⁵⁴ Deterrence failed because Kennedy was unable to prevent the Soviet Union from trying to deploy missiles in Cuba. General deterrence attempts to discourage a challenge through military buildups, force deployments, alliances, and threatening rhetoric. In Cuba, general deterrence was provocative rather than preventive. Soviet officials testified that the American strategic buildup, the missile deployment in Turkey, and assertions of U.S. strategic superiority exacerbated their insecurity. President Kennedy had considered all of these actions as prudent,

defensive measures against Soviet threats, especially in Berlin. Instead of restraining Khrushchev, they convinced him to do more to protect the Soviet Union and Cuba. Through their avowedly defensive actions, the leaders of both superpowers made their fears of an acute confrontation self-fulfilling.

Immediate deterrence attempts to forestall a specific challenge, in this case the deployment of offensive weapons in Cuba by the Soviet Union. The failure of immediate deterrence to prevent a Soviet missile deployment illustrates another fundamental problem of deterrence: the inability or unwillingness of leaders facing serious domestic and foreign policy challenges to engage in a comprehensive and open-minded assessment of the expected costs and benefits of a challenge. Khrushchev made only the most cursory examination of the feasibility of secretly deploying missiles in Cuba, and committed himself to the operation before consulting with intelligence experts and foreign policy advisors who could have helped him make a more informed judgment. He then sought out confirming opinions and discounted information that indicated that the deployment would be discovered and would provoke a serious crisis. Khrushchev's behavior bore little relationship to the expectation of rational behavior that lies at the core of deterrence theory and strategy.

Compellence, I have noted, was part of the reason why Khrushchev decided to withdraw the missiles. The single-minded focus in the American theoretical literature on deterrence and compellence — and lack of Soviet evidence — tends to obscure the more complex, political reasons why Khrushchev decided to take out the missiles. Lack of evidence did not prevent historians and political scientists from interpreting the case in terms of their Cold War

conceptions and using those interpretations to tautologically confirm their starting assumptions.

The interpretations of the Cuban missile crisis offer a sobering lesson of how ideology can trump scholarship.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

For much of the Cold War the Cuban missile crisis was a hot topic, and there is considerable literature on the crisis, almost all of it from the Western side. Most of these books and articles need to be read with great caution; they are infected by Cold War attributions, a bias facilitated by the absence of any good evidence on the Soviet side. The memoirs of American officials, and interviews with them, which are the primary sources of most empirical studies, share the same bias. Some of the most important memoir-cum-historical accounts — those of Arthur Schlesinger, Jr, Theodore Sorenson and Robert F. Kennedy (as rewritten posthumously by Sorenson) — contained misinformation to preserve and enhance the President's reputation and facilitate the American cover-up of the missile swap.⁵⁵ Khrushchev's memoirs, published in two volumes, were also heavily edited. New evidence on the Soviet side emerged as a result of Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost*. Former Soviet officials were permitted to participate in a series of conferences on the missile crisis organized by the John F. Kennedy Center.⁵⁶ Their oral recollections triggered matching revelations by American officials, and started a cascade of memoirs, documents from Soviet and American archives, and secondary works based on these sources. The most remarkable documents are the transcripts of the recordings that Kennedy had secretly made of the deliberations of the Ex Comm during the crisis.⁵⁷ The actual recordings are now available on line at <http://www.hpol.org/jfk/cuban/>. The U. S. Department of State has many documents one line at http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/frusX/index.html. The National Security Agency has also released many documents that can be found at

<http://www.nsa.gov/docs/cuba/>. The National Security Archive, a private, non-profit organization, is the largest repository of public documents and photographs on the crisis, and many can be found at <http://nsarchive.chadwyck.com>. The website includes an extensive discussion of available documents and gaps in documentation. Other on-line sources include <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/cuba.html> and <http://www.personal.psu.edu/staff/r/x/rxb297/CUBA/MAIN.HTML>.

Soviet documents are not yet available on line, but many can be obtained through the National Security Archive, and many memoirs of participants have been published in English. Some of the most valuable ones have been cited in this essay. The Central Intelligence Agency has declassified documents, available in Laurence Chang and Peter Kornbluh, *The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962: A National Security Archive Documents Reader* (New York: The New Press, 1992).

There are a number of good secondary sources on the crisis, the best of which base their interpretations on the new material. The most comprehensive and reliable overall accounts of the crisis are Raymond L. Garthoff, *Reflections on the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 1990) and Lebow and Stein, *We All Lost the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994). Mc George Bundy's, *Danger and Survival: Choice About the Bomb in the First Fifty Years* (New York: Random House, 1988), which appeared before many of these documents were classified, is the best and most honest inside account of the crisis by an American official. James G. Blight and David A. Welch, eds., *Intelligence and the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1998), is the most authoritative study of intelligence and the missile crisis. Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble: The Secret*

History of the Cuban Missile Crisis (New York: Norton, 1997), makes use of many KGB, Committee for State Security, and Soviet foreign ministry documents, but must be read with great caution. The KGB provided a select set of documents for the authors to use, and their interpretative claims often go beyond any documentary base.

ENDNOTES

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19. Bundy, *Danger and Survival*, pp. 394, 411-12.

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27. "Letter from Chairman Khrushchev to President Kennedy, 26 October 1962," *Department of State Bulletin* 69, no. 1795, 19 November 1973, pp. 640-43.
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31. Ibid. (Author: To which interview or book does the ibid. refer? What page? All of them?)
32. "Letter from Chairman Khrushchev to President Kennedy, 27 October 1962," *Department of*

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33. Oleg Grinevsky, interview by the author, Stockholm, 26 April 1992; Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, p. 499; Alekseev, "The Caribbean Crisis"; Lebow and Stein, *We All Lost the Cold War*, pp. 300-09.

34. See Lebow and Stein, *We All Lost the Cold War*, pp. 132-41, for the Soviet discussions, and pp. 523-26 for the text of Dobrynin's cable reporting on his meeting with Robert Kennedy. Fidel Castro to Nikita S. Khrushchev, 27 October 1962, *Granma*, 2 December 1990; Comments of Aleksandr Alekseev and Jorge Risquet at "The Antigua conference on the Cuban Missile Crisis," in Blight, Lewis and Welch, *Cuba Between the Superpowers*. (Author: see query in note 12)

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38. See Lebow and Stein, *We All Lost the Cold War*, Ch.2 for a discussion of these motives.
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42. Alexei Adzhubei, interview by the author, Moscow, 15 May 1989; Sergei Khrushchev,

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43. See Lebow and Stein, *We All Lost the Cold War*, Ch. 4 for an analysis of Khrushchev's decision and the role that wishful thinking and defensive avoidance may have played in it.

44. Alexei Adzhubei, interview by the author, Moscow, 16 May 1989.

45. Lebow and Stein, *We All Lost the Cold War*, Ch. 12, addresses the controversy surrounding the resolution of the crisis.

46. The chief "hawks" on the Ex Comm were Dean Acheson, Paul Nitze, John McCone, Douglas Dillon and Maxwell Taylor. See Lebow and Stein, *We All Lost the Cold War*, Ch 12, for a discussion of risk assessment.

47. See the comments of various Kennedy administration officials and Thomas Schelling at the "Hawk's Cay Conference," in Welch, ed., *Proceedings of the Hawk's Cay Conference on the Cuban Missile Crisis*, passim. (Author: See query at note 12)

48. See Lebow and Stein, *We All Lost the Cold War*, Chs. 6 and 12 for a review of these expectations and an assessment.

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54. For example, Horelick, “The Cuban Missile Crisis”; Allison, *Essence of Decision*; George and Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy*; Betts, Richard K., *Nuclear Blackmail and Nuclear Balance*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1987.

55. Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*; Sorenson, *Kennedy*. (Author: Page numbers?)

56. The transcripts of Cambridge, Hawk's Cay, Moscow and Antigua conferences are available in mimeograph and in Allyn, Bruce J., Blight, James G. and Welch, David A., *Back to the Brink: Proceedings of the Moscow Conference on the Cuban Missile Crisis, 27-28 (Month?), 1989*, Cambridge: Harvard University, Center for Science and International Affairs, 1992; Blight and Welch, *Back to the Brink*; Blight, James G., Allyn, Bruce J. and Welch, David A., *Cuba on the Brink: Castro, The Missile Crisis and the Soviet Collapse*, New York: Pantheon, 1993; Blight, Lewis and Welch, eds., *Cuba Between the Superpowers: The Antigua Conference on the Cuban Missile Crisis*.

57. May and Zelikow, eds., *The Kennedy Tapes*, is reported to contain serious errors of transcription.