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THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS OF 1962: MISCALCULATIONS, ESCALATION, AND NEAR NUCLEAR CONFRONTATION.

By

JON ANDREW ERRICKSON

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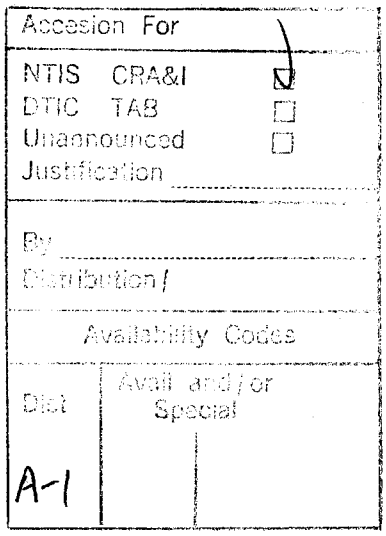
Kathryn Weathersby
Professor Directing Thesis



Dale L. Smith
Committee Member

Ljubisa S. Adamovich
Committee Member

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Name: Jon Andrew Errickson
Department: Russian and East European Studies
Major Professor: Dr. Kathryn Weathersby
Term Degree Awarded: Fall, 1994

No single event during the Cold War era better exemplifies the volatility of superpower relations than does the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. New information, resulting from five recently held history conferences, has created a renewed interest in the Caribbean crisis. Also, Soviet *Glasnost* and *Perestroika* have disclosed revealing new facts that have aided in resolving questions that have perplexed scholars for over thirty years. Most notable of the newfound information was the discovery that the United States had not done a very good job in gathering and analyzing intelligence information. The U.S. also failed to recognize the purpose for the Soviet Union's involvement with the small, isolated island-nation of Cuba. These two miscalculations brought the world extremely close to nuclear war; closer than ever before or ever since.

The nature of the Cuban Missile Crisis was such that it was never a question of Kennedy against Khrushchev or even the United States against the Soviet Union. Instead, it was a much more complex situation that involved an enormous number of variables, many of which were not fully understood by either the U.S. or the U.S.S.R..

CHAPTER 1

THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS REVISITED

Difficulties in understanding and dealing with international crises presented a problem for both the United States and the former Soviet Union throughout the Cold War era. From issues such as diplomacy and trade to military proliferation, both sides experienced their share of miscalculations and outright policy blunders. With the advent of weapons of mass destruction, namely nuclear weapons, the need for calm and concise handling of Cold War discord became all important. Though numerous instances during the Cold War tested the already tenuous relationship between the two superpowers, no one event better exemplifies the problematic nature of crisis management than the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962.

As the crisis unfolded, fear and apprehension were felt throughout the United States and the world in general. While the majority of Soviet citizens were unaware of the conflict, many of the American officials present during the crisis have labeled it in ominous terms. Dean Rusk called it "the most dangerous crisis the world has ever seen,"[1] while

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[1] James G. Blight, et al., "The Cuban Missile Crisis Revisited." *Foreign Affairs* (Fall 1987): 170.

Theodore Stevenson called it the "Gettysburg of the Cold War."[2] For the world, it was a time of extreme tension and concern.

Until very recently, we have been unable to examine all aspects of the Cuban Missile Crisis. This fact has had a hand in keeping the accolades pouring in for the diplomatic adeptness of the Kennedy administration. For Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., it was "the finest hour" for President Kennedy.[3] Even Fidel Castro and Nikita Khrushchev expressed admiration for Kennedy and the panache Kennedy exhibited during the crisis. Arthur Schlesinger recalled Kennedy's resolve and tenacity by stating that, "It was this combination of toughness and restraint, of will, nerve and wisdom, so brilliantly controlled, so matchlessly calibrated, that dazzled the world. Before the missile crisis people might have feared that we would use our power extravagantly or not use it at all. But the thirteen days gave the world - even the Soviet Union - a sense of American determination and responsibility in the use of power which, if sustained, might indeed become a turning point in the history of the relations between east and west."[4] Though such positive critiques of the crisis abound from the U.S. camp as well as the international community, new information has helped scholars paint a different picture of the United States' handling of the situation in Cuba.

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2 Blight, *Cuban*, 170.

3 Ibid.

4 Garry Wills, "The Kennedy Imprisonment 2. The Prisoner of Toughness." *The Atlantic Monthly*, (February 1982), 59.

Looking back at the Caribbean conflict conjures up images of diplomatic maneuvering at its best. The scene was set as if it were a theatrical production. The world watched in stunned silence as a duel between a young, charming and popular capitalist president and a cagey, wily communist head of state unfolded. At issue was a standoff of monumental consequence which developed out of mistrust of one another. The standoff was for the highest stakes possible - human continuance. It was a time when many throughout the world held their collective breath in both fear and anticipation for what would undoubtedly be a superpower showdown of unparalleled proportion. History has never before pitted two nations against one another that had the capability for total human annihilation. Not only was the stability of the post-World War II international system called into question, but also the very future of all mankind.[5]

The end result of the Cuban Missile Crisis has led many people to applaud the supposed diplomatic genius that peacefully ended the alarming growth of hostilities during the infamous thirteen days between 16 October 1962 and 28 October 1962. The potential for egos to clash over personality differences was there, yet these two superpower leaders were able to navigate their way through this encounter without loss of life, and with very little bruising of fragile reputations.

The resolution of the conflict brought a sense of pride and confidence to the American 'victors', a feeling of power and equality to the

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[5] By 1962, U.S./U.S.S.R. nuclear warhead numbers were steadily increasing.

Soviet Union (by their ability to place Washington on the defensive), and finally a sense of abandonment to the people of Cuba. Americans believed that the United States had stood-up to the communist attempt to intrude into the Western Hemisphere and had dealt with the aggression the same way someone would respond to a would-be burglar. To this day, most Americans are adamant in their belief that John Fitzgerald Kennedy controlled the events in Cuba so skillfully that Khrushchev was forced into an embarrassing retreat, signalling a victory for capitalism throughout the world. As then Secretary of State Dean Rusk best summed-up the majority feeling in the U.S., "We were eyeball-to-eyeball and the other fellow blinked."[6]

Was the United States as skillful in ending the Cuban Missile Crisis as has been commonly believed, or were historical events misrepresented by the U.S., leading many to the conclusion that the Kennedy administration pulled-off the quintessential diplomatic coup? The answer to this question has become clearer in the last few years. Historians are now beginning to understand how real the danger was during the crucial thirteen days in October 1962. Though there are still some who call the recent historical revisionism nothing more than bandwaggoning, the overwhelming majority of evidence recently uncovered supports the conclusion that the United States and the Soviet Union were truly on the verge of nuclear confrontation during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962.

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[6] Daniel Schorr, "Looking Back at Cuba." *The New Leader*, (5-19 October 1992), 4.

Recent Historical Developments

Historians are just now able to study this crisis from all angles due to the recent political changes that have swept through Eastern Europe since 1989. Important data, much in the form of previously unreleased documents, is being made available by both Russia and the United States. *Glasnost* enabled Soviet historians and those directly involved in the conflict to collaborate with their American counterparts to uncover the deepest secrets of the crisis. The best example of U.S.S.R./U.S. collaboration is the recently published book *Anadyr* which was written by Generals Gribkov and Smith, two highly placed military officers in the U.S.S.R. and U.S. during the Cuban Missile Crisis.[7]

In addition to memoirs, a mind-boggling amount of documentation has been released concerning the events of 1962. Through declassification by the Freedom of Information Act in the U.S., and the partial opening of archives in the former U.S.S.R., scholars are now inundated with memoranda, high-level intelligence data, figures, opinions, and personal diaries which are helping to better illuminate the events leading up to, and comprising the Cuban Missile Crisis. The final piece of the puzzle needed for an even more accurate view of the crisis had been Cuban data. That

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[7] In the book *Anadyr*, published in the Spring of 1994, Generals Gribkov and Smith collaborate in an effort to further clarify key points of confusion about the crisis. Due to their participation in the Cuban Missile Crisis conferences, and the high official capacities they held during the crisis, this book seems a credible source in reconstructing the events of the day. Anatoli I. Gribkov and W. Smith, *Operation Anadyr*, (Chicago,: Edition Q Inc., 1994).

too has very recently become available, due in large part to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent change in relations between Cuba and Russia. It seems even Fidel Castro is now eager to become part of writing the history of the conflict in which he played such an integral role.

As important as the aforementioned documents are to more accurately depicting the events of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the single most important advance in historical knowledge has been an oral history project begun in 1987 by a group of American historians, mostly out of Brown University. In 1987 they began to bring together former high officials from all three countries who were influential in policy making or implementation during the crisis. The organizers were interested in bringing together only the actual leaders, so that the validity of this "oral history" would be unquestionable.[8] The first meeting took place in 1987 at Hawk's Cay, Florida: the second in Cambridge, Massachusetts, also in 1987: the third in Moscow in 1989: the fourth in Antigua in 1991: the fifth and final in Havana, Cuba in 1992. The discussions uncovered many misunderstandings and solved some of the riddles which had up to this point remained unsolved. To maximize the information flow of the panel discussions, and to give the panel a structure to adhere to, the major topics covered at the conferences were drawn from the seven lessons Robert Kennedy outlined in his memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis, *Thirteen*

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[8] It was more difficult to bring together knowledgeable Soviet officials due to the centralized nature of their command structure.

Days. Reflecting the common wisdom of classical diplomacy, these lessons are:

(1) Take time to plan; don't go with your first impulse.

(2) The president should be exposed to a variety of options.

(3) Depend heavily on those with solid knowledge of the Soviet Union and the strategies of this communist state..

(4) Retain civilian control and beware of the limited outlook of the military.

(5) Pay close attention to world opinion.

(6) Don't humiliate your opponent; leave him a way out.

(7) Beware of inadvertence - the *Guns of August* scenario.[9]

The Havana conference in particular, held in January 1992, showcased a stunning assortment of high-officials from all three states, and was far and away the most productive of the five conferences. Among the more notable attendees were; Fidel Castro - the only remaining survivor of the original national leaders; Robert McNamara - U.S. secretary of defense during the crisis and a man whose opinion was highly valued by both the president and the attorney general, Robert Kennedy;[10] Oleg Troyanovsky - Nikita Khrushchev's special assistant for foreign affairs during the Cuban Missile Crisis. The participation of these principle players made it more likely that an accurate depiction of the actual events of the crisis would emerge. The Havana conference was meant to finish the work started at

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[9] Blight et al., *Cuban*, 172.

[10] Robert Kennedy, *Thirteen Days, A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis*, (New York,: W.W. Norton & Company), 120.

the previous conferences, and to settle unresolved historical differences brought about by the absence of key individuals at the prior oral historical discussions.

Questionable Intelligence Analysis

Among the most critical issues discussed at the conferences, and exposed in the declassified documents, was the accuracy of the intelligence gathered by the United States in the days leading up to October 1962. Because the United States could not make critical decisions in a vacuum, it was necessary for President Kennedy and his staff, particularly the Executive Committee of the National Security Council (ExComm), to quickly interpret data whose accuracy and even authenticity were often in question.[11]

The ExComm was a group of specialists President Kennedy drew on to ensure that the embarrassments of prior foreign policy blunders, such as the Bay of Pigs, would not again occur. Its members were: Dean Rusk (secretary of state), Robert McNamara (secretary of defense), John McCone (director of central intelligence), Douglas Dillon (secretary of the treasury), Robert Kennedy (attorney general), McGeorge Bundy (national security advisor), Theodore Sorenson (presidential counsel), George Ball (under secretary of state), U. Alexis Johnson (deputy under secretary of

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[11] Thousands of photographs and other bits of information were gathered and analyzed within a two week period during the crisis.

state), General Maxwell Taylor (chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff), Edward Martin (assistant secretary of state for Latin America), Charles Bohlen (Advisor on Russian affairs - he left after the first day), Llewellyn Thompson (succeeding Bohlen), Roswell Gilpatric (deputy secretary of defense), Paul Nitze (assistant secretary of defense), Lyndon Johnson (vice president), Adlai Stevenson (ambassador to the United Nations), Kenneth O'Donnell (special assistant to the president) and Donald Wilson (deputy director of the U.S. Information Agency).[12]

While foreign policy decision making relies on accurate, real-time intelligence from all available sources, the nuclear aspect of the Cuban Missile Crisis created an even more critical need for quality information. Through Soviet participation in the oral history conferences, scholars are now able to see the hidden dangers that were undetected during the crisis. From the new sources, we now know that the information received by the Kennedy administration was questionable and incomplete at best. For a number of years it has generally been accepted that the Kennedy administration pulled off a successful political and military operation with regard to the Cuban Missile Crisis, and while much of its intelligence analysis was right on target there has been a discovery over the past seven years that some critical decisions made during the crisis were based on flawed intelligence data or the flawed analysis of good data. One of the highest ranking U.S. officials of the Cuban Missile Crisis alive today, Robert McNamara, then secretary of defense, best presents this argument

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[12] Blight, et al., *Cuban*, 171.

by stating, "...it has become clear that the decisions of each of the three participating nations and their leaders, immediately before and during the crisis, had been distorted by misinformation, miscalculation, and misperceptions."[13]

Historical Perspectives

The five conferences validated the conclusion advanced by several historians and former governmental officials, such as James Blight, Bruce Allyn, David Welch, Robert McNamara, and McGeorge Bundy, that during the Cuban Missile Crisis nuclear confrontation was literally a moment away.

On the other hand, some U.S. scholars still believe we were no closer to a nuclear confrontation in 1962 than at any other time during the Cold War. An example of this school of historical thought can be found in Ray Cline's 1989 article in *Foreign Affairs*, "The Cuban Missile Crisis." Mr. Cline was CIA Deputy Director for Intelligence during the crisis and is currently the Chairman of the United States Global Council and Professor of International Affairs at Georgetown University. In his article, Cline disputed interpretations of the first three joint panel discussions. Cline contended that the Soviets participants stood to gain stature by duping the U.S. participants into thinking that the confrontation was more volatile than originally believed.[14] Where Cline's argument fails is that he attacks

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[13] James Blight, et al., *Cuba on the Brink* (New York,: Pantheon Books, 1993), 40.

the credibility of the U.S. participants in the conferences, suggesting that they were carried away by sentimental dreams, and argues that they played right into the hands of the Soviets. Cline states, "Many of the Americans attending the symposium, including former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and former Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs McGeorge Bundy, reacted to these reminiscences in the company of Soviet and Cuban speakers..."[15] Clearly, the attendees of the conferences were intelligent, independent thinkers who were aware of their environment. To imply that men like McNamara and Bundy, who were both held in high regard by John and Robert Kennedy, could be persuaded to accept scenarios that contradicted their experiences is hard to accept. Throughout the Havana conference, McNamara was quite vocal in his criticism of Soviet and American tactics during the crisis. His emphasis was always focused on separating hearsay from fact, regardless of fault, and there is really no evidence that suggests either McNamara or Bundy strayed from their fact-finding purposes. These men were not guided down memory lane and persuaded they were a part of saving all humanity, but rather they combined their own experiences with those of their Soviet and Cuban counterparts to ultimately conclude that the situation was more volatile than they originally thought.

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[14] Mr. Cline believed that by convincing participants that Khrushchev prudently averted nuclear confrontation, the Soviets would be viewed by the world as the reasonable and flexible country during the crisis. Ray S. Cline, "The Cuban Missile Crisis." *Foreign Affairs* (Fall 1989), 190-196.

[15] Ibid., 191.

The political scientist Mark Kramer bases his argument against the theory of being on the edge of nuclear confrontation solely on questioning the veracity of those involved in the oral history taking place since 1987.[16] While there has certainly been a well-documented history of deception between the U.S.S.R. and the U.S., many issues addressed during the conferences were considered to be adequately resolved by the Russian and American participants because of the joint effort used to problem-solve them.[17] In many cases, intricate details were intensely scrutinized by all sides until the issue was either solved or left unresolved. Many of these issues, such as troop strength and force composition, could not have been skewed by either side due to the accurate post-crisis data both had. The participant selection criteria for the conferences and the openness of discussion during the conferences greatly reduce the chance for deliberate misrepresentation; there was simply too much data and too many experts from both sides to allow poor information to go unquestioned. To assume Castro and the Cuban officials present at the Havana conference were totally candid and truthful, especially in light of the fact they need to do everything possible to make themselves look heroic to their people, would probably be wrong. Certainly the impartiality and honesty shown by the

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[16] Kramer makes an issue out of the fact that General Gribkov, an important member of the original operation *Anadyr* planning team as well as a key member in the five part historical symposium series, misrepresented the truth concerning Soviet command and control features, specifically first-shot procedures, during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Mark Kramer, "Tactical Nuclear Weapons, Soviet Authority, and the Cuban Missile Crisis." *Cold War International History Project Bulletin 3*, (Fall 1993), 40.

[17] Throughout the Havana conference, the smallest, seemingly insignificant details were debated until all parties either agreed with the conclusions or deemed them unresolvable. There is certainly the sense that conclusions were factual.

Soviet and American sides ensured that Cuban inaccuracies were detected and corrected.

Those experts who believe that war was near see the real issue as not whether nuclear war was narrowly averted - this is considered a fact - but rather how it was that the two superpowers came so close to launching missiles in the first place. The overwhelming evidence surfacing over the past several years points toward U.S. misperceptions as being the key reason for the close call.[18] Specifically, the inability of the U.S. intelligence system to properly gather and interpret critical information, crucial in determining Soviet intent, which in turn caused President Kennedy to make improper assumptions, were key in the U.S. misperceptions which brought the world perilously close to nuclear war.

Basis For U.S. Miscalculations

The fact that the high level advisors to President Kennedy quickly dismissed the possibility that the defense of Cuba was a key and critical part of the Soviet rationale for shipping the nuclear warheads to Cuba was a critical blunder. In a White House Memorandum to the President dated 3 September 1962, Walt W. Rostow, Director of the Policy Planning Staff of the Department of State, wrote that the Soviet purpose for showing any interest at all in Cuba was based solely on a desire to agitate the United States.[19] This sort of attitude was prevalent and it was a result of the Cold

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[18] The five oral history conferences were instrumental in developing this idea.

War mentality that dealing with the Soviets was a game of one-upmanship. This notion proved to be so strong that Kennedy never seriously considered the possibility that Khrushchev may have been content to negotiate an end to the conflict at the beginning on the basis of a non-aggression pact protecting Cuba.

While there was clearly a problem in understanding the purpose for the emplacement of the weapons, an equally important problem was in the numerous inaccuracies in gathering the priority information requirements (PIRs) during the crisis. Almost all intelligence data made available to the ExComm was based on aerial photography, and very little, if any, collaboration or verification backed-up any of the photography. This led to some potentially costly mistakes. The most critical mistakes dealt specifically with three areas; the question of how many missiles, specifically the nuclear warheads that made the missiles so deadly, were physically located within Cuba starting on 16 October 1962; the specific Soviet table of organization and equipment (TOE) which was represented on Cuba before and during the crisis; the Soviet command and control (C2) structure on Cuba. These three aspects were so grossly misunderstood by the Kennedy administration that the possibility of all-out nuclear confrontation was much closer than anyone at the time perceived. Were it not for the level-headed and prompt decisions on the part of Khrushchev, the events of October may have escalated beyond anyone's control. During

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[19] Laurence Chang and P. Kornbluh eds., *The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962* (New York,: The New York Press, 1992), 67.

an interview for the *New Yorker* journal in 1970, Eugene Rostow, Lyndon Johnson's undersecretary of state for political affairs and later director of the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, described just how close the world was to nuclear war. When asked if he thought the missiles in Cuba represented more of a technological threat than anything else, Rostow responded, "No. I think we were just touching the nerve of concern . . . the missile crisis was a situation that I think is important for us to think about, because we were ready to go."[20] While this statement was made some twenty-two years before the final symposium was held in Havana, the same conclusions would be stated by the men who played the crucial roles in the conflict.

A new era in international relations has made possible a new assessment of the Cuban Missile Crisis. The most current information proves that the United States and the former Soviet Union were very close to nuclear war, not necessarily by design but rather due to a series of misperceptions and miscalculations on the part of the U.S.. Through detailed analysis of the most recent information, we can conclude that President Kennedy avoided nuclear war through a universal fear of this kind of warfare and not by his superlative diplomatic performance.

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[20] Wills, *Kennedy*, 58.

CHAPTER 2

SOVIET INTENT

Determining Soviet intent in sending nuclear arms to Cuba is vital to understanding the Cuban missile Crisis. From the American Revolution to the Gulf War, America has prided itself on understanding the tactical and strategic situation of the enemy. When looking at America's handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the notion that the U.S. was correct in assuming that the Soviet Union was concerned with Cuba only in terms of its geo-strategic importance seems possible. However, further analysis proves this to be much too shortsighted an interpretation. The difference between assuming a strategic aim over a defensive aim could very well have led to the Soviet Union opting for a different course of action, one that may have paved the way for total nuclear confrontation.[21]

In considering the question of why the Soviet Union chose to covertly deploy nuclear weapons to Cuba in 1962, it is necessary to consider two points. The first point deals with the mood of both Cuba and the Soviet Union with regard to how worried they were that the U.S. would try to invade Cuba and attempt to restore a pro - U.S. / anti - U.S.S.R.

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[21] A strategic goal focuses on expanding spheres of influence while a defensive goal attempts to limit or stop outside aggression.

government. Was Cuba as alienated and defenseless against the U.S. and her neighbors as was claimed by Castro, and was this defenselessness an important factor in the Soviet decision to support Cuba? The second point deals with why the decision to deploy these weapons of mass destruction was made over a more conventional support effort which may have achieved the same goal.[22] Were nuclear weapons any more deterring than a naval fleet and several Soviet infantry divisions stationed on or around Cuba?

Castro's Isolationism

By 1962 Castro was feeling the pinch of isolation in the Caribbean. Castro had a right to be concerned for the preservation of not only his own rule, but for that of the government that the Cuban Revolution had created. The events leading up to the 1959 overthrow of the Batista regime indicate that Castro had reason to be uneasy with his neighbors. By the end of 1960, the Organization of American States (OAS) was extremely agitated over the presence of the new Marxist-Leninist government in Cuba . Many of the OAS leadership saw this new political change as a genuine threat to their current method of governing. One expression of this concern was a paper titled, "Notes on Cuban Policy," written by W.W. Rostow for the secretary of state. Rostow wrote that there was a definite threat of "Castroism" in other Latin American States. Rostow stated, "The roots of

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[22] This idea assumes a much larger eventual Soviet conventional force buildup.

Castroism lie in Latin American poverty, social inequality, and that form of zenophobic nationalism which goes with a prior history of inferiority on the world scene. The vulnerability of the Latin American populations to this form of appeal will depend on the pace of economic growth; the pace at which social inequality is reduced; and the pace at which other Latin American nations move towards what they regard as dignified partnership with the U.S.."[23]

Castro so worried the Organization of American States that they took the unprecedented action of expelling Cuba from their organization. This action, which occurred during a session convened in Punta del Este, Uruguay in January 1962, was unprecedented. It was the first time in OAS history the members were forced to turn on a fellow member-nation of similar origin for reasons based on individual rule.[24]

For many years Cuba had played an important economic role among OAS nations. Private investment in Cuba by the United States alone accounted for well over one billion dollars by 1958.[25] Cuba's chief economic export then, and still today, was sugar. The Cuban government relied quite heavily on this commodity for bringing in the needed capital to sustain their economic growth. It is not surprising that this primary export source would provide the final catalyst for ending U.S./Cuba trade relations and starting the friendship between Cuba and the U.S.S.R..

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23 Chang and Kornbluh, *Cuban*, 18.

24 Blight, et al., *Cuba*, 17.

25 Jorge Dominguez, *Cuba, Order and Revolution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts,: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press), 67.

Following Castro's decision to nationalize all foreign holdings on Cuba in 1960, the world that once traded with Cuba quickly turned against this island-state. By 1960, in response to Castro's nationalization policy, President Eisenhower cut sugar imports by ninety-five percent, thus diminishing the total amount of Cuban exports by eighty percent.[26] This incident triggered the alliance between Havana and Moscow which would eventually last for three full decades and lead to a polarization of past hemispheric partners. Castro turned to Moscow in a last ditch effort to stabilize the Cuban economy. The Soviets, seizing the opportunity to gain a friend so geographically close to the United States, quickly announced to the world that they would replace the United States as Cuba's primary trading partner. In addition to providing economic aid to Cuba, the Soviets welcomed Cuba into an economic partnership with other socialist states called the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA). With Cuba's acceptance into the CMEA came a complete severing of ties to all other free-market economies operating under the partnership of the OAS.

The Cuban and Soviet relationship actually transpired as a result of a visit by Khrushchev's close confidant and Presidium member, Anastas Mikoyan, who happened to be at the same time attempting to improve relations with Washington.[27] The visit, facilitated by Fidel Castro's brother Raul, proved to be most productive and was the most significant event leading up to the opening of diplomatic relations between the two

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[26] Blight, et al., *Cuba*, 460.

[27] Strobe Talbott ed., *Khrushchev Remembers* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1970), 489.

countries. While both Che Guevara and Raul Castro were staunch communists, Fidel was somewhat more reluctant to adopt a new but already established political platform.

Once Cuba abandoned her past partners in the Americas and the Caribbean she moved into untested waters with regard to self preservation. Never before, even when under Spanish rule, had Cuba been surrounded by so many unfriendly countries. The Soviets considered Castro to be an ideological brother in a hostile location. As the Soviet Union believed, "...the Cuban revolutionary stood as a dynamic, ideological contrast to the trade-and-aid emphasis of the Alliance for Progress that Kennedy offered Latin America."[28]

It is no surprise then that Castro was forced to adopt a plan of full transition to a Marxist/Leninist structure in order to gain the full support, and more to the point protection, of the Soviet Union. This, of course, leads to the question of how strong was Moscow's support for Cuba, and how far were they willing to go to protect this new found socialist state. Were the Soviets willing to risk a confrontation with the United States to defend the small island of Cuba, or were they only interested in using Cuba as a sort of trade-off for the similar actions of the United States in countries such as Turkey and East Germany? The answer to this question reveals the first critical miscalculation on the part of the United States in the Cuban Missile Crisis; that of correctly identifying the Soviet reason for wanting to emplace nuclear delivery systems on Cuba in 1962.

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[28] Gribkov and Smith, *Operation*, 90.

Nature of U.S.S.R. Intent

There are two entirely different facets of the problem of why the Soviets chose to emplace nuclear weapons on Cuba. On the one hand facts must be presented that show a stated Soviet concern over Cuba's defense. Secondly, there has to be shown proof that the Soviet stated objective is indeed plausible. An important source to help isolate the stated Soviet objective is to consider the testimony of those involved in the decision.

In his published memoirs, Nikita Khrushchev states that he and other members of the Presidium were concerned with keeping American troops off Cuban soil. Their first concern was not to use Cuba as a bargaining chip for Berlin or to project Soviet power at the U.S. doorstep as the Kennedy Executive Committee thought at the time.[29] Khrushchev pointed out that defending Cuba was his strategic goal and, along with a combination of tactical factors, proved to be important in the final deployment decision. He stated, "The main thing was that the installation of our missiles in Cuba would, I thought, restrain the United States from the precipitous military action against Castro's government. In addition to protecting Cuba, our missiles would have equalized what the West likes to call the balance of power. The Americans had surrounded our country with military bases and threatened us with nuclear weapons, and now they would learn just what it feels like to have enemy missiles pointing at you; we'd be doing nothing more than giving them a little of their own

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[29] Talbott, *Khrushchev*, 494.

medicine. And it was high time America learned what it feels like to have her own land and her own people threatened."[30]

Castro, too, seemed to echo Khrushchev's statement in that the number one priority for the emplacement of weapons of mass destruction was Cuba's defense - even though Castro seemed to be more impressed that the missiles would provide a means for attacking the United States if needed.[31] At the Havana conference, McNamara questioned Castro on the specifics of the military build-up on Cuba during the Fall of 1962. Castro contended that Khrushchev perhaps made an error in deciding to send strategic nuclear weapons as opposed to only tactical weapons. As Castro concluded, "I also think that if it was a matter of defending Cuba without creating an international problem, the presence of tactical weapons would not have created the same problem that the strategic weapons did. It couldn't have been said that tactical weapons in Cuba represented a threat to the United States."[32] Castro's statement emphasizes the defense notion while questioning the tactical value of the types of weapon systems eventually deployed to Cuba. Castro simply acknowledges potential international political ramifications certain choices would provoke in the context of defending Cuba. Again, like Khrushchev, Castro finished this statement by saying that "If the intent was simply to defend Cuba, a number of tactical weapons for the mechanized units would have been more

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30 Talbott, *Khrushchev,* 494.

31 Strobe Talbott ed., *Khrushchev remembers: The Last Testament* (Boston,: Little, Brown and Company, 1974), 177.

32 Blight et al., *Cuba*, 251.

practical.[33] Castro's choice of words in this statement reflect his understanding that in addition to protecting Cuba, the missiles would project Soviet power in the region. The statements made by Khrushchev and Castro share a common theme - that of defending Cuba being the primary strategic aim.

While both leaders talk about other benefits, both subordinate these benefits to defending Cuba. During the Havana conference, the debate over Soviet intent was heated. Those who argued that Khrushchev was only looking out for Cuba's defense supported their arguments with Khrushchev's memoirs that repeatedly state this. Others, like Soviet General Gribkov, speculate that Khrushchev was not only content to defend Cuba but, by virtue of this show of force, also expected to reap advantages in the ongoing disputes over Berlin and the arms race.[34]

Rising Tensions

Hostilities between the United States and Cuba increased when on 4 March 1960, a French merchant ship named the *La Coubre* unexplainably exploded in Havana harbor, causing a great number of casualties.[35] The ship was in the process of unloading very volatile explosives at the time of the explosion. While there has never been any evidence to back the Cuban claim, Castro immediately proclaimed that the United States was behind

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33 Blight et al., *Cuba*, 251.
34 Gribkov and Smith, *Operation*, 14.
35 Blight et al., *Cuba*, 16.

this incident, thus straining the already deteriorating relations between the Cuba and the United States. In all likelihood carelessness on the part of the Cuban stevedores was the reason for the loss of lives.[36] Nonetheless, Castro seized this opportunity to increase anti-American sentiment within Cuba. In a defiant anti-American speech that immediately followed the *La Coubre* incident, Castro called for the complete severance of ties with the United States and went as far as providing a slogan for the Cuban Revolution, "patria o muerte!" ("fatherland or death").[37] While this incident may not qualify as overwhelming evidence for Cuba's invasion phobia, it began a chain of events that produced by 1962 Cuba's fear of a U.S. attack.

The most convincing argument that Cuba was indeed fearful of a U.S. invasion centers on the Bay of Pigs debacle of April 1961, which occurred just some twenty months prior to the Cuban Missile Crisis. Following the Guatemalan success of 1954, President Eisenhower was convinced by the CIA to begin covert actions to oust Castro from power. Due to some poor U.S. intelligence, Eisenhower was convinced that Castro was an unpopular ruler who could be toppled quite easily. The problem with this assumption is that while in reality Castro may not have enjoyed total support shortly after Batista's overthrow, most Cubans preferred him over what would be perceived as a U.S. puppet government if Eisenhower installed a pro-American replacement government.[38]

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[36] Robert S. Thompson, *The Missiles of October* (New York,: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 95.

[37] Blight et al., *Cuba*, 16.

While it was Eisenhower who started the planning for the overthrow of Castro, it was President Kennedy who saw the operation to its conclusion. Eisenhower was convinced that a small, covert action would be more than sufficient to topple Castro. Richard Bissell, then the CIA's most highly regarded operations planner, on the other hand, was able to convince Kennedy upon taking office that a more aggressive action would be necessary to achieve success.[39] Bissell sent the Kennedy administration into a frenzy of decision making sessions to determine the specifics of the proposed action against Castro. The proposals went from a small-scale covert action, to a full-scale U.S. led invasion, back to a smaller covert action.[40] By the end, it is clear that Kennedy had misgivings about the eventual plan, but he went ahead with it based upon Bissell's recommendation along with the concurrence of all the top leaders in Kennedy's Executive Committee.[41]

Unfortunately for Kennedy, the concurrence of his advisors lacked one critical element - military expertise. In that respect, the White House staff had not relied heavily enough on the Pentagon during the planning stages of the operation. There was disagreement immediately following this debacle between the White House and the Pentagon leadership over CIA and military coordination. Although the Bay of Pigs created a rift between the military and President Kennedy, remedying this problem was

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38 David Detzer, *The Brink* (New York,: Thomas Y. Crowell, Publishers, 1979) 32.
39 Wills, *Kennedy*, 52.
40 Ibid.
41 Kennedy, *Thirteen*, 112.

probably the best lesson learned for Kennedy as a result of the Bay of Pigs. As General Maxwell Taylor, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, wrote in his memoirs about the Kennedy White House prior to his inclusion on the Executive Committee, "As an old military type, I was accustomed to the support of a highly professional staff trained to prepare careful analysis of issues in advance of decisions and to take meticulous care of classified information. I was shocked at the disorderly and careless ways of the new White House staff. There was little perceptible method in the assignment of duties within the staff, although I had to admit the work got done, largely through the individual initiative of its members. When important new problems arose, they were usually assigned to ad hoc task forces with members drawn from the White House staff and other departments."[42]

The fact that a competent group of advisors rose out of the of the Bay of Pigs failure, the ExComm, would not go unnoticed. Later, when the Cuban Missile Crisis reached its most critical point, Kennedy was quick to rely on the military perspective as well as the members of his White House staff that had proven themselves during the failed invasion. Although Kennedy was very cautious when considering a purely military point of view, he nonetheless recognized the importance of having military expertise when considering strategic and tactical courses of action.

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42 Wills, *Kennedy*, 54.

U.S. Policy in Cuba:

Bay of Pigs, "MONGOOSE", and Philbriglex-62.

The end result of the Bay of Pigs is well chronicled. It was a fiasco from the standpoint of the United States and their desire to rid the region of an anti-American regime. It sent a clear signal for the first time that Cuba was an important part of U.S. foreign policy. This was the turning point for Soviet foreign policy with regard to Cuba. As Khrushchev put it, "The invasion of Cuba [at the Bay of Pigs in 1961] was the work of aggressive American forces. Nobody believes that the invasion was paid for by the counterrevolutionary Cubans. No, it was supported by the aggressive forces of the United States and the taxpayers, who were not told about it. They were defeated. We knew that American monopolists would not rest until they crushed the revolutionary forces and ruled again in Cuba."[43]

From the Cuban standpoint, the Bay of Pigs marked an important stage in the evolution of Castro's new government. If Castro was earlier searching and struggling for ways to prove to the Cuban people that the Americans were evil and he was their savior, he found the fuel he wanted to fan the fires of anti-American sentiment in Cuba. After the Bay of Pigs, Cubans rallied behind Castro and supported his hatred of the capitalist west.

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[43] Jerrold Schecter and Vyacheslav Luchkov, *Khrushchev Remembers: The Glasnost Tapes* (Boston,: Little, Brown and Company, 1990), 172.

Following the Bay of Pigs, Kennedy was forced into a corner. He had to swallow a bitter pill in the failure of the guerilla led invasion, while at the same time displaying continued resolve against Castro. Ironically, while the Bay of Pigs strengthened Castro, it also proved to bring out the competitive nature of Kennedy and prompted him to formulate a new strategy to fight Castro.[44] The new strategy, code named "MONGOOSE", was designed to covertly and passively oust Castro from Cuba. On November 30, 1961, President Kennedy sent a memorandum to Secretary of State Dean Rusk which approved a plan to use American assets to overthrow Castro.[45] A program headed by CIA agent Theodore Shackley was set up on the campus of the University of Miami, which eventually had an annual budget of over fifty million dollars.[46]

The aim of operation MONGOOSE was spelled out by Brigadier General Edward Lansdale, an expert in counterinsurgency and guerilla operations. Lansdale, Kennedy's choice for the chief of this covert operation, outlined the long-term goals of operation MONGOOSE as follows: "In keeping with the spirit of the Presidential memorandum of 30 November 1961, the United States will help the people of Cuba overthrow the Communist from within Cuba and institute a new government with which the United States can live in peace."[47] Despite the enormous budget

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44 Detzer, *Brink*, 33.

45 Ibid., 34.

46 Ibid. - The program, which operated under the name of JM WAVE employed over three hundred Americans and several thousand Cubans. Its stated purpose was to sabotage Castro in an attempt to rid Cuba of a pro-communist regime.

47 Gribkov and Smith, *Operation*, 92.

and manpower that JM WAVE assumed, little was accomplished by this initiative prior to the Cuban Missile Crisis.

The Soviets were not aware of any specific covert actions, such as JM WAVE, by the United States to topple socialism on Cuba, instead they assumed the potential for U.S. aggression was a given. As Nikita Khrushchev stated, "I'm not saying we had any documentary proof that the Americans were preparing a second invasion; we didn't need documentary proof. We knew the class affiliation, the class blindness, of the United States, and that was enough to make us expect the worst."[48]

Operation MONGOOSE did succeed in landing some eleven Cuban guerilla teams whose purpose was to disrupt the everyday running of Cuban industry. The teams were specifically instructed to target such areas as bridges, communication links, production plants, sugar mills, oil facilities, and any other targets that could potentially affect Cuban commerce.[49] Lansdale believed that by disrupting any economic stability Cuba had achieved by the end of the Cuban revolution, the United States stood a reasonably high chance of succeeding in displacing Castro. This all seems to make perfect foreign policy sense, yet, as Sergo Mikoyan, a Latin-American specialist and the son of politburo member Anastas Mikoyan, stated in 1988 there really was no reason to go directly after Castro because if assassinated Castro would have surely been followed by the ever-popular Che Guevera. Instead, Mikoyan correctly identified the

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[48] Talbott, *Last Testament*, 511.

[49] James A. Nathan ed., *The Cuban Missile Crisis Revisited* (New York,: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 189.

real possibility following a Castro assassination as having been a follow-on invasion by the United States. This assumption further demonstrates the fear both the Cubans and Soviets felt for a potential U.S. led invasion.

In yet another example of provocative aggression, the United States publicly announced a plan for a large-scale military exercise, called Philbriglex-62, to take place close to Cuba sometime in the fall of 1962. The scenario called for the deployment of some 7,500 marines, four aircraft carriers, twenty destroyers, and finally fifteen troop carriers designed for transporting ground troops from ships to shore. This massive operation had the proclaimed purpose of simulating an invasionary overthrow of a ruthless dictator on the fictitious island of Vieques. Interestingly, the Pentagon was not only overly helpful in their disclosure of the details of this operation to the media, they were also more than friendly when they disclosed the name of the fictitious dictator as Ortsac - which spelled backwards is of course Castro.[50]

With the fear of invasion came an almost frantic chain of events by Cuba to discourage such a possibility. As Khrushchev recounted his feelings just before the failed Bay of Pigs operation, "...there were no longer any forces left which could be organized to fight on America's behalf in Cuba. That left only one alternative - invasion! The Cubans asked us for arms. We gave them tanks and artillery and sent them instructors. In addition we sent them antiaircraft guns and some fighter

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[50] Graham Allison, *Essence of decision, Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston,: Little, Brown and Company, 1971), 47.

planes."[51]

He further backed the contention that the Soviet's true concern was for defending their newfound socialist brother when he stated that after the failed invasion, "After Castro's crushing victory over the counterrevolutionaries, we intensified our military aid to Cuba. We gave them as many arms as they could absorb...The United States had put its faith in the Cuban emigres once and it would do so again."[52] Robert McNamara supported the notion that actions by the United States leading up to the Cuban Missile Crisis were provocative. During an address to a number of high level Cuban and Soviet officials at the Havana conference, McNamara stated that because of the Bay of Pigs, the numerous clandestine operations against Castro that followed, and overtly aggressive rhetoric coming out of Washington at the time, he too would have been convinced that an invasion was imminent.[53] This revelation by Mr. McNamara is significant when trying to depict the general attitude of the American policy makers during the crisis. As previously stated McNamara was a key figure in the ExComm task force which was formed to deal with the Soviet action. For him to admit that at the time of the crisis he, along with the other members of the ExComm, were somewhat short-sighted in their assumptions is extremely pertinent. There seems to be sufficient evidence to back the Soviet and Cuban claim of a defense strategy in Cuba given the overtly aggressive actions by the U.S., and the fact that the Kennedy

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51 Talbott, *Khrushchev,* 491-492.

52 Ibid.

53 Blight, et al., *Cuba*, 42.

strategists concentrated on Soviet nuclear aggression. During two meetings that occurred in the Oval Office on 16 October 1962, McNamara was key in developing the notion that the Soviet military buildup in Cuba, both in terms of non-nuclear support and nuclear missiles, was strictly an overt display of aggression on the part of the U.S.S.R.. During one of the exchanges he remarked that a statement must be immediately sent to Khrushchev stating that "...we have located these offensive weapons." [54]

On an equally important note, McNamara also stated at the Havana Conference that while the appearance of invasion was there, the United States had no plans to go forward with any invasion, already planned or otherwise.[55] This fact was of course lost on the Cuban and Soviet leaders at the time of the crisis who had no other information to work with other than that which pointed toward an imminent invasion. After all, even U.S. documents show that the Soviets were correct in identifying Kennedy's emphasis on ousting Castro and changing Cuba's government.[56] With a hostile, great power located only ninety miles off Cuba's shores, it is not only plausible that Castro felt the impending doom of a possible U.S. invasion, but probable. These events fully shaped Soviet policy concerning Cuba and influenced the eventual decision to send nuclear weapons to the island.[57]

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[54] Chang and Kornbluh, *Cuban,* 111.

[55] Robert McNamara, "The Lessons of October." *Newsweek*, (13 November 1989), 47.

[56] During the months leading up to the Cuban Missile Crisis, Kennedy was briefed almost daily on the Cuban situation. He was also sent a number of memorandums and action plans dealing with possible solutions to overthrowing the Castro regime. Chang and Kornbluh, *Cuban*, 16-75.

Global Balance vs. Socialist Protectionism

While it is true that both Cuba and the Soviet Union were concerned about the defense of the Cuban homeland, a second reason for the missiles was the Soviet desire to project a powerful presence in the Caribbean region. This is not entirely the same as equalling the global balance of forces, as was suspected by the Kennedy administration. Instead, the Soviets were determined not to let the United States intimidate other countries in the region into refraining from adopting a socialist government. The U.S.S.R. was instead pursuing a much more focused foreign policy, while the U.S. was blaming them for having much larger scale goals. In his memoir, Khrushchev recalled the underlying reason for considering the missile option was, "If Cuba fell, other Latin American countries would reject us, claiming that for all our might the Soviet Union hadn't been able to do anything for Cuba except to make empty protests to the United Nations. We had to think up some way of confronting America with more than words. We had to establish a tangible and effective deterrent to American interference in the Caribbean. But what exactly? the logical answer was missiles."[58] In this statement, Khrushchev raises his concern over how the Soviet Union would be viewed by other countries as compared to the U.S.. In this respect, it was of great importance to the Soviets not to challenge their super-power rival, but rather unwaveringly

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57 Schecter, *Glasnost*, 172.

58 Talbott, *Khrushchev*, 493.

stand behind their foreign policy actions and not allow other countries to perceive the U.S.S.R. as second rate in any area.

All this leads to the confusion that while the Kennedy administration dealt with the Soviet military involvement in Cuba as simply communist aggression, due in large part to the presence of nuclear weapons, there were other key factors which were overlooked in the process. Kennedy treated Soviet military involvement and Soviet aggression as being one-in-the-same. This is not a rational approach and could have gone against the U.S.. Khrushchev wanted to defend Cuba, but not at the expense of mobilizing a major portion of the military and deploying them some 11,000 miles from Russia. Aside from the obvious security risks involved in deploying such a large force, Khrushchev was also concerned about the tremendous burden it would place on the Soviet economy.[59] For the Soviets, nuclear weapons proved to be a less expensive, more powerful option than a conventional deployment.

Aside from their stated goal of defending Cuba, the Soviet Union did stand to gain much from having missile locations in the Caribbean. Judging by the recently declassified transcripts from ExComm meetings during the crisis, the comments made by the Cuban and Soviet contingents during the five historical conferences, and most importantly the aspects of U.S. overt aggression leading up to the crisis as outlined by Robert McNamara, Kennedy clearly considered the overall military support, not just nuclear missiles but rather all military support, by the Soviet Union as

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[59] Talbott, *Last Testament*, 512.

being aggressive. This evaluation was much too simplistic and lacked clear understanding of the situation.

The notion among many Americans, including the Kennedy administration, was that Khrushchev's decision to base intermediate range ballistic missiles (IRBMs) on Cuba was meant solely to project Soviet power in the Western Hemisphere. Kennedy refused to entertain the notion that the Soviets could have any reason for the missiles (equipped with nuclear warheads) other than offensive because earlier he had defined ground-to-ground missiles as "offensive", and after saying offensive weapons against the U.S. could not be tolerated he found it difficult to go back on this definition.[60] In an ironic twist, had Kennedy's "chest-pounding" waited another month or so, the entire crisis would have possibly been averted. The ExComm was adamant in their belief that the U.S. held the upper hand in nuclear superiority. Neither they, nor Kennedy, were anxious to start a war with the Soviet Union and would have more than likely accepted some sort of compromise with the U.S.S.R. had the "line in the sand" not already been drawn. During an ExComm meeting on 16 October 1962, Kennedy stated that with hindsight he should have implied to the Soviets a month earlier that the United States did not care about Soviet missiles on Cuba, but once the statement was made there was no turning back.[61]

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60 Wills, *Kennedy*, 57.

61 Chang and Kornbluh, *Cuba*, 103.

In attempting to explain the administration's stance, Theodore Sorenson stated, "Let me say that the line between offensive and defensive weapons was drawn in September, and it was not drawn in a way which was intended to leave the Soviets any ambiguity to play with. I believe the president drew the line precisely where he thought the Soviets were not and would not be; that is to say, if we had known that the Soviets were putting 40 missiles in Cuba, we might under this hypothesis have drawn the line at 100, and said with great fanfare that we would absolutely not tolerate the presence of more than 100 missiles in Cuba. I say that believing very strongly that would have been an act of *prudence*, not weakness. But I am suggesting that one reason the line was drawn at zero was because we simply thought the Soviets weren't going to deploy any there anyway."[62]

Historians as recently as this year have held to the premise of strategic gain being the reason for the Soviet deployment. According to historian Tom Morganthau, both sides knew that the U.S. was far superior to the Soviets in all aspects of nuclear ability, and therefore Khrushchev's gambit was strictly strategic.[63] In this interpretation, Cuba is made out to be a mere pawn of the Soviet Union - - just a strategic locale for the U.S.S.R.. Khrushchev, after all, had to contend with U.S. Jupiter nuclear weapons in Turkey and Italy which were located right on the doorstep of mother Russia and pointed provocatively toward unnamed targets located

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62 Blight et al., *Essence*, 181.

63 Tom Morganthau, "At the Brink of Disaster." *Newsweek* (26 October 1992), 36.

deep within her borders, and a policy that could turn the tables on the U.S. was very attractive. This interpretation, no doubt fueled by the fear of the red tide sweeping across the planet, not only won support of the American public at large, but was the premise by which the Kennedy administration developed their strategy to combat the Soviet missile deployment.

During the five oral history conferences, this interpretation has come under fire. It is clear from Castro's comments that placing missiles in Cuba was meant to secure Cuba from the U.S. threat, with a subsequent, and lesser, purpose of equalizing global nuclear advantage the U.S. may have achieved over the preceding decade.[64] While Cuba was a geographically important location, the Soviets were also guided by a sense of solidarity toward their newfound political brethren.[65]

It is important to understand that although the crisis is most often viewed as an East-West confrontation, it did involve Cuba and Cuban views toward perceived U.S. aggression did impact on Soviet decision making. As Fidel Castro is the only living head of state involved in the Cuban Missile Crisis, his input in the discussion about Soviet intent helped to pave the way to a clearer understanding of this complex issue. During the Havana conference, Fidel Castro gave his audience an explanation of exactly how the idea of a Soviet nuclear deployment came about. His

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[64] U.S. analysts now believe the Soviets had no more than 44 operational intercontinental missiles and 155 long-range bombers in 1962 - while the U.S. had 156 ICBMs, 144 sub-launched Polaris missiles and 1,300 strategic bombers. Morganthau, *Brink*, 36.

[65] Stanislav Kondrashov, "Looking Back at the Cuban Missile Crisis", *Soviet Life*, (August 1989), 21.

explanation, assuming it truly reflects his attitude at the time of the crisis, points to his concern over the protection of Cuba, and at the same time provides evidence that he understood that the missiles and Soviet military support were two entirely different issues. As Castro stated in May 1962, a Soviet diplomat, Sharaf Rashidov, came to meet with Castro in Havana. The topic of Cuban protection surfaced and Castro was asked directly by Rashidov what could be done to help Cuba. Castro responded by saying, "Well, if the United States knows that an invasion of Cuba would imply war with the Soviet Union, then, in my view, that would be the best way to prevent an invasion of Cuba."[66] Castro understood that the U.S. would never go through with any plans to invade Cuba as long as the Soviets stood in the way, either by conventional forces or nuclear arms.

Conventional or Unconventional Measures

The obvious question arises that if Cuba and the Soviet Union were only concerned with defense, how then did the nuclear missiles enter the picture? For this question, Castro, with Russian corroboration, set the record straight. During the Havana Conference of 1992, he elaborated at great length about a series of discussions he had with a Soviet delegation headed by Mr. Rashidov during the Spring of 1962. These discussions are what led to the Soviets asking Cuba for approval to send the nuclear warheads. As one expert on the Cuban Missile Crisis pointed out during

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[66] Blight, et al., *Cuba*, 197.

the Havana Conference, Cuba understood the missile support would both defend them and provide a good way to strengthen the camp of socialism in the global force structure, thereby facilitating a bit of governmental self-preservation in the process.[67] Castro, after all, understood that a mere Soviet presence would cause the U.S. to think twice before making a decision to invade.

Additional corroboration in favor of the Soviet defensive strategy in Cuba came from another very prominent Soviet official, Oleg Troyanovsky who, during the crisis, was a junior advisor to Khrushchev for foreign matters.[68] As was the case with many other conference participants from all three contingents, Mr. Troyanovsky called into question the accuracy of the United States' assertion that the missiles were a clever Soviet ploy to begin the dominoes toppling in Latin America and the Caribbean. He maintained that the reason behind the missile deployment was first and foremost defense. At the conference, Mr. Troyanovsky stated that his government had numerous reasons to believe that Cuba was ripe for a second U.S. backed (or led) invasion, and that it was for this reason that the actual nuclear option was first formulated.[69]

Only a handful of the most prominent Soviet officials were introduced to Khrushchev's initial plans, and those that came about the information via other sources, namely hearsay and innuendo, were taken

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67 Raymond Garthoff, "The Havana Conference On the Cuban Missile Crisis." *Cold War International History Project Bulletin 1* (Spring 1992), 2.

68 Gribkov and Smith, *Operation*, 164.

69 Blight et al., *Cuba*, 70-72.

aback by how far Khrushchev was about to escalate the potential for superpower conflict. As Troyanovsky said, "Even though I was familiar with all the information that Khrushchev received on foreign policy, I did not immediately find out his intention to deploy nuclear missiles to Cuba...I was definitely taken aback with this information, because being somewhat knowledgeable of U.S. affairs, and realizing the importance of such a step, I knew this would entail serious consequences."[70] The defense of Cuba was very important to Nikita Khrushchev. Though it seems likely he did not intend to risk Soviet security for the defense of Cuba, Khrushchev was willing to gamble that his actions would suppress U.S. aggression toward Cuba. At the same time, the obvious benefit of having a nuclear outpost at the doorstep of the enemy did not escape Khrushchev.

ExComm Split

President Kennedy and his ExComm, while assuming once again that the missiles were offensive in nature, down-played the danger of the weapons themselves. He concentrated his policy regarding Cuba on the belief that the maintenance of credibility within the OAS depended on a strong U.S. response to the missiles. Kennedy's real concern was that following the Bay of Pigs, his perceived ability to project U.S. power and stability in the region had been reduced. Kennedy understood the importance of making a bold stand on this issue, and he also understood

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[70] Blight et al., *Cuba*, 72.

the need to emphasize that the U.S. was a member of the OAS "team". Had Kennedy pushed the OAS into believing the Soviet intent was anything other than aggression, he would not have been as successful in garnishing the eventual support he received. Kennedy continually referred to OAS representation in the resolution of the crisis and at one point he had his special counsel, Theodore Sorenson, draft a list of potential courses of action in handling the crisis, stipulating in all that certain Latin nations would be notified in the event of any military solution to the crisis.[71]

Many on Kennedy's staff did not see the missiles as altering the balance of power. This led to a split within the ExComm based on how strongly they perceived the need to counter any Soviet aggression in Cuba. The split created two groups commonly referred to as the "hawks" who were in the minority and supported aggressive military action to counter the Soviets, and the "doves" who wanted a more guarded opposition based on their belief that Soviet missiles in Cuba would not greatly alter the United States' nuclear superiority. A third group dubbed the "owls" developed out of the aforementioned groups. It was this group that would eventually capture the attention of the president. The owls believed, as did the hawks, that the U.S. definitely held the upper hand in the nuclear arena. Similar to the doves, they thought that the risk of stumbling into nuclear war was a risk that had to be avoided at all cost.[72] Robert McNamara reflected the position of this group when he stated, "The

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71 Chang and Kornbluh, *Cuban*, 114.

72 Blight et al., *Cuban*, 176.

possibility of what I call blundering into disaster preoccupied me during the crisis, not the alleged *probability* of this or that event. What the missile crisis impressed upon me was that, yes, we *could* stumble into nuclear war; that such an event, however limited, was totally unacceptable; and thus that it must be avoided."[73] In essence, the owls were a compromise between the hawks and doves and proved to be increasingly popular as the conflict progressed. While the owls were adamant in their concern over escalation, they were at the same time staunch in their support for increasing the pressure gradually on the Soviet Union, thus allowing them an opportunity to gracefully back out of the situation without losing too much credibility.

Of the three groups, the hawks were certainly the most significant in terms of using nationalistic fervor to increase conflict potential. While the doves contended that some forty nuclear missiles in Cuba could not possibly alter the balance of power, the hawks rebutted by stating that the location of these medium range missiles (Soviet SS-4s and SS-5s) was extremely important to national security. According to the hawks, the Soviets could only expect to destroy a tiny fraction of U.S. strategic forces via long range missiles located on Soviet soil prior to the crisis, but once the forty missiles were in place on Cuba, they could expect to damage or destroy as much as forty percent of the Strategic Air Command bomber force.[74] While the hawks harped on the point that the missiles were a

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73 Blight et al, *Cuban*, 177.

74 Ibid., 176.

threat, they vehemently maintained that the only way to deter this threat was to use the threat of superior weaponry to intimidate the enemy. The hawks did not believe there was any risk of the Soviets retaliating. In fact, to the hawks it was just a question of how long it would take for the enemy to capitulate. During the Hawk's Cay conference, an exchange between the "hawkish" General Maxwell Taylor and Richard Neustadt provides an accurate depiction of how the hawks perceived the Soviet threat:

"Neustadt: Was [the final] outcome [of the crisis] unexpected to you?

Taylor: I was so sure we had 'em over a barrel, I never worried much about the final outcome, but what things might happen in between.

Neustadt: he outcome to which I am referring is Khrushchev's acceptance of our...

Taylor: Well at some time he had to accept. I never expected it on that particular day.

Neustadt: Okay, you thought it was going to go a while longer...

Taylor: Unless he was crazy and full of vodka. But I assumed his colleagues in Moscow would take care of him.

Neustadt: You have written in your retrospective in *The Washington Post* on October 5, '82, as I remember - the 20th year - that you don't recall any concern about the strategic balance, or any fear of nuclear exchange in this whole period. Now some of the civilians do recall worries about the time of that second Saturday; worries that really run to

two or three steps up the ladder of escalation. The Soviets don't accept our demand; there follows an airstrike; the Soviets then feel impelled to strike the missiles in Turkey; the Turks call on NATO for support; we feel we have to do something in Europe; the Soviets then launch a nuclear exchange - something like that was in some of their minds. I take it not in yours?

Taylor: They never expressed it to a military ear, I'll say that.

Neustadt: That's interesting.

Taylor: Not at all. It's the nature of some people [that] if they can't have a legitimate worry, they create them. Apparently they had some of that in the group you're speaking of.

Neustadt: In your mind, there was no legitimacy in this worry?

Taylor: Not the slightest."[75]

It is possible to say that while the hawks, owls, and doves had differing opinions about the crisis management aspect of the missile situation, they all were linked by their beliefs that the crisis was born as a result of the U.S.S.R.s inferiority in their nuclear arsenal, and that the crisis was an attempt by Khrushchev, through a new and aggressive strategy, to project a false power throughout the region and the world. President Kennedy's special counsel, Theodore Sorenson, best summarized the overall administration's view when, on 17 October 1962, he wrote, "It is generally agreed that these missiles, when fully operational, do not significantly alter the balance of power - i.e., they do not significantly

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[75] Blight et al., *Cuban*, 174.

increase the megatonnage capable of being unleashed on American soil, even after a surprise American nuclear strike."[76] However, as stated previously, there were also U.S. concerns over world perception in answering the Soviets.

A major importance of the missiles, actually the nuclear warheads for the missiles, was the possibility they presented for further Soviet influence through power projection within the Latin American region. Secretary of the Treasury Douglas Dillon wrote in a memorandum for President Kennedy that he saw the missiles as a deliberate public trial for the United States on how they intended to act in future world matters. He went on to write that unless the U.S. stood its ground and resisted an incursion by the Soviet Union, all of Latin America would soon fall to communism because the will to resist the communist propaganda would deteriorate.[77] Further emphasizing this idea, a Central Intelligence Agency document outlining the major consequences of certain U.S. courses of action on Cuba further demonstrated the general belief that Soviet aggression was an assumption the U.S. had to accept in dealing with the missile situation. In this document, written on 20 October 1962, the CIA incorrectly warned that the Soviets were aware that the world balance of forces had shifted so far in their favor that there was no stopping their movement into the U.S.'s region of influence. It went on to state that if they were not stopped immediately, the Soviet intrusion into Latin America

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[76] Chang and Kornbluh, *Cuban*, 114.

[77] Ibid., 116.

would be decisive and unstoppable, and that pro-communist as well as anti-American camps throughout the region would potentially gain a tremendous credibility boost in their countries.[78]

In yet another example of how the Kennedy administration disregarded the possibility of the Soviets helping defend Cuba, the ExComm looked toward the East to bolster their ideas. While struggling to correctly identify Soviet intent ExComm explanations ranged from the Soviet desire to counter U.S. Jupiter missiles in Turkey, to the Soviets using Cuba as a bargaining tool to gain full control over Berlin, to an assertion that the missiles were an attempt to solidify Soviet leadership in the emerging rivalry with China.[79] Early ExComm deliberations over Soviet intent touched upon numerous possibilities without ever advancing the defense option. An example of this is seen in the transcript of the first ExComm meeting on 16 October 1962. In one section of the transcript, the question of Soviet intent is bounced back and forth by ExComm members without anyone ever raising the possibility of real Cuban concern over U.S. invasion. As Dean Rusk says in reaction to the idea that Khrushchev is using Cuba to get back at the U.S. for their stationing Jupiter missiles in Turkey, "...Khrushchev may feel that it's important for us to learn about living under medium-range missiles, and he's doing that sort of balance that political, psychological (prank?). I think also that, uh, Berlin is, uh, very much involved in this. Uhm, for the first time, I'm beginning to

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78 Chang and Kornbluh, *Cuban*, 137-138.

79 Joseph Nye Jr., "Cuban Graffiti." *The New Republic*, (13 March 1989), 17.

wonder whether maybe Mr. Khrushchev is entirely rational about Berlin. We've (hardly?) talked about this obsession with it. And I think we have to, uh, keep our eye on that element. But, uh, they may be thinking that they can either bargain Berlin or Cuba against each other, or that they could provoke us into a kind of action in Cuba which would give an umbrella for them to take action with respect to Berlin. In other words, like the Suez-Hungary combination."[80] Clearly, from this point in the crisis all the way to the end of it, the Kennedy administration never gave any serious consideration to the defense theory. In essence, by factoring out this notion, the U.S. chose to go to battle only half-armed.

Escalation

If it is true that the primary Soviet motive for the missile support was to keep the U.S. out of Cuba, how would a misconception of Soviet intent by the Americans prove that the world was very close to nuclear war during the 1962 missile crisis? A simple way of explaining this is to examine the contingency plans of the United States and U.S.S.R.. Unlike Secretary Dean Rusk's post-crisis statement that, "the other fellow just blinked,"[81] the conflict was never as simple as bullying the foe into submission.

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80 Chang and Kornbluh, *Cuban*, 93.

81 Morganthau, *Brink*, 36.

On the Soviet side, the basic contingency plan for defending against U.S. aggression against Soviet forces on Cuba was to resist an American attack categorically.[82] Following the Havana conference, the debate over nuclear launch authority continues. Much of the testimony from Soviet officers backs the contention that local commanders did not have permission from Moscow to use nuclear weapons at their discretion. Instead, Moscow chose to decide when and where the missiles would be used. This is much more in line with a very centralized control structure, which the Soviets are known to have used before. While there continues to be debate on whether using nuclear weapons were an option for Soviet commanders on Cuba, the fact remains that Moscow was firm in its desire to defend and protect its forces on Cuba. If the Soviets were willing to escalate the crisis to a military confrontation based on this contingency, it is reasonable to assume that escalation could have occurred had the U.S. provoked the Soviets.

There are numerous tell-tale signs that telegraph an invasion by an opposing force. Pre-invasionary plans normally call for surgical airstrikes to cut and disorganize the enemy's lines of communication, logistical support, and defenses. With that in mind, the Soviets would have undoubtedly viewed airstrikes against their forces as provocative. As Castro saw the situation, the U-2 overflights as well as the low-level reconnaissance aircraft were a prelude to an impending U.S. attack.[83] To

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82 Morganthau, *Brink*, 39.

83 Blight et al., *Cuba*, 103.

this day the mere mention of the almost constant U.S. aerial reconnaissance that took place during the crisis is enough to send Cubans ducking for overhead cover.[84]

The essence of initial U.S. planning for the missile crisis encompassed military action. Even before the ExComm found itself split into groups labeled hawks, owls, and doves, the initial consensus was that a military attack, namely tactical airstrikes, was necessary to end the conflict. President Kennedy's initial reaction, which was shared by the majority within the ExComm, was to attempt some sort of air attack on the newly constructed missile sights. The only question during the earliest hours of the conflict seemed to be the timing of the airstrikes. As Kennedy stated during the first ExComm meeting, "we're going to take out these, uh, missiles....At least we're going to do that, so it seems to me we don't have to wait very long. We ought to be making those preparations."[85] This indicates that the United States was within days, if not hours, of organizing preemptive strikes against the Soviet missile sights. In a recently de-classified document submitted to the president by General Maxwell Taylor, the details of several military actions were written and planned several days into the crisis. In this Joint Chiefs of Staff Memorandum (JCSM) 821-62, Taylor outlined five courses of action for the president and the ExComm. The possible actions were:

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84 Blight et al., *Cuba*, 102.

85 Chang and Kornbluh, *Cuban*, 78.

a. "Low-level reconnaissance of selected targets. Reaction Time - 2 hours.

b. Reprisal strike to hit single SA-2 sites. Reaction Time - 2 hours.

c. Air strike against all SA-2 sites. Reaction Time - 2 hours (contingent on maintenance of present posture).

d. Full air strike. Reaction Time - 12 hours. (CINCLANT OPLAN 312).

e. Implement CINCLANT OPLAN 316. Reaction Time - Initial assault, Decision Day + 7 days. All assault and essential support forces ashore by decision day + 18 days, perhaps somewhat earlier."[86]

While the air strike options are self-explanatory, more detail is required for the OPLAN courses. The three OPLANs, 312, 314, and 316, all concerned some degree of bombing. OPLAN 312 required an unlimited bombing campaign with the ultimate aim of forcing Castro and the Soviets to the bargaining table. OPLAN 314 called for 18 days of bombing followed by an invasion and subsequent removal of Castro and his government. The final OPLAN option, 316, was an abbreviated or quick-reaction variant of OPLAN 314. It called for five days of continuos bombing followed by an invasion and removal of Castro.[87] Interestingly enough, the idea of a quarantine or blockade was proposed by General Taylor simply as a sub-mission to aid in one of the invasion plans.[88]

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86 Chang and Kornbluh, *Cuban*, 174.

87 Morganthau, *Brink*, 39.

88 Brian Dooley, "The Cuban Missile Crisis - 30 Years On." *History Today*,

As early as 17 October 1962, Kennedy requested written recommendations by his key ExComm members asking for their approval or disapproval for the airstrike option.[89] Not asking the members to consider any of the other four options at that point shows that his inclination at the time was to favor airstrike as a front-running course of action. The only reason Kennedy did not immediately approve the airstrike option was because of the U.S. Air Forces' insistence that any airstrike would have to be massive rather than "surgical", and that at best such a massive airstrike could only be sure of eliminating approximately ninety percent of the missile locations.[90] Had the prognosis for success been closer to one hundred percent, and had the Air Force not insisted that "surgical" airstrikes would have to give way to "massive" ones to raise the odds, the president would have probably opted for the non-invasionary, airstrike option.[91]

With the Soviets determined to defend against airstrikes, it seems plausible that had the United States acted upon their first instinct to neutralize the missile sights, based upon the notion that Soviet intent was not linked to Cuba's defense, and had the Soviets reacted by doing everything within their power to combat the attacks as their contingency

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(October 1992), 7.

89 Reactions were generally split. Examples are Secretary of the Treasury Douglas Dillon who supported airstikes for "the survival of our nation", and Under Secretary of State George W. Ball who supported a blockade instead of airstrike so that the U.S. would not be "destroying our moral position." Chang and Kornbluh, *Cuban*, 116-122.

90 Chang and Kornbluh, *Cuban*, 79.

91 McGeorge Bundy, *Danger and Survival: Choices About the Bomb in the First Fifty Years* (New York: Random House, 1988), 398.

instructions spelled-out, escalation would have almost certainly occurred. This chain of events would have led the world down a path of potential destruction based on President Kennedy's 22 October 1962 speech which stated that, "It shall be the policy of this nation to regard any nuclear missile launched from Cuba against any nation in the Western hemisphere as an attack by the Soviet Union on the United States, requiring a full retaliatory response upon the Soviet Union."[92] From that day forth, Kennedy had to stand his ground and he adopted a hard-line strategy of "shoot 'em out, squeeze 'em out, or buy 'em out."[93]

The fact that the U.S. failed to properly determine the primary Soviet goal in emplacing nuclear weapons on Cuba, yet was still able to prevent an escalation of the conflict based on an "eleventh hour" decision not to continue plans for airstrikes, does not excuse the United States from a messy handling of the intent question. Had circumstances been slightly different, or had the Kennedy administration not chosen to reevaluate a first-strike policy, the events of October 1962 could have ended much differently. The United States must assume blame for leading the world to the brink of nuclear confrontation.

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[92] Peter Rodman, "The Missiles of October: Twenty Years Later." *Commentary*, (October 1982), 40.

[93] Nye, *Cuban*, 17..

CHAPTER 3

PRIORITY INFORMATION REQUIREMENTS

The primary problem confronting the United States in developing a clear picture of the exact military situation on Cuba was that of real-time priority information requirement (PIR) gathering. The U.S. had not predicted the missile deployment in advance and were scrambling to gain information as soon as it was discovered. The difficulty in getting the information was that the deployment was not at all a typical operation for the Soviets. The Soviets planned their deployment operation to be covert, but were not at all concerned over the possibility of U.S. detection. They were sending the missiles to Cuba for defense purposes and were prepared to defend their actions if discovered.[94] The reason for any secrecy at all can be best understood when into account the high state of Cold War tension at the time.

The political situation was so volatile that the normal time lapse in a standard military operation between intelligence gathering, data recovery, analysis, operational planning, and military action was condensed into some thirteen days, between 16 October and 28 October 1962. The United States attempted to retrieve as much intelligence information as possible

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[94] Schecter, *Glasnost*, 172.

through aerial reconnaissance to further clarify the picture. U2 sorties were flown almost non-stop, and low level reconnaissance missions continually buzzed the island at an altitude of under two hundred feet. Castro himself addressed the provocative nature of the U.S. overflights when he stated that the almost constant U2 overflights and the ever increasing low-level flights convinced all in Cuba that the U.S. invasion was beginning.[95] It is clear that the United States was forced to rely on these flights to further develop their understanding of the situation. It is interesting to note that although the U.S. had no personnel directly involved in spying at the time of the crisis who could provide useful information with regard to Cuba,[96] depriving them of "hard" intelligence, the U2 photographic imaging was so clear it was as if the U.S. had a photographer on Cuban soil. At times, depending on the weather, the photo analyzers could clearly see minute details such as palm leaves on trees, or guards smoking cigarettes while on duty.

The interesting point to make about relying on photographs as the primary means of intelligence interpretation is that while they are helpful, there is the problem of corroborating the data, which in turn means that the photos oftentimes did not tell the whole story. An example of this is that at one point, while showing the president proof of missiles and launchers

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95 Blight, et al., *Cuba,* 107.

96 There are historians, in particular Peter Deriabin and Jerrold Schecter, who argue that Colonel Oleg Penkovsky, a Soviet intelligence officer during the crisis and also a U.S. spy, provided invaluable information concerning nuclear capabilities. See, Schecter, Jerrold L., and P.S. Deriabin. *The Spy Who Saved the World: How a Soviet Colonel Changed the Course of the Cold War.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1992.

on Cuba, Arthur Lundahl, the Director of the National Photographic Interpretation Center, was able to convince the President that one of the missile sites located in west central Cuba on the southern edge of Sierra del Rosario did not have any fencing surrounding it.[97] This led the Kennedy staff to conclude that there were no nuclear warheads at that location, because had there been it would have obviously have had better security. As was later revealed, many of these sights were guarded by Soviet soldiers equipped with mobile launchers capable of nuclear strike. There were nuclear weapons at the ready around the clock.

Early intelligence estimates by the U.S. concerning the table of organization and equipment (TOE), the organizational template of the enemy and equipment, on Cuba as of 20 October were as follows:

* 16 launchers (already operational) for medium range ballistic missiles (MRBMs) with a standard range of 1,100 nautical miles.

* 4 fixed launchers (not yet operational) for IRBMs with a standard range of 2,200 nautical miles.

* 22 IL-28 jet light bombers, of which one was assembled and three others had been uncrated.

* 39 MIG-21 jet fighters, of which 35 were assembled and four were still in crates. (There were also some 62 other jet fighters of lesser technical advancement).

* 24 SA-2 sites, of which 16 were believed to be individually operational with some missiles on launchers.

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[97] Chang and Kornbluh, *Cuban,* 86.

* 3 cruise missile sites for coastal defense, of which 2 were operational.

* 12 Komar cruise missile patrol boats, all presumed operational.[98]

Though these numbers are at times disputed by scholars, such as by Raymond Garthoff who over-estimates the number of launchers identified by the U.S.,[99] the point remains that the majority of equipment was correctly identified. The main flaw in the data regarding nuclear capable launchers was that there was never any mention of mobile launchers. As stated previously, the assumption, based on photos showing no fencing around several launch sites, that the Soviet nuclear missiles were not yet at those sights was incorrect. As General Gribkov, a key military planner during the crisis, stated at the Havana Conference, along with the thirty-six already confirmed IRBM nuclear launchers on Cuban soil, there were six mobile missile launchers potentially equipped with nine nuclear warheads.[100] The lack of precise information did not cause earth shattering diplomatic consequences since once the U.S. assumed there was already one nuclear missile on Cuba, any increase to that number became nothing more than a tactical consideration.

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98 Chang and Kornbluh, *Cuban Missile Crisis,* 135-136.

99 Garthoff seems to confuse the U.S. intelligence estimate with the actual Soviet task organization which was released by General Gribkov at the Havana Conference. Garthoff, *Havana*, 2.

100 Ibid.

Soviet Conventional Forces

What was of significant political importance that the U.S. intelligence community failed to adequately recognize was the number and force structure of the Soviet ground contingent on Cuba during the crisis. This was a critical mistake which helped to mislead the U.S. into thinking that Soviet aggression was the purpose for the considerable force build-up on Cuba. While concentrating on the missiles, intelligence analysts missed the fact that there was a combined arms force massing on Cuban soil. It was assumed early on that the Soviet soldiers on Cuba were meant to protect and operate the launchers. The CIA estimated that the entire Soviet contingent on Cuba throughout the crisis was somewhere in the area of 20,000. The exact build-up of conventional forces as analyzed by the CIA went as follows: 4,500 by 3 October; 8,000-10,000 by 22 October; 12,000-16,000 by 19 November; 22,000 in a retroactive estimate in early 1963.[101] While this estimate turned out to be extremely low, the real problem with the CIA's estimate was that the task organization of the expeditionary force was not revealed. Had the intelligence estimate revealed that the force, now known to have totalled around 42,000,[102] contained more of a conventional combat composition, the administration's view on Soviet intent may have been altered.

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[101] Raymond Garthoff, "Cuban Missile Crisis: The Soviet Story." *Foreign Policy*, (Fall 1988), 67.

[102] Blight, et al., *Cuba,* 59.

The total force structure present on Cuba during the crisis has recently been detailed by the former Soviet Union, and to nobody's real surprise the U.S. intelligence analysis of conventional force composition, not numbers, was fairly accurate.[103] To pursue the argument that the Kennedy analysts completely ignored the obvious conventionality of the Soviet deployment, it is helpful to lay-out the precise table of organization and equipment as is now known to be accurate. The exact Soviet TOE was:

Air and Antiaircraft -

* The 10th and 11th antiaircraft divisions, both subdivided into three surface-to-air missile (SAM-75) regiments of four launch complexes each. In addition to the 72 missile launchers in each division, the 10th was augmented by a 40-plane regiment of MiG-21 fighter-interceptors.

* Two cruise-missile (FKR) regiments with five missiles and an equal number of warheads for each regiment's eight launchers - 80 missiles in all, each with 5-12 kiloton warheads.

* A regiment of 33 model-4 Mi helicopters.

* A squadron of 11 Il-28 bombers (for conventional weapons) and six other Il-28s specifically fitted to carry atomic bombs (but not present on the aircraft during the deployment).

* A mixed squadron of 11 planes, Li-2s and An-24s, for intra-island transport and communications.

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[103] More detailed information concerning locations and deployments of specific Soviet units can be found in the Gribkov work. Gribkov and Smith, *Operation.*

Infantry:

* Four motorized rifle regiments drawn from the Leningrad Military district, with each 2500-man regiment assigned 31 regular tanks (T-34s or T-55s) and three amphibious tanks (PT-76s). Each regiment was also equipped with ten self-propelled, 100-millimeter cannons called SAU-100s; ten armored reconnaissance vehicles; nine 120-millimeter mortars; nine anti-tank guided missiles; nine 57-millimeter anti-aircraft machine guns; six 122-millimeter howitzers; sixty armored personnel carriers; eighteen motorcycles; two hundred and thirty-three lightly armored cars and trucks.

* Separate Luna rocket detachments from the Kiev Military District composed of two launchers and four missiles each were also attached to the 74th, 134th and 146th regiments deployed, respectively, near Artemisa, Havana, and Santa Clara.

Navy:

* One squadron of eleven submarines and a second of surface ships - two cruisers, two missile-firing and two regular destroyers, a brigade of sixteen torpedo boats, a coastal-defense regiment with six Sopka missile launchers, a naval-air regiment of twelve Il-28s and, in support roles, two supply ships, two tankers, two bulk carriers, and a repair ship.[104]

The CIA had accurately pinpointed four Soviet motorized rifle regiments, but they mistook the regiments as being missile-defense related.

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[104] Gribkov and Smith, *Operation*, 27.

There is a clear distinction between Soviet air defense forces, which were typically a more static force and not usually a rapid maneuver force, and maneuver forces which are more mobile/mechanized, and have quite a bit less organic support. Although there were missile detachment assigned to the infantry regiments, the Luna launchers are both nuclear and conventional capable which again raises the question of air defense versus ground defense intent. Air defense batteries are made up primarily of antiaircraft guns and surface-to-air missile launchers while motorized rifle regiments, which are made up of an extremely maneuverable force mix, promote offensive or defensive combat operations. According to the U.S. Army's Field Manual 100-2-3, updated in 1984 but still reflecting the same Soviet task-force organization found in 1962, each motorized rifle regiment has organic to it a reconnaissance company, a howitzer battalion, an antiaircraft missile and artillery battery, an antitank missile battery, an engineer company, and several other support sections.[105] This TOE clearly reflects a combined arms look which is typically associated with maneuver operations (i.e., the defense of key terrain). While it could be argued that an infantry regiment could, within its mission essential task list, be prepared to defend a missile launch site, this seems highly unlikely in the Cuban situation. If the Soviets were intent on a covert induction of nuclear weapons onto Cuba, it would have been much more prudent to assign the smallest force possible, at least in the beginning, to support the

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[105] Department of the Army, *The Soviet Army - FM 100-2-3* (Fort Leavenworth,: 1984), 4-8.

missile sites. Why, after all, draw attention to a secret operation by inundating the entire area with a force of some 42,000 soldiers. This sort of deployment falls much more within the parameters of a "show of force" than a covert air defense mission.

The real reason for the four regiments deployed to Cuba, according to Soviet officials and corroborated by the Cubans, was for defense from invasion. It is true that the infantry regiments also defended the missile locations, but this is common practice within combined arms forces. In other words, each unit had a dual role, the missile units were in Cuba to defend U.S. aggression while at the same time providing a safeguard for the infantry troops; the infantry troops were on Cuba to help defend against the U.S. while at the same time providing protection to the missile units. This should have been obvious from the TOE, but was somehow missed completely or misinterpreted by the U.S.. This notion is backed-up by new evidence that some twenty launchers with eighty conventionally armed cruise missiles were attached to the ground forces, yet undetected by the U.S..[106] There is no way such a mass conventional stockpile of surface-to-surface missiles would be used to defend missile sights.

There is the possibility that Kennedy chose not to make the distinction between conventional maneuver forces and nuclear missile/anti-air forces in order to ensure popular support. Once the crisis was publicly disclosed on 22 October, it was important for the Kennedy administration to convince the world that the U.S. occupied the "high"

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[106] Garthoff, *Havana,* 3.

position in this cold war confrontation. As Raymond Garthoff correctly states, it would have been much more difficult to argue that conventional forces, in this case defensive, would pose a threat to U.S. and hemispheric security.[107]

There is no question that Kennedy chose to ignore the possibility of the defensive nature of the forces, and that the Soviets understood Kennedy's intentions regarding Cuba. Several documents have been recently uncovered that show Kennedy was at the very least exposed to the possibility of a Soviet defensive strategy brought on by the U.S.S.R. build-up on Cuba. In a September 3, 1962 "Memorandum to the President," W.W. Rostow quite clearly spells this out to the president by stating, "On the basis of existing intelligence the Soviet military deliveries to Cuba do not constitute a substantial threat to U.S. security. They do constitute a deterrent to certain types of surveillance and a means for improving certain types of Soviet intelligence."[108] It is quite plausible that by seeing the Soviet forces on Cuba as nothing more than one, large support detail linked to the nuclear nemesis, Kennedy was able to focus attention away from the possibility of a defensive alliance between the U.S.S.R. and Cuba. Also, by tying the conventional forces to the nuclear weapons, Kennedy was able to avoid having to confront domestic opposition, which also helped strengthen his international reputation. From a Soviet standpoint, Kennedy's actions were in-line with normal U.S. diplomatic maneuvering

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107 Garthoff, *Havana,* 3.

108 Chang and Kornbluh, *Cuban*, 67.

in the face of superpower discord.[109]

Number And Type of Weapons

Historians have had a problem pinning-down exact data concerning the "missiles of October". Interestingly enough, this is the one area that the Kennedy administration was sure it had identified in enough detail to pursue the conflict to its conclusion. Had the ExComm really had enough intelligence data on the number, type, and location of the weapons, or was this too an area of miscalculation on their part? The answer to this question is that there never was any "hard" intelligence data to back the idea that the U.S.S.R. had done anything more than to erect several potential missile launch sites. As early as 20 October 1962, the ExComm decided to "assume" there were nuclear warheads at the storage bunkers located by reconnaissance flights the day before.[110] Kennedy too adopted this assumption when briefing other domestic and international leaders despite any conclusive evidence to back the claim.

In his article, *Was Khrushchev Bluffing in Cuba?*, Richard Lebow contends that there was never any doubt that the Soviet Union had missiles in Cuba in October 1962, but that there was never any real evidence found by the CIA to prove that these missiles had nuclear warheads, or that

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[109] The Soviets were correct in assuming the U.S. would immediately work to gain popular international support. Immediately following the first aerial missions over Cuba, French President Charles de Gaulle was notified of the Soviet missile deployment. President de Gaulle supported the U.S. response. Talbott, *Testament*, 513.

[110] Chang and Kornbluh, *Cuban*, 364.

Khrushchev ever intended them to get the warheads.[111] Due to the numbers of known conventional missiles, they were of relatively little threat to the United States or any other country in the Americas. This known, Kennedy was forced to use the nuclear warheads as a means to rally public support. As stated previously with the conventional forces on Cuba argument, any loss of focus concerning the "evil" intent of the U.S.S.R. to eventually surround the free world with her military might would have been fatal to JFK's attempts to make this crisis a moral fight. Kennedy was very convincing to other world leaders when he argued that the U.S.S.R. was using Cuba to help them get back to an equal footing with the U.S..[112]

Assuming that the CIA had accurately depicted the number, type, and location of all the Soviet missiles sent to Cuba, and this was indeed the findings from the Havana conference, what then were the mistakes in their analysis of the warheads, and to what extent did this analysis influence Kennedy's handling of the situation? The CIA carefully monitored the dismantling operation following the conclusion of the crisis, yet no evidence surfaced to support earlier claims that the Soviets already had a number of offensive, tactical nuclear warheads on-site. If the world had known at the time that this was the case, would the frenzied negotiations and panic-ridden public outcry been so feverish? Though this question cannot be answered in hindsight, it can be determined that had

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111 Richard Lebow, "Was Khrushchev Bluffing In Cuba?" *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, (April 1988), 38.

112 Analysts now believe that the exact shortcomings for the Soviets during the crisis in nuclear warheads were even greater than Kennedy first thought. Morganthau, *Brink*, 36.

this information been disclosed, or at the very least a public statement been issued stating that the presence of the warheads was only "suspected" on Cuba, Kennedy's anti-Soviet rhetoric would have most assuredly been less tolerated internationally, and probably domestically too.

Richard Lebow makes an interesting point when he stated that the warheads were more than likely located somewhere between the U.S.S.R. and Cuba at the time of Kennedy's quarantine order.[113] Lebow argued that the Soviet transport ship *Poltava* could not have made the needed trips to transport the entire quantity of both missiles and warheads in the number of times that the ship traveled to Cuba.[114] One explanation that follows from this analysis is that Khrushchev merely meant to plant a seed in the minds of the Americans about the nuclear weapons, and that he either did not intend to send real warheads at all, or the very least was going to delay their arrival until he was able to make the U.S. show their cards before the world. A mid-level Soviet Party official, Fedor Burlatsky, had this to say about the presence of the warheads on Cuba, "Were there any nuclear warheads deployed on the island? I am convinced - no. First of all, I never had any positive information that they were on the island. Then, knowing the psychology of N. Khrushchev, I think it hardly likely that he would immediately throw all his cards on the table. More likely, you can assume that he wanted to deploy the missiles, and see what kind of impression it would make on the American administration, to consider the

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113 Lebow, *Khrushchev*, 39.

114 Ibid.

reaction, and then make a decision regarding warheads. Particularly so because this action was especially dangerous. Moreover, had nuclear warheads been deployed on the island, the American side certainly would have known about it, for they had at their disposal sufficient means of information, including agents on Cuba."[115]

This analysis fails to consider several key issues including the possibility of utilizing other ships as possible conveyers of the warheads, or even other means of transportation altogether. Anatoli Gribkov explained that the *Poltava* and her sister ship the *Omsk* was used to transport thirty-six medium range R-12 missiles prior to mid-September. Then the *Poltava* made a return trip and, by mid-October, returned to Cuba with twenty-four intermediate-range R-14s.[116] While these trips led many analysts to conclude that she was the nuclear transport ship, largely due to her size (stability) and appearance (missile and warhead transport cones on deck), and that the warheads were in-place by October. Also, the theory proposed by Lebow and Burlatsky falls short by assuming that the U.S. had collaborative sources on Cuba, or even in the Soviet Union, that could give any detailed information about the warheads at the time of the crisis. There is no evidence to support this claim. In fact, the only known U.S. spy who was in a position to alert the U.S. of the nuclear threat was a Soviet officer by the name of Colonel Penkovsky. While Penkovsky was not able to pass any secrets to the U.S. about the Soviet deployment, he is

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[115] Raymond Garthoff, "Did Khrushchev Bluff in Cuba? No." *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, (July/August 1988), 41-42.

[116] Gribkov and Smith, *Operation*, 45.

probably best remembered for his role in sending the U.S. a false nuclear strike message during the crisis. Penkovsky, who was arrested by the KGB soon after the blockade was announced on 22 October 1962, had two special codes that he could transmit to the U.S.. One of the codes was to warn that he was about to be uncovered and arrested, and the other code was to forewarn the U.S. of an imminent nuclear attack by the U.S.S.R.. Penkovsky inadvertently sent the second code but it was luckily ignored by the CIA.[117] This example is evidence that the CIA was at a loss for good information regarding the warhead question, and that the information they did receive was thought to be suspect at best.

As it turns out, the missiles were on Cuba by October, but the *Indigirka* and *Alexandrovsk* and not the *Poltava* or *Omsk* were responsible for their arrival. Once again, it is not as important that the missiles were or were not present on Cuba by October as it is that the U.S. could not accurately determine this. In essence, the ExComm made their recommendations to the president based on flawed information and outright guessing. Had the world known that missile sights, sans warheads, were the only things known on Cuba by 16 October, it is highly unlikely such an outcry of international denunciation as well as support for Kennedy would have occurred. In fact, as the crisis progressed, anti-Americanism began to develop, especially in Latin America. As one CIA document reported, dated 27 October 1962, although "unfavorable reactions are decidedly in the minority...There are reports that anti-U.S. demonstrations have broke

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[117] Nye, *Cuban*, 18.

out in several Latin American capitals, including Buenos Aire, Caracas, and La Paz.[118] There would no doubt have been increasing demonstrations and denunciations without Kennedy's assumption of Soviet warheads on Cuba. Indeed, the ExComm was very much aware of public opinion as can be seen in memoranda such as one written by Theodore Sorensen on 20 October that military action against the tiny island of Cuba would mean "an U.S. - initiated "Pearl Harbor" on a small nation which history could neither understand nor forget."[119]

This analysis concerns the possibility that by miscalculating Soviet TOE, and by improperly depicting an accurate nuclear presence on Cuba, Kennedy brought the world closer to nuclear war than was originally thought. Some scholars and officials, like Ray Cline, claim that these issues were unimportant and that, "While it is exciting to speculate on how brilliantly we escaped the nuclear holocaust, none of the informed officials I talked with at the time thought the chances of war were high. I would have said no more than one in a thousand."[120] These scholars apparently disregard the newest data that describes flawed U.S. intelligence analysis of the Soviet TOE and the whereabouts and numbers of nuclear warheads. They ignore signs that tensions escalated due to the numerous miscalculations. There can be no dispute that the United States' flawed intelligence analysis was a critical part of Kennedy's decision making

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118 Chang and Kornbluh, 195.
119 Ibid., 133.
120 Cline, *Cuban*, 191.

process, and while the crisis outcome was favorable in the end, it could have very well taken a different turn - a turn toward nuclear war.

CHAPTER 4

COMMAND AND CONTROL

The understanding of the command and control (C2) situation on Cuba between forces is a critical factor in the outcome of the crisis. The U.S. assumed from the beginning of the crisis that the Soviets were using Cuba to further their aims. During one of the very first Kennedy cabinet meetings convened to discuss the crisis, which was recorded on tape, the idea that the Soviet Union had ulterior motives with regard to Cuba was introduced. During this meeting, held on 16 October, the Undersecretary of State, George Ball said when discussing Soviet reasons for using Cuba, "That here is Cuba armed against the United States, or possibly use it to try to trade something in Berlin, saying he'll disarm Cuba if, uh, if we'll, uh, yield some of our interests in Berlin and some arrangement for it. I mean, that this is a, it's a trading policy."[121]

The U.S. presumed that the Soviet Union's superpower status would create a hierarchy for the tactical control of forces on Cuba.[122] When handling a situation as important as the safety of the entire globe, it becomes imperative to know who to deal with and who has the ability to

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121 Chang and Kornbluh, *Cuban Missile Crisis,* 106.

122 Ibid., 106.

hurt you. In the case of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the U.S. assumed the U.S.S.R. was in complete control of the situation while, in reality, there were several events which called into the question the validity of this notion.

There were four acts that brought into question the absolute control the U.S.S.R. exercised in Cuba; the first was a serious proposal made by Fidel Castro to Nikita Khrushchev on 26 October 1962 which outlined a first strike contingent; second was the selection of the force commander, Pliyev, who was a questionable selection from the standpoint of diplomacy as well as tactical proficiency; third was the fact that there appears to be some doubt that the sub-unit commanders on Cuba during the crisis understood Khrushchev's command and control intent; fourth was the shooting down of a U.S. U2 spy plane on 27 October 1962.

First Strike

Again, though the command and control policy seemed clear-cut to the United States, the oral histories of the five conferences depict a far different situation. Throughout the crisis, Khrushchev was adamant in making it perfectly clear that the Soviet ground forces were under the command and control of Moscow, and that comrade Castro was to adhere to this policy.[123]

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[123] Very few in Moscow had knowledge of the missiles, enabling Khrushchev to maintain ultimate control over them.

Castro's gung-ho attitude with regard to the nuclear missiles clearly scared Khrushchev. As Khrushchev's memoirs show, he viewed Castro as a man who had no real concept of the power of nuclear weaponry. Khrushchev said of a letter received from Castro, commonly referred to as the "First Strike Letter", "Castro suggested that in order to prevent nuclear missiles from being destroyed, we should launch a preemptive strike against the United States. He concluded that an attack was unavoidable and that this attack had to be preempted. In other words, we needed immediately deliver a nuclear missile strike against the United States. When we read this I, and all the others, looked at each other and it became clear to us that Fidel totally failed to understand our purpose."[124] Castro would later deny, during speeches to his people as well as those involved in the Havana Conference, that he had harbored any real desire to begin a nuclear war. While it is impossible to know what Castro really wanted to do with the nuclear warheads, Castro's proposal shook the Soviet leader severely, and led to Khrushchev's reversal of trust in Castro.

The exact text of Castro's letter, received by Khrushchev on the evening of 26 October 1962, read, "If... the imperialists invade Cuba with the goal of occupying it, the danger that that aggressive policy poses for humanity is so great that following that event, the Soviet Union must never allow the circumstances in which the imperialists could launch the first strike against it. I tell you this because I believe that the imperialists' aggressiveness is extremely dangerous and if they actually carry out the

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[124] Blight et al., *Cuba,* 29.

brutal act of invading Cuba in violation of international law and morality, that would be the moment to eliminate such danger forever through an act of clear and legitimate defense, however harsh and terrible the solution would be, for there is no other."[125] In turn, Khrushchev responded by saying, "We had installed the missiles not for the purpose of attacking the United States, but to keep the United States from attacking Cuba. What does it mean to make a preemptive strike?"[126] Clearly, Khrushchev's bond and trust with the Cuban leader was being tested.

That Castro reacted this way to the escalating crisis proved several things to the planners in Moscow. The first thing it showed them was that while they were making an attempt to resolve the crisis diplomatically, Castro was conjuring-up more militaristic solutions, based on his emotional leadership style. This left a lasting impression on the Soviet planners who attended the Havana conference. As Anatoli Gribkov stated, Khrushchev was forced to respond to Castro's letter with a memo of his own urging Castro "at this critical juncture not to be overcome by emotion, to show constraint."[127] Years later, following Khrushchev's death, Castro would claim in his own defense that "Perhaps Khrushchev even interpreted it this way, but in reality it did not happen like that."[128] Regardless of this claim, the important point here is that the Soviet leader perceived Castro to be out of control; it is irrelevant whether Castro was really in control of

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125 Gribkov and Smith, *Operation*, 71.
126 Schecter, *Glasnost*, 177.
127 Gribkov and Smith, *Operation*, 71.
128 Blight et al., *Cuba*, 29.

his emotions or not. The second issue was that Castro was too far from the Kremlin's control. There was no real safeguard to prevent the Cuban leader from following his own course of action and, unlike the other Soviet peripheries in Eastern and Central Europe, the tremendous distance between the two countries prevented any "normal" Soviet control safeguards. Also, the warheads had no "locks" to prevent Castro from seizing the launchers and firing the missiles.[129] Castro had a larger military force on Cuba than did the Soviets and, thanks to the military weapons, ammunition, and equipment that the Soviets had provided to Castro previously, Castro's force was also well prepared.

Force Command

The selection of General Issa Aleksandrovich Pliyev to command all forces, both Soviet and Cuban, during the crisis raises several perplexing command and control questions. The most obvious question to those knowledgeable in military planning pertains to Pliyev's qualifications, or lack thereof. The second interesting point to bring out centers around Pliyev's apparent lack of diplomatic ability, especially when dealing with high-level Cuban officials.

For Castro, there seems to be no question that he understood the command and control structure as dictated by Moscow. To Castro, his soldiers were to fall under the command of Cuban commanders and Soviet

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[129] Gribkov and Smith, *Operation*, 172.

soldiers under their own commanders. He also claimed that any combined operational decisions would be made by the Soviet Union due to their experience in dealing with global matters. A strong, experienced, combined arms general would have almost assuredly kept Castro in line, but instead General Pliyev was the choice of Moscow.

Pliyev was selected to lead the combined forces for several reasons that would later be considered questionable. Most importantly, Pliyev was selected because he was a highly decorated, and well known (even in the West) cavalry officer. The fact that he was widely recognized as being a conventional, combat-arms officer would, in the eyes of the Soviets, focus attention away from the possibility of nuclear forces being present.[130]

The problems that arose as a result of Pliyev's appointment were the direct result of his inexperience in this type of military operation as well as his lack of diplomatic skills. He knew relatively little about ballistic missiles much less air defense and concealment from aerial reconnaissance. His claim to fame revolved around his cavalry exploits in Mongolia from 1936-1938 and then in Manchuria where he led the last cavalry charge in history that crossed the Gobi Desert and the Greater Khingin Range and attacked the rear of the Japanese Kwantung Army in August 1945.[131] These credentials were hardly the leadership skills necessary to lead the most massive, covert military operation of the modern era. Another problem arose from the fact that Pliyev was not accustomed to working outside his

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130 Gribkov and Smith, *Operation*, 25.

131 Garthoff, *Cuban*, 68.

own command group. Because the diverse troop configuration on Cuba, Pliyev would have benefited from surrounding himself by senior officers used to combined arms operations. Instead, Pliyev was assigned a staff comprised of all rocket forces officers who added to the inexperience already confronting Pliyev.[132] Pliyev certainly does not seem to be the type of military expert that would be selected to use technical as well as tactical skills to mesh together a combined forces group assigned the enormous task it was eventually given.

General Issa Pliyev lacked another needed skill in dealing with the crisis - diplomatic expertise. In fact, not only did Pliyev lack experience, he more importantly lacked the type of personality necessary in working within diplomatic parameters. Castro, who was known to Moscow as being somewhat strong-willed and adamant in his nationalistic aims, needed to be held in check and controlled during this diplomatically volatile situation. Pliyev's appointment, in fact, was a recipe for disaster. As Gribkov stated, "Soldier and emissary at the same time, the commander of the Soviet Group of Forces needed tact more than tactical expertise, and Pliyev was deficient in that quality."[133] Many normal procedures that diplomats are required to use for protection, such as the use of phony passports and the wearing of inconspicuous clothes, were refused by Pliyev.[134] His relationship with Castro was so poor that misunderstandings between Castro and Khrushchev were exacerbated, creating a less than desirable

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132 Gribkov and Smith, *Operation*, 25.

133 Ibid.

134 Ibid.

diplomatic climate on Cuba during the volatile missile crisis. As a result of Pliyev's command assignment, the Soviet Union found themselves in a situation that was militarily weak as well as diplomatically fragile.

Missile Control

During the fifth and final conference in Havana, General Anatoly Gribkov, who was a colonel at the time of the crisis and heavily involved in the planning of the missile operation known now as operation "Anadyr", surprised many participants by claiming that General Pliyev had Moscow's permission to launch a nuclear strike against the United States in the event the U.S. invaded Cuba (here it is not understood whether airstrikes constituted an invasion, or if actual ground forces had to be a part of the invasionary forces).[135]

There is much debate currently as to the validity of Gribkov's statement. Mark Kramer sees Gribkov's account as nothing more than a way for an overzealous conference participant to grab some publicity. Other scholars like James Blight and Robert McNamara were eager to take Gribkov's testimony at face value. Gribkov later that same year, in an interview for *Krasnaya Zvesda* (Red Star) in November 1992, retracted his earlier tale.[136]

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135 Gribkov and Smith, *Operation*, 259.
136 Kramer, *Tactical*, 43.

In the beginning of 1994, Gribkov published a book with U.S. general William Y. Smith, which seems to put the question of ICBM control to rest. In the book, which appeared in April 1994, Gribkov appears to back-away from his startling Havana statements by writing, "Hours before receiving the translation of Kennedy's address, however, Khrushchev and his colleagues had also agreed on measures to reduce the risk that conflict over Cuba might lead to general war. One such action was a coded telegram sent at 11:30 P.M. Moscow time that reached us in Havana some thirty minutes before the U.S. President began his broadcast. Addressed to *Trostnik* - Comrade Pavlov (code for Soviet headquarters on Cuba), and signed by Defense Minister Rodian Y. Malinovsky as Director, the message contained both a call to arms and a prohibition on the use of atomic arms. Instructing Pliyev to prepare to fight, it also hedged his authority to use any part of his nuclear arsenal in the event of fighting."[137]

Although there appears to have been some control in the deployment of strategic nuclear missiles toward the U.S., less control was exercised in the proposed use of close-in, tactical nuclear weapons. In a message dated 8 September 1962, Moscow instructed Pliyev that, "If, in the course of an enemy landing on the island of Cuba and of the concentration of enemy ships involved in such a landing off the coast of Cuba in its territorial waters, the destruction of the enemy is delayed and there is no possibility of receiving the instructions of the U.S.S.R. Ministry of Defense, you are permitted to decide on your own to employ the nuclear means of the

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[137] Gribkov and Smith, *Operation*, 62.

"Luna," Il-28 or FKR-1 as instruments of local warfare for the destruction of the enemy on land and along the coast in order to achieve the complete rout of the invaders of Cuban territory and to defend the Republic of Cuba."[138]

While by no means proving that there was a loss of missile control during the crisis, this revelation does bring the issue of solid command and control features into question. If official planners and strategists can misunderstand the orders in a combined arms operation, commanders can also be expected to perceive confusion by these incomplete and ambiguous orders. Also, if there was this distinction made between tactical and strategic control, who is to say that tactical usage at the local level would not have precipitated a large-scale nuclear escalation.

Spy Plane Incident

The best example of confused command and control during the missile crisis can be seen in the shooting down of an American U2 spy plane over Cuban territory on 27 October. This act was the turning point of the crisis, and it succeeded in showing both super-power leaders that the situation in Cuba had almost reached the point of no return. It also proved to both sides that the control issue was key in avoiding nuclear confrontation.

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138 Gribkov and Smith, *Operation*, 5-6.

It is unclear who ordered the shoot-down, and who actually conducted the action which resulted in the death of the American U2 pilot, Major Rudolf Anderson, Jr.. Speculation runs the spectrum from it being a purely Soviet initiated action to suggestion that Castro himself pulled the trigger. The Havana conference shed much light on the subject when it was discovered that once Castro had ordered his own air defense batteries into action, the Soviet commanders too upped their readiness. Soviet commanders then apparently loosely interpreted self defense orders and decided that U.S. reconnaissance aircraft were posing a threat to their safety.[139] Still, neither the Russians nor the Cubans seem to confirm the details.

Regardless of the truth, from the point of view of Khrushchev, Castro was behind the decision to shoot at the aircraft, further solidifying his distrust of the Cuban leader. In his memoirs, Khrushchev stated that it was Castro, and not Moscow, that authorized the firing.[140] Although this account is now widely disputed by both the Cuban and Soviet camps, the fact that Khrushchev perceived this as being true shows that he understood the C2 question was very volatile and quickly slipping out of his control.

The U2 incident had an unnerving effect on Khrushchev during the waning hours of the conflict. Khrushchev was afraid the young, brash Kennedy would be unable to handle the potential humiliation and would in turn escalate the crisis.[141] The fact that the U.S. relied heavily on the

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139 Garthoff, *Havana*, 3.
140 Talbott, *Khrushchev,* 499.
141 Ibid.

estimate that the U.S.S.R. was in complete control on Cuba was what possibly stopped further retaliation. Had Kennedy better understood the command and control problems on Cuba, he may have elected to change to a different policy. During an executive committee meeting on 27 October, the staff actually recommended taking out some of the surface-to-air missile (SAM) sites to protect future U.S. pilots.[142] This policy was preempted by the 28 October resolution to the conflict. Khrushchev was clearly skeptical about letting this most dangerous situation further escalate.

Castro pointed out that he always understood the command and control question to be very straightforward. To Castro, his soldiers were to fall under the command of Cuban commanders, and Soviet soldiers under their leadership. He also claimed that any combined operational decisions would be made by the Soviet Union due to their experience in global matters. As Castro said in 1992, "We were very confident in the experience of the Soviet Union. We had practically just won against the Batista army - it was just two years after the end of our war. The Soviets, on the other hand, had decades of experience in diplomatic, international, and military matters. The Soviets were our very power ally...We had unlimited confidence in them."[143] It seems surprising that with this sort of obsequious behavior by Castro, Khrushchev would have questioned the command and control aspect at all - but he did.

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142 Chang and Kornbluh, *Cuban,* 210-212.

143 Blight et al., *Cuba,* 83.

Khrushchev simply did not trust Castro and his aggressive personality. It appears that the Soviet leader was willing to do anything, including negotiating an end to the crisis without the participation of Cuba, to quickly bring to a halt the spiralling turn of events which threatened to set a dangerous course toward nuclear war. Had Kennedy realized Soviet control of the situation was as tenuous as it actually was, he may not have pushed as hard as he did for the humiliating terms of the crisis resolution. As it turned out, the mis-diagnosis of the C2 situation turned out to work to the U.S.'s favor in light of the fact that Khrushchev was prepared to do anything in his power to prevent being pushed into an all out nuclear confrontation, a no win confrontation, by a non-Russian like Fidel Castro.

CHAPTER 5

POLITICAL GENIUS OR FORTUNE?

The Cuban Missile Crisis is better understood now thanks to the recent information coming out of the oral history conferences and Soviet sources following *Perestroika* and *Glasnost*. The most important question about the crisis, that of how close the world was to all-out nuclear war, continues to be debated.[144] Now, however, those studying the crisis have access to much more information than ever before. This new information, especially from the Russian side, shows that mistakes in information analysis on the part of the Americans during the crisis could have very easily changed the eventual outcome.

During the oral historical conferences, leaders from both superpower sides agreed that while their respective governments understood the danger and volatility of the Cuban Missile Crisis, and wanted to avoid this prospect, there was always the possibility that nuclear confrontation could occur. During the Havana conference, General Gribkov brought into question the absolute control over the nuclear warheads. During one point he stated, "Deep inside me, I did not think

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[144] Although no new oral history conferences are currently scheduled, there is a tremendous amount of work now being published and debated by those involved in the five previous conferences.

war would come. I did not believe that either Khrushchev or Kennedy, looking foursquare at the prospect of nuclear confrontation, would plunge the world into Armageddon. But accidents could happen, and the presence of nuclear arms on Cuba made the possibility of a single misstep, a misjudgment by either side, truly frightening to contemplate."[145]

Due to U.S. misperceptions in analyzing information about the missile crisis, the world truly was on the brink of nuclear war. Though the Soviets clearly provoked a U.S. response, they are right in contending that there were other alternatives in resolving the dispute that would have lessoned the opportunity for confrontation. As Nikita Khrushchev said when he later talked of how he wanted to end the conflict, "Our preference was for talks around a table and for all countries to remove their troops from others' territory. Our only goal in placing the missiles in Cuba was to prevent any encroachment on Cuban sovereignty and to assure the capability of the Cuban people to be the masters of their own country."[146] Maturity on both superpower sides, not stalwart Soviet or American strategy, is what prevented further discord. Historian Raymond Garthoff best sums up the crisis saying, "The most important lesson of the Cuban missile episode is that many elements of the superpower crises are likely to go beyond the control of parties. What is being learned now about the Soviet side of the experience underlines the point: The management and resolution of the crisis from both sides was even more haphazard than was

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145 Gribkov and Smith, *Anadyr*, 59.

146 Schecter, *Glasnost*, 171.

originally realized."[147]

From the Soviet standpoint, the missiles in Cuba were as justified as any American missile in Europe. In fact, Khrushchev thought they were more justified because Cuba was much more at risk from a U.S. invasion than Western Europe was from a U.S.S.R. invasion. As Khrushchev said on 12 December 1962, "Cuba needed weapons as a means of containing the aggressors, and not as a means of attack. For Cuba was under a real threat of invasion...Further events have shown that the failure of [the Bay of Pigs] invasion did not discourage the United States imperialists in their desire to strangle Cuba."[148] So from their standpoint, corroborated during the oral history conferences, the United States was the unreasonable party in the crisis, and nuclear war was a reality because of U.S. inflexibility.

The nature of the Cuban Missile Crisis was such that it was never a question of Kennedy against Khrushchev or even the United States against the Soviet Union. Instead, it was a much more complex situation that involved an enormous number of variables, many of which were not fully understood by either the U.S. or the U.S.S.R.. Robert McNamara best explains the complexity of superpower crises by stating, "I don't think the Cuban missile crisis was unique. The Bay of Pigs, Berlin in '61, Cuba, later events in the Middle East, in Libya, and so on - all exhibit the truth of what I'll call 'McNamara's Law,' which states: It is impossible to predict with high degree of confidence what effects of the use of military

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147 Garthoff, *Cuban*, 77.

148 Wills, *Kennedy*, 57.

force will be because of the risks of accident, miscalculation, misperception and inadvertence. In my opinion, this law ought to be inscribed above the doorways in the White House and the Pentagon, and is the overwhelming lesson of the Cuban missile crisis."[149]

The possibility of an all-out nuclear war starting in such a small, isolated country like Cuba is what keeps people from around the world interested in the Cuban Missile Crisis. No doubt the debate will continue over how close the world really was to total devastation. Hopefully, the lessons learned, and still being learned, will go a long way in preventing future nuclear hostilities.

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[149] Blight, *Cuban*, 186.

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BIOGRAPHY

Jon Andrew Errickson was born 20 December 1961 at Fort Benning, Georgia. His father, a career army officer, was reassigned numerous times throughout the United States and the world. While attending the University of South Florida, Jon Errickson accepted an army Reserve Officer Training Corp. (ROTC) scholarship. At the University of South Florida, Mr. Errickson studied history and, in 1984, was awarded a Bachelor of Arts degree in history. Following graduation, he was commissioned a second lieutenant in the United States Army and assigned to Fort Benning, Georgia. After attending Ranger training and other service related schools, Mr. Errickson's assignments included tours to Washington, Korea, Hawaii, Florida, and California. After commanding a company and achieving the rank of captain, Jon Errickson was sent to the Defense Language Institute to complete Russian language training. Following language training, the U.S. Army sent Mr. Errickson to the Florida State University where he received a Master of Arts degree in Russian and East European Studies.