



EXTENSION OF THE COLD WAR OUTSIDE EUROPE (THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS)

The Cuban Missile Crisis¹

- In Fidel Castro, Khrushchev found a worthy heir of the Bolshevik revolutionary tradition and an example for the rest of the "third world". Mao had never shown Khrushchev the deference he had accorded Stalin, and was on his way to becoming an annoying - even dangerous - critic. Ho Chi Minh had an uncompleted civil war on his hands because of the settlement forced upon him in 1954, and was in no position to export revolution outside of Indochina. Nasser of Egypt had never seriously considered becoming a Marxist-Leninist and preferred keeping Egyptian communists locked up. Castro's victory and subsequent turn to Moscow presented an unexpected opportunity, not unlike the one Mao had offered Stalin a decade earlier. Khrushchev's hopes for Latin America quickly swelled to match those of his predecessor for China.²



A Case for the Monroe Doctrine

- Since the days of President James Monroe³, the United States had regarded the Caribbean as its own backyard, a source of trade and wealth and its own security zone and dominated Latin America economically and militarily: it understood the advantages of hemispheric hegemony long before it began to think about global hegemony.⁴ One of the first manifestations of this doctrine was the conclusion of the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, signed in September 1947 in Rio de Janeiro (hence the colloquial name "Rio

¹ The Cuban Missile Crisis which lasted from 16-28 October 1962 is often considered the closest the Cold War came to escalating into a full-scale nuclear war. Len Scott and R. Gerald Hughes (ed.) *The Cuban Missile Crisis: A Critical Reappraisal*, p. 17.

² John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History*, pp. 176-177.

³ James Monroe (1758-1831) was the fifth President of the United States (1817-1825). The Monroe Doctrine was introduced in 1823 and stated that further efforts by European nations to take control of any independent state in North or South America would be viewed as "the manifestation of an unfriendly disposition toward the United States." At the same time, the doctrine noted that the United States recognise and not interfere with existing European colonies nor meddle in the internal concerns of European countries. At this point in time, nearly all Latin American colonies of Spain and Portugal had achieved or were at the point of gaining independence from the Portuguese and Spanish Empires.

⁴ Gaddis, *We Now Know*, p. 177.



Treaty"). At the Ninth International Conference of American States was held in Bogotá, Colombia between March and May 1948 and led by United States Secretary of State George Marshall, members pledged to fight communism in the western hemisphere. This gave birth to the Organization of American States (OAS). Communist parties existed but were mostly mouthpieces for disaffected intellectuals. There was hardly any industrial proletariat, and the Catholic Church retained the peasantry's overwhelming allegiance. Comintern efforts had fallen victim to the same ignorance of local conditions that had defeated them elsewhere. Due to the distances involved, attempts to promote trade, even to arrange diplomatic contacts with the USSR, had languished.⁵

- Communism to the south concerned officials in Washington but less than one might have expected. The Federal Bureau of Investigation had handled intelligence operations in Latin America during World War II and continued to report on communist activities there. In April 1948, Secretary of State Marshall found himself besieged in Bogota, because of riots widely blamed on the Communists during the founding meeting of the Organisation of American States. Kennan toured Latin America early in 1950 and returned with a pessimistic assessment that repression may be the only answer. Acheson suppressed his report and it had no influence on US policy in the region.⁶
- In Guatemala, a military officer, Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán, was elected its president in March 1951. While not a Communist, he had been elected with the support of several left-wing parties. As part of his modernisation programme, the Árbenz administration introduced a policy of land reform. One of its measures involved the nationalisation of 400 000 acres of uncultivated land belonging to the largest American enterprise in Central America, the United Fruit Company⁷, whose banana plantations were at the core of the Guatemalan economy. These lands were redistributed to landless peasants.
- Washington did not act chiefly to protect the interest of United Fruit Company, substantial as they were. Although Árbenz was not a Communist, he relied heavily on support from the Guatemalan Communist Party and was very much under its influence. He and his supporters instituted the most successful land reform programme seen in Latin American up to that time. Despite warnings from Dulles about long existent Russian ambitions in the western hemisphere, the Soviet Union did little to encourage Árbenz. Direct contacts appear to be limited to a visit by a Soviet diplomat interested in bartering agricultural equipment for bananas, a deal that fell through when each side realised the other had no refrigerated ships and that bananas could only travel under the auspices of the United Fruit Company.⁸
- These developments led the United Fruit Company to begin an intensive lobbying campaign against Árbenz in the United States. This was done particularly through Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, who had close ties to the company.⁹ The company had begun a public relations campaign to discredit the Guatemalan government; overall, the company spent over a half-million dollars to influence both lawmakers and members of the American public that the Guatemalan government of Jacobo Árbenz needed to be overthrown. President Eisenhower approved a secret plan to depose Árbenz. However, under the charter of the Organization of American States (OAS), no member could interfere in the internal politics of another. While publicly espousing this doctrine, Washington authorised the CIA to train and supply a band of Guatemalan political exiles on United Fruit property in neighbouring Honduras. These were to be led by an ardent anti-Communist exile, Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas.¹⁰

⁵ Ibid..

⁶ Ibid..

⁷ The United Fruit Company was formed in 1899 and had extensive landholdings and railroads in Central America. By 1930, it was already Guatemala's largest landowner and employer.

⁸ Gaddis, *We Now Know*, p. 178.

⁹ John Foster Dulles had been a senior partner in a law firm associated with the United Fruit Company. His brother, Allen Dulles, the head of the CIA, had been on its board of trustees.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 204.



Hwa Chong Institution (College)
Paper 1
Theme I: Understanding the Cold War, 1945 -1991
How was the global Cold War fought?

- In May 1954, a Polish ship carrying supplies of small arms and ammunition docked in Guatemala; the first time a Latin American state had bought arms from the Eastern bloc. This was seen by Eisenhower as the last straw. In June, the rebels under Armas crossed into Guatemala. While they initially made little headway, Árbenz had overestimated his military's loyalty. Subjected to a radio propaganda campaign inspired by the CIA, the officer corps defected to Armas and Árbenz fled into exile. A new military junta came to power and the reforms of the previous administration were reversed. Eisenhower assumed at that time that American dominance in the Caribbean would remain unchallenged.¹¹
- The CIA's intervention was a massive over-reaction to a minor irritant. It did little to alter the course of events in Guatemala where Árbenz's regime made so many enemies among the landowners and military that it probably would not have lasted long in any event. It did nothing to contain Soviet ambitions in Latin America –those hardly existed at the time. It did however affect what happened later in Cuba. It produced over-confidence in the use of covert operations. It generated resentment through the hemisphere, where knowledge of American complicity became overt. It influenced individuals in a way no one could have anticipated. Castro did not observe events in Guatemala City but an unemployed physician Ernesto "Che" Guevara did.¹²

Road to the Cuban Revolution

- The United States defeated Spain in the Spanish-American War to liberate Cuba and protect considerable American investment there. In the following decades, American businesses bought up most of the land and industry in Cuba. In 1933, Fulgencio Batista y Zaldívar came to power and ruled through puppets or directly for the next 25 years. By the 1950s, his corrupt and dictatorial regime was losing support among the population. On 26 July 1953, Fidel Castro, a young lawyer, first raised the standard of revolution against Batista, but was arrested and imprisoned. Later released, Castro went into exile in Mexico after a bungled attack on an army barracks in Santiago, Cuba, before returning to lead a two-year guerrilla struggle. Castro and his band of rebels, which included Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, gained widespread support. Together, they plotted Castro's return in December 1956, two years of fighting in the Sierra Maestra followed, and in January 1959, the Batista regime fell.¹³
- On 8 January 1959, one week after Batista fled the country, Castro and his armed revolutionaries entered Havana, where he formed a coalition government. This was recognised by the United States which appointed a new ambassador. The Eisenhower administration responded remarkably calmly to events in Cuba. Batista's corrupt, inefficient, but conspicuously pro-American regime had been an embarrassment. Vice-President Richard M. Nixon was almost lynched in Caracas several months earlier on the tenth anniversary of the events in Bogota. Washington now took the message seriously: Nixon upon his return, spoke of the need to recognise the 'advent of the lower classes into the political scene and the ensuing requirement that American ambassadors broaden their contacts beyond the traditional elite.'¹⁴ This however did not extend to the same acceptance of nationalism and non-alignment – even anti-Americanism – something that Eisenhower had come around to after many hard lessons in the Middle East.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 205-206. The 1954 Guatemalan coup d'état was a covert operation carried out by the CIA that deposed the democratically elected Guatemalan President Jacobo Árbenz and ended the Guatemalan Revolution of 1944–1954. Code-named Operation PBSUCCESS, it installed the military dictatorship of Carlos Castillo Armas (1915-1957), the first in a series of U.S.-backed authoritarian rulers in Guatemala.

¹² Ibid., pp. 178-179.

¹³ Ibid., p. 179.

¹⁴ This was highlighted in the Cabinet meeting minutes on 16 May 1958.



While land reforms won popular support, there was no initial programme to nationalise American interests or take control of the sugar industry. At this point, Castro had not declared his allegiance to Marxism-Leninism. The Soviet Union was consequently cautious in approaching Cuba. Even then, beginning from March, the National Security Council (NSC) considered means to institute regime change. The United States was not prepared to treat Castro as Nasser, a fact that became evident when Castro accepted an invitation by the American Society of Newspaper Editors, pointedly not seconded by the White House, to visit the United States in April 1959. Nervous assurances were extracted from Castro that he had no communists in his government. Eisenhower avoided a meeting, assigning that task to Nixon and the successor to Dulles, Christian A. Herter. In May, the CIA began to arm guerrillas inside Cuba.¹⁵



- The breakdown of relations with Castro may be explained first by geography. It was easier to recognise the limits of power when required to wield it halfway around the world, as seen in the Middle East. Ninety miles offshore was a different matter. Interests were also dissimilar. Nasser had nationalised the Suez Canal but nothing else – American owned facilities in the Middle East had remained untouched. Cuba was full of American property and Castro had not concealed his plans to take over many of these assets. Timing was another problem: Eisenhower had six years to experiment with approaches to Nasser, but only two remained to him for Castro. The distractions of a presidential campaign, though he himself would not be running, were sure to dominate one of them. Cuba left less room for manoeuvre, for trial and error.
- Castro was equally responsible. He was much closer, in temperament, priorities and style of leadership to Mao and Ho than to Tito, Nehru and Nasser. The latter were balancers: the ideologies they proclaimed only occasionally dictated their actions; non-alignment allowed them to tilt this way or that, thereby playing both sides in the Cold War off against one another. Mao and Ho were band-wagoners: ideology told them the direction in which history was moving, and they were determined to climb on board – or even in Mao's case after the death of Stalin, to take the driver's seat.
- Castro began his career as a revolutionary with no ideology at all: the only ideas that appear to have driven him were a lust for power, a willingness to use violent means to get it, and an unwillingness to share it once he had it. Despite the influence of Guevara and his brother Raul, both avowed Marxists, Castro did not start

¹⁵ Gaddis, *We Now Know*, p. 179.



thinking of himself in those terms until well after he had deposed Batista and assumed the title of Maximum Leader. Washington's hypersensitivity may have pushed him in that direction: he had always been anti-American, but it seems more likely that Marxism-Leninism appealed to Castro for domestic and personal reasons. As an authoritarian and historically determined ideology, it provided the best possible excuse for not holding elections, and if taking this path should attract support from Moscow, then so much the better.¹⁶

- The Cuban government now ordered the country's oil refineries – then controlled by US corporations Esso and Standard Oil and Anglo-Dutch Shell – to process crude oil purchased from the Soviet Union, but under pressure from Washington, these companies refused. Castro responded by expropriating the refineries and nationalising them under state control. In retaliation, the United States cancelled its import of Cuban sugar, provoking Castro to nationalise most US-owned assets on the island, including banks and sugar mills.¹⁷
- To Moscow, Castro's revolution came as an enormous surprise, his insurgency attracted little attention and no support from the Kremlin. Castro's relations with the Cuban Communist Party had been distant and uneasy. Over the summer and fall of 1959, Castro repaired relations with the Communists as his relations with Washington deteriorated. He also put out feelers to Moscow regarding trade and possible arms sales. Moscow responded warily, and sent a KGB representative to Havana - there was as yet, no diplomatic relations – and in February 1960, at Castro's invitation, Anastas Mikoyan, Deputy Chairman of the Soviet Council of Ministers, arrived to assess the situation for himself. The Cubans were delighted at receiving sympathy and promises of support from the Soviets, while the latter relished the opportunity to upstage the Americans in their own backyard.¹⁸
- When the United States announced it would not sell petroleum products to Cuba, the Soviet Union agreed to meet the island's needs, despite the strain on Soviet shipping. Cuba was now moving closer to the socialist camp. When Khrushchev met Castro at the United Nations in September 1960, he embraced him as a fellow revolutionary.¹⁹ Havana did not respond with violent actions within the United States for revenge or deterrence. Rather, it followed the procedure required by international law. In July 1960, Cuba called on the UN for help, providing the Security Council with records of some twenty bombings, including names of pilots, plane registration numbers, unexploded bombs, and other specific details, alleging considerable damage and casualties and calling for resolution of the conflict through diplomatic channels. US Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge responded by giving his "assurance [that] the United States has no aggressive purpose against Cuba."
- On 13 October 1960, Washington prohibited the majority of exports to Cuba – the exceptions being medicines and certain foodstuffs – marking the start of an economic embargo. In retaliation, the Cuban National Institute for Agrarian Reform took control of 383 private-run businesses on 14 October, and on 25 October, a further 166 US companies operating in Cuba had their premises seized and nationalised, including Coca-Cola and Sears Roebuck. On 16 December, the United States then ended its import quota of Cuban sugar, the country's primary export.²⁰
- To the United States, a revolutionary, left-leaning government near its border was an unbearable affront. On 17 March 1960, Eisenhower approved another CIA programme for covert action; a Cuban paramilitary force would be trained in the Guatemalan jungles by the United States to lead a resistance movement.²¹ The Castro regime would be overthrown in favour of one "more devoted to the true interests of the Cuban people and more acceptable to the United States," including support for "military operation on the island"

¹⁶ Gaddis, *We Now Know*, p. 181. Robert E. Quirk, *Fidel Castro*, pp. 247-248.

¹⁷ Peter G. Bourne, *Fidel: A Biography of Fidel Castro*, pp. 205-206, Quirk, *Fidel Castro*, pp. 316-319, Leycester Coltman, *The Real Fidel Castro*, p. 173.

¹⁸ Gaddis, *We Now Know*, p. 181.

¹⁹ Isaacs and Downing, *The Cold War*, pp. 206-207.

²⁰ Bourne, *Fidel Castro*, p. 214, Coltman, *The Real Fidel Castro*, p. 177.

²¹ This was begun in May 1960 when the CIA began recruiting anti-Castro Cuban exiles in Miami, Florida. These men were named Brigade 2506.



and "development of an adequate paramilitary force outside of Cuba." Intelligence reported that popular support for Castro was high, but the United States would determine the "true interests of the Cuban people." At an August 1960 meeting of the Organization of American States (OAS) held in Costa Rica, the US Secretary of State Christian Herter publicly proclaimed that Castro's administration was "following faithfully the Bolshevik pattern" by instituting a single-party political system, taking governmental control of trade unions, suppressing civil liberties, and removing both the freedom of speech and freedom of the press. He furthermore asserted that international communism was using Cuba as an "operational base" for spreading revolution in the western hemisphere, and called on other OAS members to condemn the Cuban government for its breach of human rights.²²

- On 18 August 1960, Eisenhower approved a budget of \$13 million for the operation. By 31 October 1960, most guerrilla infiltrations and supply drops directed by the CIA into Cuba had failed, and developments of further guerrilla strategies were replaced by plans to mount an initial amphibious assault. On 18 November 1960, Allen Dulles (CIA Director) and Richard Bissell (CIA Deputy Director for Plans) first briefed President-elect John Kennedy on the outline plans. In December, Eisenhower also endorsed a plan for an amphibious landing by US-trained Cuban guerrillas, which the CIA was confident, would provoke an island-wide uprising against Castro.²³
- On 6 January 1961, Khrushchev delivered a speech at the Higher Party School of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism in Moscow and declared that for the first time in history, the socialist camp's military strength could compel the imperialists, "under the threat of the downfall of their system, not to unleash a world war." But "national liberation wars" would continue "as long as imperialism exists, as long as colonialism exists... Such wars are not only admissible but inevitable." Turning to the example of Cuba, Khrushchev declared that "the Communists support such wars and march in the front rank with the peoples waging liberation struggles." When these pronouncements were made public a few days later, Eisenhower dismissed them as nothing new, but the new president's reaction was quite the opposite. "Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest, this is our clue to the Soviet Union."²⁴
- On 19 January 1961, the new President John F. Kennedy was briefed by Eisenhower on a number of topics before his inauguration. He was surprised by the scale of the plan to help the anti-Castro guerrillas but was not averse. The new president refused to let the US military intervene but he continued to allow the CIA to organise Cuban exiles for an invasion. Kennedy insisted, however, that any American involvement must be concealed. Despite the CIA's confidence, the invasion plan was riddled with problems. The morale of the Cuban exiles training in Guatemala was low and their numbers were small. The CIA's assumption that the government would support a failing mission by direct military involvement ran counter to Kennedy's public position.²⁵
- On 28 January 1961, Kennedy was briefed, together with all the major departments, on the latest plan (code-named Operation Pluto), which involved 1,000 men landed in a ship-borne invasion at Trinidad, Cuba, about 270 km south-east of Havana. When the plan was subsequently rejected by the State Department, the CIA proposed an alternative plan. On 4 April 1961, President Kennedy then approved the Bay of Pigs plan (also known as Operation Zapata), because it had an airfield that did not need extending to handle bomber operations, it was farther away from large groups of civilians than the Trinidad plan, and it was less "noisy" militarily, which would make any future denial of direct US involvement more plausible.

²² Quirk, Fidel Castro, p. 329.

²³ Isaacs and Downing, The Cold War, p. 209.

²⁴ Gaddis, We Now Know, p. 183. Michael R. Beschloss, The Crisis Years: Kennedy and Khrushchev, 1960-1963, pp. 60-61.

²⁵ Ibid..



The Bay of Pigs Invasion (17-20 April 1961) and Operation Mongoose

- The operation went wrong from the start. Only 6 American bombers, painted in Cuban colours, as if flown by rebel Cubans, took off from Nicaragua in support of the amphibious invasion. They only damaged three planes on the ground. Fearful of detection, Kennedy withdrew US air support at the last minute. Despite this, a force of about 1500 Cuban exiles went ahead with the invasion at the Bay of Pigs. Contrary to CIA expectations, the attack provoked no popular uprising against Castro. Kennedy called a crisis meeting and considered sending unmarked jets to destroy the Cuban air force. The meeting ended when everyone recognised the hopelessness of the situation. After three days' fighting, the survivors surrendered. Only fourteen were rescued by the US Navy. Kennedy was distraught over the Bay of Pigs fiasco. His determination to minimise political risk had weakened prospects for a military success. The CIA had vastly overestimated the support of the Cubans for a military invasion to 'liberate' them. Kennedy took as lesson from this episode that he must be considerably more critical of counsel from eager advisors. The fiasco also made him more determined to remove Castro as a threat to the United States.²⁶
- Kennedy was now also convinced that in the battle for the hearts and minds of the developing world was being won by the Soviet Union. When he met Khrushchev at the Vienna Summit in June 1961, the latter could not resist rubbing it in. The botched invasion had only "strengthened the revolutionary forces and Castro's own position. Castro is not a communist but U.S. policy can make him one." Kennedy acknowledged that the invasion was a mistake, but pointed out that if Castro were to use Cuba as a base from which to subvert other countries in the western hemisphere, that would endanger the United States. Khrushchev scoffed: "Can six million people really be a threat to the mighty U.S.?" The Soviet leader insisted that the wars of national liberation would be won by the Communists and that the United States was on the wrong side of history.²⁷ In Cuba, the invasion unified the people behind the regime and Castro chose at this moment to proclaim his cause was that of socialist revolution. It is now evident that Khrushchev was posturing. In fact, the Bay of Pigs had caused him to lose confidence about Castro and the Cuban Revolution. His memoirs highlighted his fear of Cuban vulnerability to another invasion and the implications its fall would have on the Soviet reputation. This prospect led Khrushchev to ponder over how to confront the United States with "a tangible and effective deterrent to American interference in the Caribbean."²⁸
- After Vienna, the Berlin crisis²⁹ preoccupied Washington, Moscow and their allies for several months. However, the open wound of Cuba did not heal. In November 1961, a presidential directive created a top secret covert-action programme against Cuba called Operation Mongoose³⁰, a programme of paramilitary operations, economic warfare, and sabotage which had as part of its objective the overthrow of Castro. By March 1962, the Joint Chiefs of Staff began contingency planning for an invasion of Cuba and an economic blockade. Later that spring, 40 000 US Marines practised an amphibious landing on another Caribbean island.
- Khrushchev was also concerned about his own position. He worried about the humiliation for the Soviet Union if Cuba was lost, certain that the United States would invade sooner or later again. He also felt the Soviet Union's military weakness. By 1962, a million US soldiers were stationed in more than 200 foreign bases, all threatening the Soviet Union, from Greenland to Turkey, from Portugal to the Philippines. Three

²⁶ Ibid., p. 210.

²⁷ Gaddis, *We Now Know*, p. 185.

²⁸ Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, pp. 545-546.

²⁹ The Berlin Crisis (June-December 1961) is the last major European incident of the Cold War about the occupational status of the German capital city, Berlin, and of post-World War II Germany. The USSR provoked the Berlin Crisis with an ultimatum demanding the withdrawal of Western armed forces from West Berlin—culminating in the city's de facto partition with the East German erection of the Berlin Wall by the end of the year.

³⁰ Operation Mongoose was part of the Cuban Project which had been earlier commissioned in March 1960 by the CIA during the Eisenhower administration. The operation was led by United States Air Force General Edward Lansdale and went into effect after the failed Bay of Pigs Invasion.



and a half million troops belonging to the America's allies were garrisoned around Soviet borders. There were American nuclear warheads in Italy, the United Kingdom and Turkey. Khrushchev knew that the missile balance was stacked against the Soviet Union, and its long-range missiles were limited in their capability.³¹

Missiles in Cuba

- In May 1962, Khrushchev visited Bulgaria. While walking on the beach at Varna, he was acutely aware that across the Black Sea in Turkey were American military bases with nuclear warheads within striking distance of the Soviet Union. An idea formed in Khrushchev's mind of placing missiles in a base close to the United States.³² Cuba provided the perfect site and installing Soviet missiles in Cuba would have the double benefit of protecting the island from attack and of equalising the balance of power in nuclear weapons. The Soviet Union had never before sited ballistic missiles outside its borders. Khrushchev reasoned that it would be best to import the missiles in secret and by the time the Americans spotted them it would be too late. His plan to place short- and medium-range missiles in America's backyard would create a parity with its long-range weapons – one of fear.³³
- While Castro was unhappy over turning Cuba into a missile base, he believed that the missiles would alter the worldwide strategic balance in favour of the socialist camp. The Soviet leader gave first priority to defending Cuba, the strategic balance, was for him, an important but secondary consideration. For Castro, it was the other way around: the strategic balance was primary, with Soviet military protection a useful bonus.³⁴ Accepting the missiles, a Cuban delegation was sent to Moscow to negotiate terms. In early 1962, a group of Soviet military and missile construction specialists accompanied an agricultural delegation to Havana. From the very beginning, the Soviets' operation entailed elaborate denial and deception, known in the USSR as "maskirovka". All of the planning and preparation for transporting and deploying the missiles were carried out in the utmost secrecy, with only a very few told the exact nature of the mission. Even the troops detailed for the mission were given misdirection, told they were headed for a cold region and outfitted with ski boots, fleece-lined parkas, and other winter equipment. Even the Soviet code name Anadyr was also the name of a river flowing into the Bering Sea, the name of the capital of Chukotsky District, and a bomber base in the far eastern region. All these were meant to conceal the programme from both internal and external audiences.³⁵
- In July 1962, 65 Soviet ships sailed for Cuba, ten of them carrying military equipment and specialists in missile construction under the guise of "machine operators," "irrigation specialists" and "agricultural specialists". In August 1962, Che Guevara visited Moscow and asked Khrushchev what would happen if the Americans discovered that there were missiles in Cuba. The latter replied that "If there is a problem, we will send the Baltic fleet." Until it arrived, tactical nuclear weapons would protect Soviet troops and the strategic encampments they were constructing. The assumption was that using low-yield, short-range nuclear weapons in combat limited to Cuba would not provoke massive nuclear retaliation against the Soviet Union.³⁶ By September, the installation of missile sites, from which nuclear warheads targeted on the United

³¹ Isaacs and Downing, *The Cold War*, pp. 211-212. In October 1962, they may have had a few dozen ICBMs, with some intelligence estimates as high as 75. In comparison, the United States had 170 ICBMs and was quickly building more. It also had eight George Washington- and Ethan Allen-class ballistic missile submarines with the capability to launch 16 Polaris missiles each, with a range of 1,500 nautical miles (2,800 km). Khrushchev boasted to the world that the USSR was building missiles "like sausages" whose numbers and capabilities actually were nowhere close to his assertions. Although the Soviet Union had about 700 medium-range ballistic missiles in quantity, these were very unreliable and inaccurate. The United States had a considerable advantage in total number of nuclear warheads (27,000 against 3,600) at the time and in the technology required for their accurate delivery. It also led in missile defensive capabilities, naval and air power; but the USSR enjoyed a two-to-one advantage in conventional ground forces, more pronounced in field guns and tanks in Europe.

³² Khrushchev was with his defence minister Rodion Malinovsky. As Khrushchev put it, he saw the deployment of Soviet missiles in Cuba as "putting one of our hedgehogs down the Americans' trousers."

³³ Operation Anadyr was the code name used by the Soviet Union for its Cold War secret operation in 1962 of deploying ballistic missiles, medium-range bombers, and a division of mechanised infantry to Cuba to create an army group that would be able to prevent an invasion of the island by United States forces.

³⁴ Gaddis, *We Now Know*, p. 265.

³⁵ James H. Hansen, "Soviet Deception in the Cuban Missile Crisis" in *Learning from the Past*, pp. 49-50.

³⁶ Gaddis, *We Now Know*, p. 275.



States could be launched, was under way. Castro wanted the missiles to be sited openly but Khrushchev was obsessed with secrecy. Even the Soviet ambassadors at Washington and the UN were not informed. In September, Havana was further enraged when Congress approved US Joint Resolution 230 which expressed Congress's resolve to prevent the creation of an externally supported military establishment. A major military exercise in the Caribbean, which Cuba denounced as a deliberate provocation and proof that the U.S. planned to invade Cuba.³⁷

- On September 11, the Soviet Union publicly warned that a U.S. attack on Cuba or on Soviet ships carrying supplies to the island would mean war. In the meantime, Moscow continued to conceal their actions in Cuba by denying that the weapons being brought into Cuba were offensive in nature. TASS, the Soviet news agency also announced that the Soviet Union had no need or intention to introduce offensive nuclear missiles into Cuba. As early as August 1962, Washington suspected the Soviets of building missile facilities in Cuba. During that month, its intelligence services gathered information about sightings by ground observers of Russian-built MiG-21 fighters and Il-28 light bombers. U-2 spy planes found S-75 Dvina (NATO designation SA-2) surface-to-air missile sites at eight different locations. The first consignment of R-12 missiles arrived on 8 September, followed by a second on 16 September. The R-12 was a medium-range ballistic missile, capable of carrying a thermonuclear warhead. On 13 October, the Soviet ambassador to the United States Dobrynin³⁸ was questioned by former Undersecretary of State Chester Bowles about whether the Soviets planned to put offensive weapons in Cuba, which he denied. On the morning of Sunday, 14 October, a U-2 spy plane photographed the missile sites under construction near San Cristobal in western Cuba. The next day, the photographs were analysed and by late evening, reports reached McGeorge Bundy³⁹, the national security advisor. Kennedy was informed on 16 October.⁴⁰



The Formation of ExComm

³⁷ The codename for the exercise was Operation Ortsac, which was Castro spelled backwards.

³⁸ Anatoly Fyodorovich Dobrynin (1919-2010) was a Russian statesman and a Soviet diplomat and politician. He was Soviet Ambassador to the United States for over two decades, from 1962 to 1986.

³⁹ McGeorge Bundy (1919-1996) was an American expert in foreign and defence policy, serving as United States National Security Advisor to Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson from January 1961 to February 1966. He was noted for the escalation of American involvement in the Vietnam War.

⁴⁰ Isaacs and Downing, *The Cold War*, p. 213.



How was the global Cold War fought?

- On Tuesday, 16 October, Kennedy convened a small group of senior officials to debate the crisis. Known as ExComm, this Executive Committee of the National Security Council met almost continuously for the next two weeks. It was unanimous from the start that the missiles must be removed from Cuba. Secretary of State Robert McNamara calculated that they would become operational in less than two weeks, which imposed a fourteen day maximum timetable to get the missiles out. More than just a problem with Cuba, this was a major Cold War crisis.
- The first issue ExComm debated was whether to bomb the missile sites or to pursue some other option to force the Soviets to dismantle them. Kennedy initially favoured a limited air strike. On that afternoon, the Joint Chiefs met and agreed that an air strike would have to be total to be effective, taking out not only all the missile sites but the SAM⁴¹ anti-aircraft missile defences and the backup facilities. A later meeting failed to produce consensus. Meetings over the next few days saw various options being analysed. The Pentagon tried to persuade Kennedy that a neat, surgical strike against the missile launchers was impractical. Air Force general Curtis LeMay agreed that a major air offensive was called for. Those opposed to this line argued that it risked casualties on both sides and could jeopardise worldwide public opinion. ExComm members were divided into two groups: hawks and doves. The former wanted to take Cuba and rid it of Communism. The latter preferred exploring diplomatic options, which included approaching Castro or even Khrushchev, and wanted to avoid any action that might result in Soviet retaliation.⁴²
- ExComm also examined the effect of the developments on the strategic balance of power, both political and military. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that the missiles would seriously alter the military balance, but McNamara disagreed. They however agreed that the missiles would affect the political balance. First, Kennedy had explicitly promised the American public less than a month before the crisis that "if Cuba should possess a capacity to carry out offensive actions against the United States ... the United States would act."⁴³ Second, the credibility of the United States among their allies, and among the American people, would be damaged if they allowed the Soviet Union to appear to redress the strategic balance by placing missiles in Cuba. Kennedy explained after the crisis that "it would have politically changed the balance of power. It would have appeared to, and appearances contribute to reality.
- On Thursday afternoon, 18 October, Kennedy met Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko at the White House. Kennedy had not yet decided whether to confront Gromyko with irrefutable proof of Soviet missile sites in Cuba. Both men discussed the possibility of another summit, and then Gromyko charged the United States of 'pestering' Cuba. Kennedy pointed out that the situation was aggravated by Soviet military assistance to Cuba, which Gromyko insisted was purely defensive in nature. Kennedy decided not to reveal American awareness of the missiles until he had his policy clearly worked out. Gromyko cabled the Kremlin, stating that there is reason to believe that the United States has no current plans to invade Cuba. That evening, ExComm was informed that the installation of the SS-4 medium-range missiles was nearly complete. The longer-range SS-5 missile sites might not be operational till December.⁴⁴ ExComm now pursued an alternative option to an air-strike: a naval blockade. This would prevent the Soviets from landing further shipments. While stopping ships on the high seas was tantamount to an act of war, a blockade would permit greater control over events and offer more options as the crisis unfolded.⁴⁵

⁴¹ SAM refers to a Surface-to-Air Missile. It is designed to be launched from the ground to destroy aircraft or other missiles. It is one type of anti-aircraft system.

⁴² Isaacs and Downing, *The Cold War*, pp. 213-214.

⁴³ This was articulated during a news conference attended by Kennedy on 13 September 1962.

⁴⁴ The SS-4 Sandal was the first Soviet strategic missile using storable propellants and a completely autonomous inertial guidance system. With its capability to deliver a megaton-class nuclear warhead the rocket provided a capability to attack strategic targets at medium ranges. This system constituted the bulk of the Soviet offensive missile threat to Western Europe. It was deployed at both soft launch pads and hard silos. The SS-5 Slean was a single-stage, storable liquid-propellant, intermediate range ballistic missile. As with the SS-4, the Slean missile was a single stage missile with integral fuel tanks though it was larger and twice the maximum range.

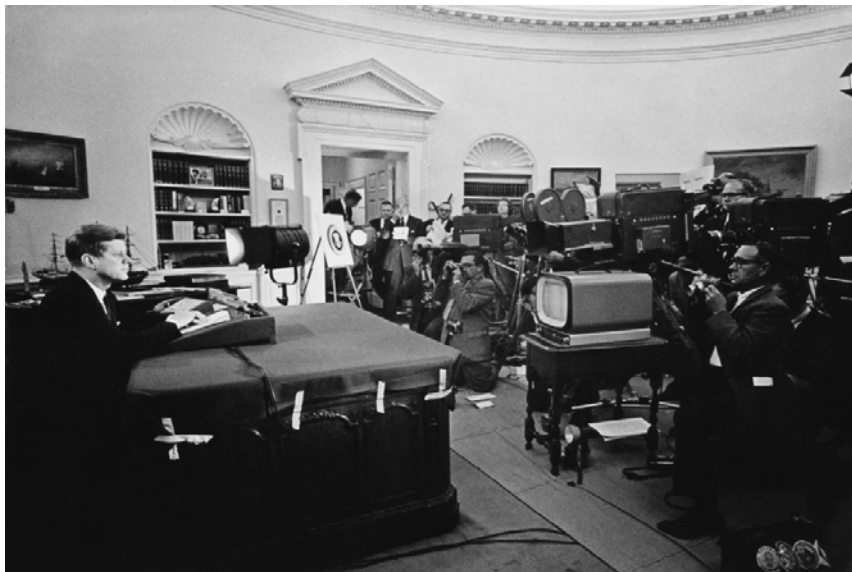
⁴⁵ Isaacs and Downing, *The Cold War*, p. 215.



Hwa Chong Institution (College)
Paper 1
Theme I: Understanding the Cold War, 1945 -1991
How was the global Cold War fought?

The Blockade

- For two more days, the meetings continued. With mid-term congressional elections approaching, Kennedy was needed elsewhere to campaign on behalf of the Democrats. In the meanwhile, Rusk and McNamara persuaded ExComm to come down against a military air strike and recommend the more cautious policy of a naval blockade of Cuba as first option. On Sunday morning, 21 October, Kennedy cancelled the rest of his electioneering trip and decided to back the blockade. Acheson suggested calling this a 'quarantine' around Cuba, since it sounded less aggressive. Plans were finalised and Acheson sent abroad to garner support for America's position.
- On Monday, 22 October, TV networks were approached to clear their schedules for the prime-time coverage of a speech by the president on 'a matter of highest national urgency'. Earlier in the day, the State Department officially informed America's allies of its intentions. President de Gaulle and Prime Minister Macmillan assured Washington of full support. Precautionary measures were taken elsewhere. Worried that action over Cuba would produce a Soviet reaction over Berlin, Strategic Air Command put its B-52 nuclear bomber force on alert. Each bomber was armed with four nuclear warheads; the first time in its history that the Air Defense Command armed all its aircraft with nuclear weapons.



- At 5 pm, Kennedy, Rusk and McNamara met with 17 congressional leaders from both parties to brief them on the crisis. Some expressed support for the blockade, while others argued it was not enough. Rusk and McNamara assured them that they had not ruled out an invasion but would try the blockade option first. That afternoon, Soviet ambassador Dobrynin was in New York sending Gromyko off at the end of his trip. A State Department official caught up with him and informed him of a meeting with the secretary of state that evening in Washington. At 6 pm, Dobrynin met with Rusk, who handed him a copy of the speech Kennedy would deliver on television that evening and a copy of a personal message to Khrushchev.⁴⁶
- In this letter, Kennedy told the Soviet leader that his action was a 'necessary minimum' and he hoped Moscow would refrain from any action that would deepen an already grave crisis. Dobrynin, who was still

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 217.



unaware of the deployment of missiles in Cuba, returned to the Soviet embassy and relayed the message to Moscow. Convinced that a US invasion of Cuba was imminent, Khrushchev sent instructions to the Soviet commander authorising him to use tactical nuclear weapons in the event of an American landing. He was however told not to fire the SS-4 ballistic missiles without a direct order from Moscow. Soviet air defence units were under equally explicit orders not to fire on American reconnaissance planes, despite the detailed information they were collecting on missile deployment.⁴⁷

- An hour after Rusk met with Dobrynin, Kennedy addressed the nation live from the White House.⁴⁸ In the meanwhile, the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered all US military forces worldwide to go to DEFCON 3, a heightened state of nuclear alert. Several hundred ICBM missiles were prepared, and Polaris nuclear submarines were dispatched to their pre-assigned locations at sea. In the Caribbean, the US Navy deployed 180 ships to blockade Cuba. Khrushchev's plan had backfired. With no contingency plan in the event the missiles were discovered, all he could now was to improvise. Warsaw Pact troops were put on high alert. On Tuesday morning, 23 October, TASS transmitted from the Kremlin a statement charging Kennedy with piracy, with an unheard of violation of international law,' and with measures that constituted 'a serious threat to peace and to the security of nations.' Moscow insisted that the weapons in Cuba were 'intended solely for defensive purposes in order to secure the Republic of Cuba against the attack of an aggressor,' and that the White House policy 'may lead to catastrophic consequences for world peace.' That evening, Robert Kennedy paid the first of several private visits to Dobrynin. As he was leaving, Kennedy asked the ambassador if he knew what orders had been given to Soviet ships heading to Cuba. Dobrynin told him that they had orders to continue their course to Cuba, when in fact, the Kremlin had already ordered five ships carrying missiles to return to the Soviet Union.⁴⁹
- On Wednesday, 24 October, U Thant, secretary-general of the United Nations, under pressure from 40 non-aligned states, sent letters to both leaders urging suspension of the blockade and the stopping of shipments to Cuba for two or three weeks. It called upon both governments to refrain from any action that would 'bring with it the risk of war.' In the meantime, the Soviet vessel Aleksandrovsk was the first vessel ordered to race on to Cuba when the others were recalled. It contained twenty-four nuclear warheads and beat the blockade by a few hours. Khrushchev cautioned Kennedy that should the US Navy try to stop Soviet ships at sea, his submarines would sink the American vessels. He would not be the first to fire a nuclear weapons, Khrushchev said, but he warned that 'if the US insists on war, we'll all meet together in hell.'

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 218. Gaddis, *We Now Know*, p. 276.

⁴⁸ In his address, President Kennedy reiterated 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.' He also described the administration's plan: to halt this offensive buildup, a strict quarantine on all offensive military equipment under shipment to Cuba is being initiated. All ships of any kind bound for Cuba, from whatever nation or port, will, if found to contain cargoes of offensive weapons, be turned back. This quarantine will be extended, if needed, to other types of cargo and carriers. We are not at this time, however, denying the necessities of life as the Soviets attempted to do in their Berlin blockade of 1948.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 219.



- ExComm went into a long, tense session. At 10.25 am, an intelligence message reported that some of the Soviet ships appeared to have stopped. Dean Rusk leaned across to McGeorge Bundy, sighed with relief, and said, 'We're eyeball to eyeball, and I think the other fellow just blinked.' McNamara advised Admiral George Anderson, chief of naval operations, that the blockade must carefully avoid humiliating the Soviets, lest Khrushchev react in a volatile manner. That night, Kennedy received a personal message from Khrushchev, warning that the Soviet Union saw the blockade as 'an act of aggression,' and that 'the Soviet Union cannot fail to reject the arbitrary demands of the United States.' It appeared that Moscow was going to the wire. The Joint Chiefs of Staff increased the alert status of the US military to DEFCON 2, the highest alert status short of war. This was the only time in the entire Cold War that the US military would go to this kind of alert.⁵⁰ In the meantime, Kennedy replied to Khrushchev's earlier telegram, stating that the United States was forced into action after realising that the repeated Soviet assurances that no offensive missiles were being placed in Cuba were false.
- At 7.15 am on Thursday, 25 October, the first interception took place in the Caribbean. As the Soviet tanker Bucharest entered the quarantine zone, it was stopped by the USS Gearing. Guaranteeing that it was only carrying oil, it was allowed to continue to Havana. Kennedy avoided responding directly to U Thant's appeal. Khrushchev wrote that he agreed with the proposal. Meanwhile at the UN Security Council, Adlai Stevenson⁵¹ confronted Soviet representative Valerian Zorin with evidence of the missile installations. At ExComm, the CIA reported that the medium-range SS-4 missiles were ready for firing.
- Shortly after dawn on Friday, 26 October, another ship was stopped by the destroyers of the US Navy and boarded. This was a Lebanese vessel Marucla and the event was stage-managed for public opinion. Lebanon could barely afford to launch an international protest and in any case, intelligence already knew the contents of the ship's cargo. American naval officers and a Russian translator boarded the ship and having assured themselves of what they already knew, they allowed the ship to continue to Havana. By 10 am, ExComm was assembled. Kennedy was under pressure to 'crack down hard' on Castro before the November elections. He

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 220-221. B-52 bombers went on continuous airborne alert and B-47 medium bombers were dispersed to various military and civilian airfields, and made ready to take off, fully equipped, on 15 minutes' notice. One-eighth of Strategic Air Command's 1,436 bombers were on airborne alert, some 145 intercontinental ballistic missiles stood on ready alert, some of which were targeted at Cuba. Air Defense Command redeployed 161 nuclear-armed interceptors to 16 dispersal fields within nine hours with one-third maintaining 15-minute alert status. Twenty-three nuclear-armed B-52s were sent to orbit points within striking distance of the Soviet Union.

⁵¹ Adlai Stevenson (1900-1965) was the United States ambassador to the United Nations (January 1961-February 1965).



conceded that the blockade was not going to get out missiles already in Cuba and plans for invasion were discussed. 25 000 marines were assembling around the Caribbean, and 100 000 soldiers were being mobilised in Florida. Two aircraft carriers headed for Cuba at full speed. The air force again put forth the bombing option, and presented plans for an initial strike of more than 2000 sorties. Estimates point to at least 18 500 casualties in the event of an invasion. Kennedy realised that in order to avoid catastrophe, he had to do a deal.⁵²

An Extraordinary Proposal

- Later that morning, ABC-TV diplomatic correspondent John Scali received a surprise call from Aleksandr Fomin⁵³, a press counsellor from the Soviet embassy suggesting that they meet. Over lunch, Fomin asked if Washington would accept a compromise whereby in return for a guarantee that the United States would not invade Cuba, the Soviet Union would dismantle and withdraw the missiles. Scali immediately passed the request to Dean Rusk, who went straight to the President. Scali was told to go back to Fomin and tell him that the US government saw real possibilities in the deal. It later emerged that Fomin, actually a KGB official, was acting entirely on his own initiative.⁵⁴
- That evening, the State Department received a letter from the Kremlin. It seemed to offer hope by suggesting a settlement along the lines Fomin had proposed earlier in the day: the Soviets might withdraw the missiles if the US agreed not to invade nor 'support other forces which might intend to invade Cuba.' At 10 pm, ExComm reconvened and decided to treat the letter as a bona fide proposal. Later that night, Castro visited the Soviet embassy in Havana and dictated a cable to Khrushchev predicting an imminent US invasion and assuring the Kremlin that any landings would be resisted. He suggested that the Soviets prepare a nuclear strike in retaliation. Despite protests from the Soviet ambassador, Castro ordered his own units to fire on any US aircraft flying over Cuba.⁵⁵
- In the early hours of Saturday, 27 October, Robert Kennedy met Dobrynin. The ambassador pointed out that the United States had sited operational missiles in Turkey⁵⁶ aimed at the Soviet Union. Kennedy responded that the Turkish missiles might be brought into a possible solution to the crisis. After he returned from a phone call, Kennedy told the ambassador that the President was willing to 'examine favourably the question of Turkey.' This message was passed on to Moscow immediately. When morning broke, the day would go down as Black Saturday. ExComm began a marathon session at 10 am with news that low-level reconnaissance flights indicated that six missile launchers now appeared to be operational. The next forty-eight hours would be critical. The meeting was interrupted by a report that a U-2 flight over Alaska had drifted off course into Siberian airspace. The Soviets regarded this as a 'feeler' to test their response systems. When ExComm learned that the Soviets had mobilised their MiGs to intercept the U-2, McNamara turned white.
- In fact, the U-2 pilot got away safely. At this tense moment, just after 11 am, reports came in the form of a Radio Moscow broadcast of another letter from Khrushchev. This was in a more formal tone and made a new proposal. For the Soviets to remove their missiles from Cuba, the United States must remove its missiles from Turkey. The hawks in ExComm were outraged and immediately challenged the President; to remove

⁵² Isaacs and Downing, *The Cold War*, p. 222.

⁵³ This was the alias of Aleksandr Semyonovich Feklisov (1914-2007). He was the KGB station chief of Washington from 1960-1964.

⁵⁴ Isaacs and Downing, *The Cold War*, p. 222.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

⁵⁶ The PGM-19 Jupiter was the first nuclear tipped, medium-range ballistic missile (MRBM) of the United States Air Force. These nuclear tipped missiles were deployed in both Italy and Turkey in 1961 due to NATO's Cold War deterrence against the Soviet Union.



the missiles from Turkey would fragment NATO. The discussion carried on through the day with Kennedy arguing that to start a nuclear war and not accepting a trade over Turkey was an 'insupportable' decision.⁵⁷

- Fears in Washington that Khrushchev had been removed from power proved unfounded. At the Saturday Presidium, Khrushchev reiterated that by standing firm, the Soviet Union had forced the United States to reconsider its invasion plans. Despite all intelligence predictions, Khrushchev did not believe an invasion was imminent. Now he introduced a new factor: the Turkish missiles, and dictated the message that created the panic response in ExComm.
- In Cuba, reports of an American U-2 having been spotted over the island prompted Soviet anti-aircraft batteries into action. Unable to reach his commander, the Soviet deputy authorised the firing of a SAM missile which exploded alongside the U-2, killing the pilot.⁵⁸ When this was reported in Washington, the military prepared to take action against the SAM missile emplacements, as contingency plans directed. To the Pentagon's consternation, Kennedy ordered no action be taken. At ExComm, the idea slowly emerged of ignoring Khrushchev's second letter and responding only to his first. At just after 8 pm, the president signed the letter, which guaranteed an end to the blockade and no invasion of Cuba if the Soviet Union removed its missiles. A few ExComm veterans lingered at the White House, including the president, his brother, Rusk and Theodore Sorensen. They agreed Robert Kennedy should arrange another meeting with Dobrynin and inform him directly of the president's letter. Rusk had come round to the deal over the Turkish missiles but suggested it not to be made explicit since it would look like backing down. In case the details were leaked, Rusk telephoned an American official at the United Nations and dictated a statement which he wanted U Thant to issue the following day if so instructed by Washington. In that statement, U Thant was to call for the removal of both the US missiles in Turkey and the Soviet missiles in Cuba. If the Soviets revealed the secret deal, Kennedy could pretend that the suggestion had come from the UN. Later that night, Dobrynin met with Robert Kennedy at the Justice Department. He made it clear that the military and many senior officials were spoiling for a fight. However, he stressed that if the Soviets dismantled the missiles, the US would withdraw the blockade and guarantee no invasion. Dobrynin asked about the Turkish missiles to which Kennedy replied the president was willing, but the deal had to be kept secret. This was because as the leading NATO member, the United States cannot be seen as unilaterally removing the missiles for its own purpose. He urged Khrushchev to give a clear, substantive reply the following day, but asked him not to mention the Turkish missile deal.⁵⁹
- In Moscow, the Presidium had gone into session when it received Dobrynin's report of his conversation with Robert Kennedy. Khrushchev told his colleagues they must take the dignified way out of the crisis. He was worried that Kennedy was under such intense pressure from the military to escalate that he might not be able to hold out. Fearing that air strikes on the missile sites were imminent, Khrushchev agreed to accept Kennedy's proposals. At 9 am on Sunday, 28 October, Radio Moscow broadcast a message from Khrushchev announcing that the government has given a new order to dismantle the arms which were described as 'offensive', crate and return them to the Soviet Union. At the White House, there was an immense sigh of relief. Within hours, Kennedy broadcast a quick acceptance statement to Moscow over the Voice of America, and ordered that no more ships were to be boarded. In a more formal reply to Khrushchev, the president wrote of 'firm undertakings on the part of both our governments which should be promptly carried out.' He concluded by agreeing with Khrushchev to 'devote urgent attention to the problem of disarmament.'

⁵⁷ Isaacs and Downing, *The Cold War*, p. 225.

⁵⁸ The U-2 was piloted by Major Rudolph Anderson. Although the Cubans had opened fire on low-flying American aircraft that day, the Soviet anti-aircraft unit was acting on orders from Lieutenant General Stepan Greckho. General Issa Pliyev, the commander of Soviet forces in Cuba had earlier asked for authorisation to fire on American planes if they attacked Soviet facilities, but Moscow did not respond to the request.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 227- 228.



- The blockade continued, and in the following days, aerial reconnaissance proved that the Soviets were making progress in removing the missile systems. On 2 November, Kennedy addressed the nation via radio and television broadcasts regarding the dismantlement process. Soviet ships began leaving from 5 November. Further diplomatic efforts were required to remove Soviet bombers, and they were loaded on three Soviet ships between 5 and 6 December. Concurrent with the Soviet commitment on the status of the bombers, Washington announced the end of the blockade effective on 20 November 1962.

A Win-Win Outcome and the Aftermath

- In the United States, the outcome was seen as a major Soviet defeat. Only the right-wing hawks and the military were disappointed; they had been denied a fight. Kennedy though famously warned his subordinates and to reporters not to humiliate Khrushchev by boasting too openly. The latter too admitted that the Soviets were “obliged to make some big concessions in the interest of peace.” In Moscow, Khrushchev too claimed a victory. In portraying the settlement, the Soviets repeatedly stressed that they had achieved what had never before been possible – an agreement from the United States not to invade Cuba. Khrushchev had safeguarded the socialist revolution in Cuba, helping it avoid the fate of Guatemala and regarded this as a personal diplomatic triumph.⁶⁰
- In Havana, Castro, who had not been consulted over the withdrawal of the missiles, was furious. He refused to see the Soviet ambassador and regarded the dismantling of the missiles as a moral defeat. Castro saw the outcome as a betrayal by the Soviets, given that decisions on how to resolve the crisis had been made exclusively by Kennedy and Khrushchev. Castro was especially upset that certain issues of interest to Cuba, such as the status of the U.S. Naval Base in Guantánamo, were not addressed. This caused Cuban–Soviet relations to deteriorate for years to come. In Ankara, the Turkish government, which had repeatedly made clear that it wanted US missiles sited on its territory for defensive purposes, expressed delight at the settlement and stated it would never be party to any negotiation that involved their withdrawal. No one told them a deal had already been done.

⁶⁰ Gaddis, We Now Know, p. 278.



- Kennedy emerged as a hero from the crisis. In the congressional elections ten days after the crisis, the Democrats won their biggest majority in the Senate in twenty years. In 1963, the missiles in Turkey were quietly removed, with cover stories that this had no connection to the Cuban crisis. Despite the agreement reached with Khrushchev, Kennedy continued to discuss plans for insurgency and sabotage in Cuba. After his early humiliations in the Bay of Pigs and uncertainty over Berlin, Kennedy was now a statesman, a world peacemaker; his political future looked secure.
- The compromise embarrassed Khrushchev and the Soviet Union because the withdrawal of missiles from Italy and Turkey was a secret deal between Kennedy and Khrushchev. Khrushchev went to Kennedy thinking that the crisis was getting out of hand. The Soviets were seen as retreating from circumstances that they had started. Khrushchev's fall from power two years later in 1964 was in part because of the Politburo embarrassment at both Khrushchev's eventual concessions to the United States and his ineptitude in precipitating the crisis in the first place. According to Dobrynin, the top Soviet leadership took the Cuban outcome as "a blow to its prestige bordering on humiliation."⁶¹
- The crisis ended with a collective sigh of relief. Both superpowers had had to choose between compromise and nuclear war. Neither side chose war. Even though both sides claimed victory, the same important lesson was learnt: never again must the superpowers risk direct nuclear confrontation.⁶² After the crisis, the superpowers created the Moscow–Washington hotline⁶³, a direct communications link between Moscow and Washington, D.C. The purpose was to have a way that the leaders of the two Cold War countries could communicate directly to solve such a crisis. This was done after the signing of a "Memorandum of Understanding Regarding the Establishment of a Direct Communications Line" in June 1963, in Geneva, Switzerland, by representatives of the Soviet Union and the United States.⁶⁴
- Soviet-American competition took on a certain stability, even predictability after 1962. Neither side would ever again initiate direct challenges to each other's sphere of influence. The strategic arms race intensified in the wake of the missile crisis but it was conducted within an increasingly precise set of rules, codified in formal agreements like the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (1963), the Non-Proliferation Treaty (1968) and the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (1972), as well as the equally important and informal understanding that both sides would tolerate satellite reconnaissance. By the late 1970s, the Cold War had evolved, or so it seemed, into a robust, sustainable, and at least at the superpower level, peaceful international system.⁶⁵

Postscript

- No episode in the history of international relations has received such microscopic scrutiny from so many historians. So surely we know what happened. Was it not Nikita Khrushchev's contempt for Kennedy's weaknesses that led him to place medium- and intermediate range ballistic missiles in Cuba? Was he not seeking, through this bold stroke to redress a strategic balance upset by Washington's belated acknowledgement that there was no missile gap? Did not Kennedy's courageously hawkish but coolly crafted response thwart this scheme, producing a triumph for the Americans and abject humiliation for the Russians? Did not both sides conclude from the experience that neither should ever again run such risks?
- Historians still answer "yes" to the last question – but only to that one. New American, Soviet and Cuban sources are revealing most other conventional wisdom about the crisis to be highly questionable.

⁶¹ William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era*, p. 579.

⁶² Isaacs and Downing, *The Cold War*, p. 230.

⁶³ It is known formally in the United States as the Washington-Moscow Direct Communications Link.

⁶⁴ Thomas Graham, Damien La Vera, "The "Hot Line" Agreements". *Cornerstones of Security: Arms Control Treaties in the Nuclear Era*, pp. 20–28.

⁶⁵ Gaddis, *We Now Know*, pp. 279-280.



Khrushchev placed missiles in Cuba, these materials suggest, because he saw Kennedy as aggressive, not passive. He acted at least as much from an emotional compulsion to save the Cuban revolution as from any calculated determination to correct a strategic imbalance. Kennedy may well have been the most dovish member of his administration – not a hawk at all – but he comes across as even more courageous for having taken that stance. Lessons about decision-making that long ago made their way into the crisis-management textbooks turn out to have been largely irrelevant to the outcome of this one. That settlement was itself a compromise, not a clear-cut victory for either side; and a third side, the Cubans, did more than previously suspected to bring it about. Finally, the long-term effect as not so much to humiliate the Soviet Union as to bolster its image as an equal to the United States in a Cold War that would continue for another three decades.

- What has not changed, in all these revisions and reconsiderations, is the central place the Cuban missile crisis occupies in Cold War history: if anything, it appears to have been a more important turning point that we had earlier believed it to be. It was the only episode after World War II in which each of the major arenas of Soviet-American competition intersected: the nuclear arms race to be sure, but also conflicting ideological aspirations, “third world” rivalries, relations with allies, the domestic political implications of foreign policy, the personalities of individual leaders. A different kind of Cold War emerged that would evolve into a “long peace”: a context by no means free of tensions and even crises on a smaller scale, but one conducted within an international system to which the superpowers slowly accustomed themselves. Soviet and American leaders would find fewer incentives to try and alter the system – until 1989, when circumstances converged once again, very abruptly and to everyone’s astonishment, to alter it for them.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 260-261.