

# THE CUBAN CRISIS REVISITED

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THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS was precipitated on October 22, 1962, when President John F. Kennedy ordered a partial naval blockade of the island. Suspect vessels were to submit to search, and any "found to contain offensive weapons" destined for Cuba were to be forcibly forbidden passage.<sup>1</sup> This measure, Kennedy said, was necessitated by the sudden discovery of missiles and bombers in Cuba, because these weapons (a) had been introduced "under a cloak of secrecy and deception" and in "deliberate defiance of . . . my own public warnings to the Soviets on Sept. 4th and 13th," (b) upset the Soviet-American strategic balance, and, therefore, (c) threatened the peace of the Western hemisphere.

Now, no scholar should accept uncritically this (any more than the Soviet) interpretation of the crisis. Some documents are available, and it is now possible to look back upon the period with a modicum of perspective. This paper will attempt to study only one, albeit the most basic, problem of the Cuban crisis: Why did the Soviets place strategic weapons in Cuba?

This question has a twofold meaning which has not always been adequately distinguished. First, the question means: What Soviet objectives was the deployment of the weapons intended to serve? But in view of the widely accepted allegation of Kennedy, that the Soviet move constituted "defiance" of his "warnings," a defiance which "contradict[ed] the repeated assurances of Soviet spokesmen," the question also means: Why did the Soviets believe that they could successfully deploy the weapons? This aspect of the problem, in turn, raises a third, subsidiary enquiry: Why did the Soviets later decide that they could no longer successfully deploy them, and agree under duress to withdraw the weapons?

These three questions will be studied here in that order. But preliminarily I shall mention the principal theories of the crisis offered to date. Though I reject them as a whole, there is an element of truth in each of these.

1. President Kennedy's TV speech, October 22, 1962. I use throughout the text of the AP version reproduced by *The Toronto Globe and Mail*, but I have consulted other versions, including that of *The New York Times*, that of *USIS Texts*, and the official version of *The Department of State Bulletin*. Minor variations are to be noted among these versions, but none that would militate against the observations made below.

## I—THEORIES OFFERED TO DATE

**D**URING THE CRISIS and shortly afterwards, several observers developed the so-called "pre-planned withdrawal" theory, in order to account for the otherwise incomprehensible "defiance" of the "warnings," as well as for the absurdity of the American claim of Soviet "stealth" and for several other facts which were being generally ignored at the time.<sup>2</sup> Several variations were available, including some developed from a far right viewpoint. A few gave prominence to a Cuba-Turkey base exchange, while others emphasized the achievement of a no-invasion "pledge." Still others attempted to balance several possible Soviet objectives.

As one who at the time of the crisis wrote along these lines, I must now reject these hypotheses in principle. It seems evident in retrospect that no conceivable set of advantages could have been deemed by Chairman Nikita S. Khrushchev to outweigh the tremendous political defeat and the personal humiliation, which, in the event, were inflicted on him. Besides, positive indications abound that the withdrawal was hurried and disarrayed. Though the Soviet move did not end in complete disaster, it was a clear and resounding defeat. Arnold Horelick rightly asserts that these hypotheses "mistake skillful salvage of a shipwreck for brilliant navigation."<sup>3</sup>

The explanation first offered by Khrushchev in his speech of December 12, 1962 — that the objective was solely to defend Cuba against an imminent United States attack, and that the weapons were withdrawn when U.S. imperialism, having learned its lesson, gave up its intent — is both inadequate and disingenuous. It is essentially inadequate in that it fails altogether to explain how the Soviet Union expected to cope with the provocation caused by the presence of missiles which, allegedly, had been declared intolerable by the U.S. Besides, there was no actual or tacit "pledge" exchanged for the withdrawal. It is true that eventually (though not until early 1963) Kennedy renounced his objective of overthrowing the Cuban government, but this is not to say that any such undertaking was ever given by him. (We shall have to explain below why despite Kennedy's "victory" the crisis was directly instrumental in his eventual decision to tolerate the continued existence of the Cuban Revolutionary Government.)

Khrushchev's explanation is also disingenuous in several ways. My

2. See Stuart Chase, "Two Worlds," *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, June, 1963; David Lowenthal, "U.S. Cuban Policy: Illusion and Reality," *National Review*, January 29, 1963; Robert D. Crane, "The Cuban Crisis: A strategic analysis of American and Soviet policy," *Orbis*, VI, 4; and my own "Russia's Cuban Policy and the Prospects of Peace," *Council for Correspondence Newsletter*, October, 1962, reprinted as "The Prospects for Peace" in *Liberation*, December, 1962. An abridged, revised version appeared in *The Nation*, February 9, 1963.

3. *The Cuban Missile Crisis: an analysis of Soviet calculations and behaviour* (Memorandum RM-3779-PR, The RAND Corporation, September, 1963), [henceforth cited as "Horelick"] p. 5. A slightly abridged version of this paper was published in *World Politics*, XVI, 3 (April, 1964), pp. 363-389.

reconstruction will account for the fact that though Khrushchev obviously knows the truth, nevertheless he has found it inconvenient to reveal it, except in small and distorted part.

The early hypotheses offered by the U.S. were vague and inconsistent. Kennedy's speech of October 22nd interpreted in detail the hostile nature of the Soviet move, but did not clearly explain what the Soviets expected to achieve had the move been successful. Kennedy hinted at "intimidation" and "desire to dominate or conquer," and other officials spoke of "nuclear blackmail." But precisely what this meant in concrete terms was never stated. Ambassador Adlai Stevenson's submissions to the UN were sheer double-talk: the Soviet move was depicted as "a premeditated attempt to confront this Hemisphere with a fait accompli. By quickly completing the whole process of nuclearization of Cuba, the Soviet Union would be in a position to demand that the status quo be maintained and left undisturbed. [Para.] If we were to have delayed our counter-action, the nuclearization of Cuba would have been quickly completed. This is not a risk which this Hemisphere is prepared to take."<sup>4</sup> In other words, the Soviets wanted to place missiles in Cuba for the purpose of having them remain there, and unless the U.S. forced them out the missiles would have stayed in place. Conclusion: the U.S. could not take the risk of having the missiles remain in Cuba, because if the U.S. countenanced their presence there then the missiles would remain. Elsewhere, the Soviet "defiance" was explained away as a "blunder."<sup>5</sup> Evidently, the Soviets did blunder. But could it be maintained that their *objective* was to blunder? If not, then what did they seek? And why did they believe they could safely place the weapons in Cuba? The "blunder" theory explains nothing. It merely asserts that they were mistaken in this belief.

More recently, however, the U.S. government has made its own the theory of Arnold Horelick.<sup>6</sup> This theory states that the Soviet Union deployed the missiles in order to redress temporarily a strategic nuclear imbalance until Soviet production closed the gap. It was "a 'quick fix' measure to achieve a substantial, though far from optimal improvement in Soviet capabilities against the U.S.": it was "a stop-gap measure, pending the completion of a Soviet-based ICBM force."<sup>7</sup>

But there are serious objections to this view. Horelick's thesis simply ignores the total political situation in which the crisis took place. He leaves out of account almost every political factor in the cold war. In particular he ignores the Cuban factor, as if Cuba had not been the object of conflict between the two great powers. But even within its own parameters, Horelick's reconstruction cannot stand. He rightly adduces

4. First statement to the Security Council, October 25, 1962 (as reproduced in *The U.S.S.R. and Cuba: the U.S. position* [USIS, 1963], p. 23).

5. See the article by James Reston, *The New York Times* [henceforth cited as *NYT*], October 24, 1962.

6. See reference above, note 3. Administration sources publicly espoused Horelick's thesis on December 12, 1963. See *NYT* of the same date. Since then the theory has been widely disseminated, e.g. by the NBC television programme "Cuba: the missile crisis," broadcast on February 9, 1964.

7. Horelick, pp. 27, 28.

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the well-known facts concerning the strategic inferiority of the Soviet Union and the mythical nature of the "missile gap." But he fails to give any evidence, or even to cite reasonable indications, that the nuclear inferiority of the Soviet Union was *sufficient* to render the deployment of missiles to Cuba a "substantial" improvement in its strategic position. For Horelick's thesis would require not only a considerable, even hopeless, Soviet lag behind U.S. missile strength (which in any event remains to be shown). It would also require the Soviet to lack, as of mid-1962, even a "minimum deterrent." It would require, in brief, such strategic weakness in the Soviets, and such peril to its security, that the Soviet Union lay open to the possibility of an essentially unpunishable U.S. first strike, so that in desperation the Soviets sought to improve the range of what strategic weapons they did have.

This does not correspond to the generally available estimates of Soviet strength as of the period. Horelick's fundamental assertions are gratuitously made. The theory, in the last analysis, assumes the truth of Kennedy's words: "As the President subsequently said, the Soviet leaders tried materially to change the balance of power."<sup>8</sup> For this reason it is a basically uncritical *apologia* (albeit an unconscious one) for the U.S. policy, rather than an independent critical investigation.

Finally, Horelick's theory suffers from the same tautology of early U.S. versions. Horelick fails to explain what concrete political objectives the strategic redress subserved. Yet, unless one were to suggest that the Soviets were concretely preparing to launch an attack on the U.S., one must suggest what concrete political service this military strategy was expected to perform. In the end, Horelick is reduced to the conclusion that the Soviets did not seek any concrete political objective: "They probably anticipated that the emplacement of strategic missiles in Cuba and their acceptance by the United States would contribute in some degree to the solution of a whole range of military-political problems confronting the Soviet Union and would alter the environment of the cold war in such a manner as to promote new opportunities for political gain whose nature could not be precisely foreseen."<sup>9</sup> Now, it is undeniable that "Khrushchev may have found the deployment attractive especially for the increased political and diplomatic leverage it promised to provide against the West."<sup>10</sup> This is only to state (inconsistently) the obvious truth that the fundamental Soviet expectations were political benefits. The suggestion that Khrushchev did not expect any political benefits in particular, that he did not intend "precisely" anything, may be forgiven to an honestly mistaken scholar; it cannot be seriously discussed.

## II—THE SOVIET OBJECTIVES

**N**O ACCOUNT of the Cuban crisis can ignore the principle that the crisis was closely related to the Cuban question as a whole. This is based on

8. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

two facts which dominate the background of this period: (a) the Soviet interest in the survival of the Cuban revolution, (b) the opposite desire of the U.S. After the abortive invasion of April, 1961, through 1962 Kennedy harbored, as he first avowed on April 20, 1961, a general intention to overthrow the Cuban government at the opportune time. This meant, as he explained, that the U.S. would use military force against Cuba after all other means had been exhausted. It was this original conflict between the two powers that escalated into the Cuban crisis. Although many other factors intervened and compounded it, Cuba remained at the heart of this dispute.

In November, 1963, Prime Minister Fidel Castro told French journalist Jean Daniel<sup>11</sup> that the Soviet Union had deployed the missiles in order to deter an American attack on Cuba. The decisive event "that started everything," Castro said, occurred when Kennedy conveyed certain exploratory hints to the Soviets through Khrushchev's son-in-law, Aleksei Adzhubei, to whom Kennedy allegedly said that "the new situation in Cuba was intolerable," reminding the Russians "that the United States had not intervened in Hungary." Evidently, said Castro, this was a request for "Russian non-intervention in the event of an invasion." The Soviet Union, Castro thought, decided to deter such an invasion with nuclear military aid.

We need not assume the correctness of this interpretation. But it is a fact that Adzhubei did interview Kennedy on January 30, 1962, under circumstances which are relevant to later events: it was on that very day that the OAS had voted to deny Kennedy the support for action against Cuba which he had desperately tried to obtain. Pierre Salinger has confirmed that Hungary was mentioned during the interview. Castro was surely wrong if he meant that an actual decision to invade had been made, but any mention of the topic in this context must have been at least exploratory.

On February 7th the Soviet Union backed Cuba's charges at the UN that the U.S. planned aggression against Cuba. The complaint was unsuccessfully pursued, first in the Political Committee, next in the General Assembly, and finally in the Security Council. On February 18th the Soviet Union officially declared that the American policy toward Cuba "creates a serious threat to world peace," and charged the U.S. with supporting "preparations . . . for a new armed attack."<sup>12</sup> The Soviet Union, however, made no commitment to defend Cuba except by supplying aid for her own independent use. As often before, the Soviet expressions of support stopped short of the commitment to consider an attack on Cuba as an attack on the Soviet Union.

Far from it. As had also happened before, Soviet-American relations improved in inverse proportion to the quality of Cuban-American relations. By this time the Soviet Union had become engaged in a new peace offensive aimed at a simultaneous settlement of the German question and of disarmament. Russian hopes of a summit at Geneva, in connection

11. NYT, December 11, 1963.

12. NYT, February 19, 1962.

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with the forthcoming disarmament conference were not denied until the end of February.

The Soviet Union, thus, had at least two different — indeed somewhat contradictory — objectives at this time, not only one, as Khrushchev later said. It opposed Kennedy's Cuba policy on political and ideological grounds and wished to deter an attack on Cuba. But not at any price. It also wished to coexist with the U.S. and, specifically, to avoid any action that would make more difficult the solution of the German question or disarmament. More generally, it did not want to jeopardize a possible settlement of the cold war. Yet, this did not mean, as the Chinese have construed it, that the Soviet policy of coexistence, propelled by deathly fear of war, implied "softness" towards the U.S. For Khrushchev did not hesitate to devise a plan that would put considerable pressure on the U.S. The objective was not only to deter an attack on Cuba, without guaranteeing Cuba's security, but also to press the U.S. to negotiate a settlement of the cold war, under conditions more favorable to the Soviet Union than heretofore. Let us now consider the various components of this complex objective.

Suppose that the Soviet missile policy originated as an attempt to pursue a middle course between abandoning Cuba to American invasion and guaranteeing Cuba's security against the U.S. Castro, in Daniel's report, wanted the latter: "do whatever is needed," he asked Khrushchev, "to convince the United States that any attack on Cuba is the same as an attack on the Soviet Union." The Soviet Union, however, wanted something slightly different, namely, to press the U.S. to abandon its "plans" yet without committing Russia to war if the U.S. were not dissuaded (and let us keep in mind that this may not have been all that Khrushchev wanted).

It may be asked whether at this time the deterrent the Soviets had in mind was a nuclear deterrent. Certain facts indicate that it was so and, moreover, that from this early date the U.S. so understood it. Unidentified diplomatic sources (possibly the Cubans themselves) informed the U.S. delegation at the Punta del Este OAS conference that the Soviet Union "has not yet" supplied Cuba with "jet bombers" and "short-range rockets," but might soon.<sup>13</sup> A State Department intelligence estimate also concluded that Cuba "may soon have ballistic missiles capable of hitting targets in the United States."<sup>14</sup> This was reported in the U.S. within one week of the Adzhubei interview.

On the other hand, Castro seems to have granted to the Soviet Union a single-mindedness which may have been his own. This may have been the origin of later difficulties. Castro's unco-operativeness with the subse-

13. *The Toronto Globe and Mail* [henceforth cited as *G&M*], February 5, 1962, (AP report).

14. *The Toronto Star*, February 6, 1962 (UPI report). *The Interim Report on the Cuban Military Buildup*, Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee, Committee on Armed Services, U.S. Senate [88th Congress, 1st Session], [henceforth cited as *Senate Report*], confirms that "the intelligence community did conclude in early 1962 . . . that the IL-28 (Beagle) light bomber would be supplied to Cuba by the Soviets in the future," p. 5.

quent Soviet-American agreement to withdraw the missiles, may have sprung from the fear that Khrushchev had worked out a deal with Kennedy "betraying" Cuba for Berlin, and from the fact that the withdrawal reduced Cuba's defenses against U.S. attack. But some such "betrayal" had been a real possibility ever since Cuba began to rely upon the Soviet Union for support. Castro's behavior since late 1960 through 1962 (e.g. his sometimes exaggerated protestations of communist belief) becomes intelligible if we remember that abandonment by the Soviet Union had been Cuba's second greatest danger, after the danger of American attack, between February 5, 1960, and October 22, 1962.<sup>15</sup>

I know of no evidence that the Soviet Union ever intended a simple trade of Cuba for Berlin, or for any other simple strategic advantage such as U.S. bases elsewhere. (I argue solely from indications, not from any supposed Soviet incapability to betray an ally.) On the other hand, there are indications that the objective was both to deter an invasion without a guarantee, and to press, from a position of strength, for advantageous settlement of the cold war. Early in October, 1962, and at least once again before mid-month — that is, just before the crisis — the Soviet Union approached the U.S. informally through the UN, suggesting negotiations to "link the questions" of Cuba and Germany. Specific reference was made to the deployment of missiles to Cuba.<sup>16</sup> The overtures were rejected by the U.S. (We shall see below why.) I do not interpret this offer to mean (as Castro for a time seemed to think) that in exchange for advantages elsewhere the Soviet Union would abandon Cuba to U.S. attack. Not only did the Soviet Union protect Cuba at a late date and despite disadvantages to its prior commitment to peaceful coexistence, but the political disadvantages of such a betrayal would hardly have been overcome by mere concessions in Turkey or Berlin.

Besides, Horelick has rightly pointed out that deterrence of U.S. attack did not require the deployment of the weapons actually sent. By the same token, the Soviet abandonment of Cuba in trade for valuable consideration could have been achieved, if at all, without deploying weapons that exceeded the requirements of deterrence alone. The idea of "linking" the questions of Cuba and Germany makes sense only if the objective was to *solve* the German question and, hence, to settle a — if not *the* — fundamental problem of the cold war. Thus, in the final analysis the hypothesis here suggested is that the objective was to wrap up a "package deal" on Germany and Cuba. For the reasons here explained, it must have appeared to Khrushchev that, paradoxically, it would be easier to negotiate on both questions together rather than separately: the U.S. did not want to negotiate on either, but it might be forced to negotiate on both. The U.S. evidently, would have considered the attainment of this Soviet objective a major defeat for itself.

15. Horelick admits (pp. 23, 25), that "before the crisis, Khrushchev's expressions of strategic support for Cuba were formed in notably cautious and equivocal terms," and that "it may be assumed that the Cuban leaders had pressed Khrushchev for an explicit and unequivocal commitment to defend Cuba with Soviet-based weapons in the event of a U.S. attack. It was presumably to secure such a commitment, which the Soviet Union was evidently reluctant to give, that Castro in effect volunteered Cuba for membership in the 'socialist camp' in 1961."

16. G&M, October 15, 1962.

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It is one thing to say with Castro that the missile policy went back to February, 1962, but it is another to suppose that the decision to ship them was made at that time. It was only towards the end of June that Raúl Castro, Cuba's Defense Minister, went to Moscow to initiate talks of stepped-up military aid. In the meantime a general relaxation of Soviet-American tensions did not seem at all impossible in March, 1962. Discussions at Geneva on the conjoined questions of Berlin, a nuclear test ban, and disarmament were proceeding apace.

To the U.S. administration it appeared that the Cuban question could be pursued apart from the Geneva talks. After the "disappointment" of Punta del Este the U.S. had tried to rally NATO support for its Cuban policy, but to no avail. Economic and diplomatic sanctions against Cuba had hurt her, but were obviously not bringing her to her knees. So, on April 10th, Attorney General Robert Kennedy arranged an interview between his brother and José Miró Cardona, the leader of the anti-Castro Cuban exiles. Miró's later contention, that "six divisions" were mentioned during the interview, was never denied; the same figures had been bandied about in other circles at the time. Kennedy did later deny (in 1963, when it became clear that he had given up the overthrow of Castro, and Miró, in protest, revealed his dealings with Kennedy) that he had given his assent to an actual undertaking to Miró. This is, of course, entirely credible. It is intrinsically improbable that a concrete decision to invade would have been taken even at this time. The outcome of Geneva was surely the least that Kennedy would have waited for.

On the other hand, it cannot be doubted that the overthrow of Castro remained Kennedy's objective. Even as public opinion against Castro began to subside in the months after the failure of the U.S. invasion, the same purpose was periodically re-stated by the administration. Its words were backed by its actions: continuation of a \$2,400,000 per year subsidy to the Cuban Revolutionary Council, the maintenance and use of CIA-operated facilities in the Miami area for training exiles in subversive activities, the segregation of Cuban soldiers volunteering for enlistment in the U.S. Army, and the continuation of sabotage, infiltration, coastal raids, air-supply of guerrillas, both by the CIA's own units and by independently operating (but CIA-supplied and supervised) exile groups. The conclusion that armed intervention was being actively though hypothetically considered at this time is the most plausible one.

Ironically, Kennedy's wishes to deal separately with Russia and Cuba began to be frustrated soon. By May 4th, the "package deal" for a settlement of the Berlin question (proposed by the U.S. with British and French support) on the basis of which a detente had seemed almost certain, had completely collapsed. The terms, apparently, had been acceptable to the Soviet Union, but the Bonn government became intransigently opposed. The disarmament conference immediately became deadlocked. The cold war was on again, and the U.S. was freer to pursue a more decisive Cuban policy — but so was the Soviet Union. Towards the end of June Raúl Castro arrived in Moscow and talked with Marshal Rodion Malinovsky, his Soviet counterpart; on July 3rd he was received



by Khrushchev himself. The curtain had been raised on the drama's first act.

**T**O SUM UP: Soviet objectives were complex. They included an attempt to force a settlement of the Cuban question within the context of the German question and, ultimately, the cold war. Berlin, Germany, disarmament, the success of "peaceful coexistence" and Cuba may not have been the only ingredients. Horelick's idea that the objective was to gain a strategic advantage could be admitted, at the level of subsidiary gains. For instance, whatever real or imaginary strategic advantages, if any, the deployment might have had, could have been used by Khrushchev to appeal for support from the Soviet military. But the main objectives seem to have been political. And Berlin and Germany were surely the only other elements of immediate importance comparable with Cuba's. These probably predominated from the outset.

Was this complex and ambitious objective an attainable one? There were difficulties, of course; but if managed correctly the policy was likely to succeed — in fact it almost did. If this is not readily apparent, part of the reason may be the uncritical acceptance of the U.S. explanation that the Soviet Union defied the American warnings despite full knowledge that the U.S. would not stand idle. We shall examine this story in detail in the next section. But even if the claim were correct, the Soviets could not have known what would be the U.S. attitude at the time the policy was conceived and planned: indeed, the Soviet plan must have provided for feeling out the U.S. government and pressing it to accept the Soviet move before committing itself irrevocably.

This does not mean that the U.S. could have been pleased by the Soviet plan. But the question was: what would the U.S. do about it? The deployment of any missiles to Cuba was perfectly legal. What publicly admissible reasons could the U.S. allege against the Soviet move? Still, legality aside, the U.S. attitude must be ascertained. The obvious solution was to proceed gradually, telegraphing to the U.S. each step as it was taken, observing its reaction and noting its attitude before proceeding to the next step. The real difficulty, therefore, was not how to keep the deployment secret. On the contrary, it was to keep the U.S. informed of the deployment, without complete openness about other aspects of the program.

In order for the missiles to have a *credible* deterrence (and, moreover, in order to minimize the risk of Soviet involvement if the U.S. eventually decided to brave the missiles), it would have been necessary for the Soviet Union to vest control of the weapons in the Cuban government. Yet, the Soviets were not willing to go so far as to allow "proliferation"; after all, the defense of Cuba was only part of their objective. For one thing, they were not likely to trust implicitly Castro's prudence. More generally, they had exactly the same reasons for retaining ultimate control in relation to Cuba that the U.S. has always had in relation to its allies. The Soviet solution — an unfortunate one from their viewpoint, as

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we shall see — was to *pretend* to the U.S. that the weapons had been given to Cuba, whereas in reality they remained under complete Soviet control.

It was necessary, therefore, to let the U.S. know of the existence of the missiles, without giving away the facts about their control. The Soviets never attempted physical secrecy. On the contrary, the U.S. reaction to the missiles had to be probed. What they kept secret was the official arrangements made with the Cuban government.

This was a risky plan. But we must not exaggerate the danger. I agree with Horelick that although the Soviets took political and military risks, "the risk of an immediate thermonuclear response was almost certainly not one of them."<sup>17</sup> There was indeed no reason for the Soviets to suppose even that a confrontation such as did in fact occur would be precipitated by the U.S. as long as no surprises were sprung on Kennedy and as long as the U.S. government could be made to accept each Soviet move as it occurred. If at any time the U.S. became intransigent and could not be made to accept the Soviet policy, the scheme could always be halted without great loss.

Why, then, did the confrontation eventually take place? Wherein lay the Soviet miscalculation? Why did the Soviets believe they could safely proceed to the last step, the emplacement of the missiles in the field, even after the U.S. warnings of September 4th and 13th? These are the questions to which we shall now turn.

### III — THE AMERICAN COUNTERSCHEME

**T**HE EVIDENCE SUGGESTS that at a certain point the Soviets were misled by the U.S. government into the belief that it would accept the deployment of the missiles, whereas in reality it did not intend to do so. On the contrary, the U.S. plan was to feign surprise at the later "discovery" of the missiles and, then, with the backing of an aroused, "managed" public opinion, to demand the unconditional withdrawal of the missiles. Kennedy could not afford to argue with Khrushchev about the legality or the propriety of the move; to do so would have meant, in effect, to enter into negotiations on the question whether the Cuban government, though communist, would be permitted to exist. Deception was the only way to nullify the Soviet scheme. Every other solution would have meant negotiations, which in turn would have implied some compromise.

More precisely, the U.S. government's strategy consisted of the following steps: (1) keep the public partly uninformed, partly misinformed, about the nature of the Soviet buildup, including the presence of the missiles, and about the nature of the Soviet objectives, (2) convey to the Soviets at the right time the impression that the U.S. reluctantly accepted the Soviet move, (3) issue equivocal statements which would not deceive the Soviets, but which could later be made to appear to domestic (and world) opinion as a stern warning to the Soviet Union against de-

17. Horelick, p. 35.

ployment of the missiles, (4) wait, then, about six weeks until the missiles were emplaced (with the added bonus that this would bring the U.S. to within two weeks of national elections), (5) feign astonishment at the "discovery" of the weapons, (6) obtain the backing of public opinion with the pretense that the missiles gravely endangered U.S. security and upset the strategic balance, and with the charge that the Soviets mounted this threat through deception and stealth, and finally (7) demand the unconditional withdrawal of the bombers and missiles.

Soviet military aid to Cuba had begun on a modest scale shortly before the invasion of April, 1961. Its pace quickened noticeably later the same year and during early 1962, but it did not become "alarming" until shortly after Raúl Castro's return from Moscow. Early in August, Cuban exile sources began to report the presence of Soviet troops in Cuba. On August 8th a Cuban exile source calculated that there were about 4,000 Soviet troops. The Cuban and Soviet governments had failed to take the most elementary precautions to keep their presence secret. Simultaneously, rumors about missiles began to flow from the same sources.

No conclusive evidence is publicly available on the date of arrival of the missiles. Castro stated to Jean Daniel that they began to arrive at the end of July, 1962. I cannot imagine why he should have wished to falsify the date, and the fact that the exile rumors began in early August would tend to confirm it. On the other hand, the U.S. government maintains that the equipment did not arrive "until about Sept. 8th."<sup>18</sup> Instead of asking *cui bono?* I shall argue *a fortiori*, and continue to suppose that the American date is correct.

In either event, the State Department at first ridiculed the reports of troops and missiles. But the reports became insistent and detailed, with ever increasing estimates in the number of troops. Moreover, the exiles began to enlist the willing ears of several American legislators. Before long the government found it impossible to dismiss the reports on the grounds that they were just exile talk. It now had to contend with the opposition, whose charges began to be widely credited. On August 20th the State Department finally admitted the presence of Soviet troops, but claimed that they were "technicians," and falsely insisted that their number was much smaller than reported. American opinion, which since the invasion had subsided noticeably, became electrified and indignant at the presence of the troops. There was a fairly common idea that U.S. security was being endangered by Soviet soldiers so close to home. Some politicians actually fostered this notion, though precisely what conceivable aggressive strategy could have been furthered by Soviet ground troops in Cuba was never discussed. The U.S. government did not enlighten the public or manage to disabuse it of this preoccupation. In fact, Kennedy kept his peace until August 22nd, when under considerable pressure to comment he confirmed the presence of "technicians" in Cuba. Other government sources then amplified: the troops had arrived as early as July 21st. Kennedy's personal intervention, however, seemed only to increase the demands for invasion or blockade.

<sup>18</sup>. NYT, December 12, 1963.

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Abstracting from strategic weapons (which, however, we might keep in mind as an additional possibility), it is not difficult to surmise what the Soviet troops in Cuba meant to Kennedy. They made a military adventure in Cuba extremely risky. Militarily, of course, they counted as nothing, nor did they imply a Soviet guarantee of Cuba. But they did put the onus on the U.S. for the international consequences of an attack. Kennedy thus found himself in the paradoxical position of having to counsel against the course he himself had continued to entertain, and to keep alive in the minds of the American people, during the previous year. (I assume here that the earliest attempts to hide the true state of affairs were motivated by indecision alone. It is possible to determine, as we shall see below, that by September 4th Kennedy's counterscheme was in operation, but it is impossible to determine when he first conceived it. If he had early intelligence of the Soviet plan, it is possible that from the outset the spread of misinformation and the counsel of moderation were intended to permit the Soviets unsuspectingly to proceed. If the missiles arrived in late July, this construction, of course, would be almost imperative.)

At any rate, the containment of public opinion was attempted on a variety of fronts. The number of "technicians" was consistently underestimated by a factor of about 5. The presence of ground-to-air missiles was denied even after the end of August, when their presence was known to the U.S.<sup>19</sup> On August 29th Kennedy stated at a press conference that he was not in favor of invading Cuba "at this time." Such a course, he added, would have had "very serious consequences." He hinted strongly that his words did not mean that he planned to invade at a later time. However, he refused to confirm whether his qualification "at this time," meant that he would favor an invasion in the future. These ambiguities served only to whet the already ravenous appetites of his critics.

One must go back to the newspapers of the day to recall the full force of the indignation and the alarm, to regain the stridency and the hostility, to recapture the fury of the inconsidered as well as the malicious demands — malicious, that is, more in relation to Kennedy than to Castro. "Public opinion" would not merely have backed a decision to invade: it was ready for nothing else. But in this context "public opinion" does not mean the mass of the American people: it means the representatives of the public, particularly the politicians and the mass media. The Soviet troops were providing the American people's personators with an occasion to press for "action." According to the Gallup Poll, among the people only one in four favored the use of force.

**A**T THIS TIME, the end of August, a crucial juncture was reached. Until then, as we have seen, the Soviet buildup merely foiled Kennedy's hopes. In this respect the Soviet move was meeting with success. But an undesir-

<sup>19</sup> Henry M. Pachter, *Collision Course: the Cuban missile crisis and coexistence* (New York, 1963), p. 8.

able side effect was also accruing. The Soviet policy was inflaming political passions in the U.S. — at a time when an election was looming up. Hence, the Soviet maneuver was achieving a double effect: it deterred Kennedy from invasion, but it excited many others to pursue that very end. This, in turn, excited Kennedy, on whom the political pressures ultimately bore. In short, the Soviet policy did in part deter Kennedy; but it also provided him with additional motives, beyond his original one, to take action.

The Soviets, apparently, had not anticipated this. The fact that as late as August 29th Kennedy had not altogether ruled out an invasion must have worried them somewhat. Perhaps for this reason, the Soviets began to explain their policy in public and thus to try to elicit a response out of an annoyingly uninformative administration.

On September 2nd, the Soviet Union confirmed that it was supplying weapons and military "technical specialists" to Cuba, explaining that "as long as the [United States] continue threatening Cuba, the Cuban Republic has every justification for taking necessary measures to insure its security and safeguard its sovereignty and independence, while all Cuba's true friends have every right to respond to this legitimate request."<sup>20</sup> Within two days, on September 4th, Kennedy issued a statement replying to the Soviet submission. This was the first of the two alleged "warnings" to the Soviets against deploying the missiles.

The statement was read by Kennedy to a press conference. It was very brief. Its essential part read:

There is no evidence of any organized combat forces in Cuba from any Soviet bloc country; of military bases provided to Russia; of a violation of the 1934 treaty relating to Guantanamo; of the presence of offensive ground-to-ground missiles; or of other significant offensive capability either in Cuban hands or under Soviet direction and guidance.

Were it to be otherwise the gravest issues would arise.<sup>21</sup>

If we read this statement assuming the truth of Kennedy's October 22nd statement explaining that it "made clear the distinction between any introduction of ground-to-ground missiles and the existence of defensive anti-aircraft missiles," it is not difficult to construe it as Kennedy intended that it be construed by the public. But does that construction correspond to what he actually said? And is that construction the one which the Soviet Union could have placed on the text?

Kennedy's "warning" was, rather, that the presence of "offensive ground-to-ground missiles" would be considered a grave issue. If this meant that any ground-to-ground missile would be considered offensive why did he not simply speak of "ground-to-ground missiles," without further qualifications? Why did he resort to redundancy, "offensive ground-to-ground missiles," which rendered the meaning ambiguous? In contrast, on October 22nd he did not resort to it, and claimed he had

20. *G&M*, September 3, 1962 (AP report).

21. Text of the statement, *NYT*, September 5, 1962. Subsequent quotations from this statement refer to the same source.

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warned the Soviets against "any introduction of ground-to-ground missiles."

Nor is this a matter of mere words. There is, after all, a valid distinction between "offensive ground-to-ground missiles," and "defensive ground-to-ground missiles," as we shall see below. If the "warning" of September 4th had conveyed that *all* ground-to-ground missiles would be considered intolerable, because they were offensive, the Soviets might have contested the moral and legal validity of the reasoning, but at any rate its meaning would have been clear to anyone. In point of fact the meaning was not clear.

Other parts of the statement were similarly equivocal. The absence of reference to bombers may be significant, since they had long been suspected as a possibility. The reference to "military bases provided to Russia" seems clear enough until we ask exactly what the term means. If, as the statement partly hinted, it meant a base for stationing "organized combat forces," then the statement's provisions did not apply, since no such base was being contemplated by the Soviets. On the other hand, if it applied to such missile bases as were about to be established, then they would have come under the provisions concerning "significant offensive capability either in Cuban hands or under Soviet guidance." If so, the gravity of the issue depended on what should be construed as *significant* offensive capability. Did this qualification not seem to grant that even *some* offensive capability would be tolerated, as long as it did not endanger American security?

This does not mean that Kennedy's statement was deceptive, only that it was ambiguous — deception entered only with the statement of September 13th. To the Soviets, who were about to unload the weapons, the ambiguity must have been the source of much worry. What did it really "warn" about? Only one thing was certain: it offered no reassurance against attack. Did it mean, therefore, that the U.S. rejected the Soviet submission of September 2nd, which claimed that the U.S. had no right to invade Cuba? Yet, Kennedy's statement had, in the main, a soothing tone. On the other hand, if it was meant to reveal a peaceful intent, why did it not make clear that Cuba would not be invaded? It would have been easy to convey so, instead of implying once more that for the present — whatever that meant — there was no need to invade. Or did Kennedy's words indicate that he was wavering under pressure? The Soviet Union had stated that the buildup was due solely to U.S. threats against Cuba. Did Kennedy's failure to reply to this point mean that the U.S. reaffirmed, or that it withdrew, such threats? In brief, the first overt attempt to ascertain the U.S. position had failed. It was necessary to clarify the situation. Within the week, on September 11th, the Soviet Union issued a lengthy and detailed statement of policy. This was the document which, according to Kennedy's speech of October 22nd, reassured him that the Soviet Union "had no need or desire to station strategic missiles on the territory of any other nation." Let us now examine the Soviet submission in some detail.

The Soviet statement said that "at first," when only Congress and the press were calling for an attack on Cuba, "the Soviet Union did not

pay special importance to this propaganda." <sup>22</sup> But, "now, however, one cannot ignore this," because *now Kennedy's own intentions were unclear*: in his message to Congress asking for a reserve call-up he had envisaged "the possibility of rapidly and effectively reacting . . . to a danger that might arise . . . and that he was taking such a step in connection with the strengthening of the armed forces of Cuba" by the Soviet Union. And yet, "what could have alarmed the American leaders, what is the reason for this devil's Sabbath [sic] raised in Congress and in the American press around Cuba? [Para.] The point is, they say, that armaments and even troops are shipped from the Soviet Union to Cuba." (Such was indeed the heart of the matter.) What did the Soviet Union have to say in reply?

The first point was that the Soviet Union had the *right* to station troops in Cuba at her request, and to supply her with whatever weapons were required. The right to self-defense was given considerable emphasis. Only as an afterthought, and only incidentally to contrasting the amount of military aid provided with the much larger amount of economic aid, the Soviet Union did allow that it had in fact sent to Cuba "up-to-date weapons" and the troops to handle them, ambiguously suggesting that these weapons were under Cuban control:

We can say to these people that these are our ships, and that what we carry in them is no business of theirs. It is the internal affair of the sides engaged in this commercial transaction. . . . But we do not hide from the world public that we really are supplying Cuba with industrial equipment and goods . . . we also send agronomists, machine-operators, tractor-drivers and livestock experts. . . . It will be recalled that a certain amount of armaments is also being shipped from the Soviet Union to Cuba at the request of the Cuban Government in connection with the threats by aggressive imperialist circles . . . [as well as] Soviet military specialists, technicians who would train the Cubans in handling up-to-date weapons, because up-to-date weapons now call for high skill and much knowledge.

The hint cannot be considered too broad, especially if we recall that it was unnecessary. By this time, if not earlier, the U.S. had more than second-hand rumors in evidence of the presence of the weapons. (U.S. intelligence has admitted that it first photographed the bomber crates, and detected the nature of the missile cargoes, while the ships were still at sea en route to Cuba.) The problem, thus, was not how to inform the U.S. of the nature of the weapons. The real problem, rather, was twofold: (a) to offer such arguments and reassurances as would incline the U.S. to accept the Soviet policy, and, (b) to ascertain to what degree, if any, the U.S. actually accepted the Soviet submissions. Note the semantic skill with which the Soviet Union began its ambiguous argument: "The armaments and military equipment sent to Cuba are designed exclusively for defensive purposes and the President of the United States and the American military . . . know what means of defense are. How can these means threaten the United States?" Did this question mean that the Soviet Union wanted to know what the U.S. thought, or did it mean that the

22. Text of the statement, *NYT*, September 12, 1962. Subsequent quotations from the statement refer to the same source.

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Soviet Union asserted that the U.S. could not but agree that the "up-to-date" weapons did not threaten the U.S.? Actually, it meant both. And in both senses it betrayed uneasiness about the U.S. attitude towards the Soviet buildup.

Of a different nature was the ambiguity of the expression "designed exclusively for defensive purposes." The Soviet phrase could mean either "intended for defense only," or "capable of being used only for defense." But, evidently, the Soviets did not think they could expect the U.S. to be reassured by the mere assertion of peaceful Soviet intentions. Therefore, it was necessary to demonstrate that the weapons were *capable* of being used only for defense.

**T**HE SOVIET ARGUMENT was very simple: under the circumstances in which the weapons were being deployed to Cuba they *could not* be used aggressively. But to understand the nature of the Russian submission we must first consider an elementary point of strategy which the layman often ignores.

The essential determinant of whether a weapon is intrinsically aggressive is not the intention of the user. But neither is it the physical design, the lethal power, the destructive capability, nor any other physical characteristic. The primary standard is the objective situation, that is, the relation the weapon has to a potential victim — in short, the actual possibilities of its being used to attack. A rifle or a pistol is an offensive weapon in relation to an unarmed man. But the same weapons in the Cuban militia's hands could hardly be considered offensive in relation to the U.S. of 1962. By the same token, the short-range missiles once placed in Turkey by the U.S. were offensive weapons when they were first installed, in the sense that they *could* have been used aggressively for a first strike against the Soviets. But in time, when these missiles were neutralized by new Soviet equipment, they ceased to have offensive capability. At first, when the Soviet Union lacked missiles of its own, the U.S. missiles in Turkey deterred a Soviet ground attack on Europe by threatening an "overwhelming" first nuclear strike; now they deterred a Soviet missile attack only because they promised an "unacceptable" retaliatory blow. Thus, they had become defensive weapons, unless a way could have been devised (which to date has not) in which they could have been used in connection with "hardened" missiles, or other missiles with "second strike capability" which released them for a "pre-emptive" or for a wanton attack. (Eventually the Turkey missiles lost even their defensive capability in relation to the U.S., though they retained it, of course, in relation to Turkey alone. It was then that they were withdrawn.)

The argument submitted by the Soviets on September 11th was the exact parallel of the foregoing. It stated that there was a distinction between the missiles which the Soviet Union possessed at home (i.e. "hardened" ICBM's, or "soft" ICBM's with secret locations, or Polaris-type missiles), which *were* capable of threatening aggression by virtue of their



capacity to carry out successfully a wanton attack, and the missiles actually sent to Cuba, which *could not* have been successfully so used. Reminding the U.S. of its bases "in Turkey, Iran, Greece, Italy, Britain, Holland, Pakistan and other countries," the Soviet Union submitted that

... there is no need for the Soviet Union to shift its weapons for the repulsion of aggression, for a retaliatory blow, to any other country, for instance Cuba. Our nuclear weapons are so powerful in their explosive force and the Soviet Union has so powerful rockets to carry these nuclear warheads, that there is no need to search for sites for them beyond the boundaries of the Soviet Union. We have said and we do repeat that . . . the Soviet Union has the possibility from its own territory to render assistance to any peace-loving state and not only to Cuba.

The last sentence particularly stipulated that the missiles in question, which the Soviet Union did not intend to deploy beyond its boundaries (a statement that solicited belief on the grounds that this undertaking in no wise lessened Soviet security), were not those which, in the Soviet submission, were required specifically for the defense of Cuba. In every respect this paragraph remains true even today. For it cannot be said that the Soviet Union did deploy such weapons to Cuba, nor could it be seriously argued that the weapons actually sent gave Cuba a credible capability to launch a wanton nuclear attack on the U.S. Indeed, as Kennedy himself would put it on the very next day: "if the United States ever should find it necessary to take military action against communism in Cuba, all of Castro's Communist-supplied weapons and technicians will not change the result or significantly extend the time required to achieve that result,"<sup>23</sup> though on October 22nd he was to claim precisely the opposite, namely, that they "upset the status quo." (And again, less than two months later he would reverse himself once more and admit that *strategically* the missiles did not change the status quo: "the Cuba effort . . . was an effort to materially change the balance of power. . . . Not that they were intending to fire them, because if they were going to get into a nuclear struggle they have their own missiles in the Soviet Union. But it would have *politically* changed the balance of power. . . .")<sup>24</sup>

The missiles that were placed in Cuba, however, would have made an American attack possible only at a price too heavy to be readily acceptable. They had, therefore, an appreciable deterrent effect. But they could not be said to have posed the threat of aggression against the U.S. for that end they were radically insufficient, given the ratio of their power to that of the U.S. They could have been used only in order to defend Cuba from attack.<sup>25</sup>

23. NYT, September 14, 1962.

24. CBS Script of *A Conversation with President Kennedy*, broadcast December 17, 1962 [cited below as *CBS Script*], p. 22 (italics mine).

25. Henry Kissinger, writing shortly after the crisis, made the point that the missiles had neither offensive nor defensive value for the Soviet Union: "the bases were of only marginal use in a defensive war. In an offensive war their effectiveness was reduced by the enormous difficulty — if not the impossibility — of co-ordinating a first strike from the Soviet Union and Cuba," "Reflections on Cuba," *The Reporter*, November 22, 1962. However, Kissinger failed to consider the possibility that they had defensive value for Cuba. Therefore, he fell into the "blunder" fallacy: "it is difficult to explain Soviet actions except as a colossal blunder."

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Before we proceed to study the American reply to this document we should consider this question: in view of the foregoing analysis of the Soviet statement of September 11th, how was it possible for Kennedy on October 22nd to pretend to construe its contents as a Soviet disclaimer of intent to deploy nuclear delivery systems to Cuba? The reason is that Kennedy quoted from the document out of context. Indeed, in one instance he actually did violence to the Soviet text itself.

For on October 22nd Kennedy's accusation was that:

... the Soviet Government publicly stated on Sept. 11th that "the armaments and military equipment sent to Cuba are designed exclusively for defensive purposes." That "there is no need for the Soviet Union to shift its weapons . . . for a retaliatory blow to any other country, for instance Cuba," and that "the Soviet Union has so powerful rockets to carry these nuclear war-heads that there is no need to search for sites for them beyond the boundaries of the Soviet Union." That statement was false.

Now, the first quoted sentence contained, of course, no more than the gist of the Soviet argument. The U.S. might well have claimed that the argument was invalid or otherwise unacceptable, but the Soviet statement hardly constitutes an undertaking not to send missiles to Cuba. The third quoted sentence referred, in the context, to Soviet ICBM's, not to the missiles actually sent. Indeed, it remains true to this day that it would have been absurd for the Soviet Union to deploy ICBM's to Cuba.<sup>26</sup>

The second quoted sentence, "there is no need for the Soviet Union to shift its weapons . . . for a retaliatory blow to any other country, for instance Cuba," similarly referred in the original context to weapons with second strike capability. But the Soviet words could not have been easily misapplied by Kennedy had he quoted the sentence in full: "there is no need for the Soviet Union to shift its weapons for the repulsion of aggression, for a retaliatory blow, to any other country, for instance Cuba." This described much too obviously the second strike weapons of the Soviet Union. But by omitting the words "for the repulsion of aggression" (which, in turn, necessitated omitting the commas before and after "for a retaliatory blow" in order to disguise the fact that the sentence had been tampered with),<sup>27</sup> the Soviet words were made to mean that the Soviet Union disclaimed all intention of sending *any* missiles to Cuba.

26. As late as September 12, 1962, the CIA Deputy Director, General Marshall S. Carter, while briefing the House Committee on Armed Services was still expounding the Soviet argument, namely, "that there was no reason why the Soviets should put in any long range offensive missiles in Cuba because they had the capacity to fire from the homeland and therefore did not need to go into Cuba," *Hearings, Committee on Armed Services, U.S. House of Representatives (88th Congress, 1st Session), January 30, 1963 [henceforth cited as House Hearings], p. 269.*

27. In most published versions, though the commas were omitted, the elision of the words was indicated by the conventional three dots. However, the official version published in *The Department of State Bulletin* (as reproduced in the *Headline Series, Foreign Policy Association, No. 157, Jan.-Feb., 1963*), violates the integrity of the Soviet text even more. It quotes the Soviet statement as follows: "There is no need for the Soviet government to shift its weapons for a retaliatory blow to any other country, for instance Cuba."

Evidently, this misrepresentation of the Soviet policy was intended to obtain domestic, allied and UN support for the blockade. The blockade, in turn, was necessary as a means to force the unconditional withdrawal of the missiles. For had the U.S. privately approached the Soviet government in reply to the Soviet overture of September 11th it could have done little but negotiate on a basis which Kennedy would have considered an utter defeat. To avoid this utter defeat it was necessary to create the Cuban crisis.

But the crisis stage was yet to come. First it was necessary to reply to the Soviet submission. More specifically, it was necessary to answer that the U.S. accepted the doctrine that the weapons sent to Cuba should be construed as having defensive capability only, and to disclaim the intention of attacking Cuba. On the other hand, if at a later stage the U.S. government was to claim that the weapons were offensive in character, it was necessary to convey the foregoing to the Soviet Union in such manner that the American public did not become aware that this was being done — indeed, the reassurance must be so worded that it could be later construed as an additional warning.

It did not take the administration long to compose such a reply. Two days after the Soviet statement Kennedy held a press conference. It began with a prepared statement explicitly addressed to both the Soviet Union and to American and allied listeners:

Ever since communism moved into Cuba in 1958 [sic] Soviet technical and military personnel have moved steadily on to the island in increasing numbers at the invitation of the Cuban Government.

Now that movement has been increased. It is under our most careful surveillance.

But I will repeat the conclusion that I reported last week: that these new shipments do not constitute a serious threat to any other part of this hemisphere.

If the United States ever should find it necessary to take military action against communism in Cuba, all of Castro's Communist-supplied weapons and technicians will not change the result or significantly extend the time required to achieve that result.

However, unilateral military intervention on the part of the United States cannot currently be either required or justified, and it is regrettable that loose talk about such action in this country might serve to give a thin color of legitimacy to the Communist pretense that such a threat exists.<sup>28</sup>

Under the circumstances here outlined these words could have had but one meaning for the Soviet Union: that the U.S. was well aware of the nature of the Soviet buildup due to its "most careful surveillance"; that nevertheless *even the most recent shipments* were not considered a threat to U.S. security, because the weapons did not affect appreciably the overwhelming superiority of the U.S. *in relation to Cuba* and, thus, that the U.S. accepted the view that they had only defensive capability. It also meant, therefore, that the U.S. was in a position to reassure the Soviet Union that no invasion would be launched. The Soviets should disregard

28. Text of the statement and press conference, NYT, September 14, 1962. Subsequent quotations refer to the same source.

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"Loose talk" about such a move: it did not emanate from those in authority. Kennedy was able to give his personal assurance to the Soviet Union that no such threat existed.

The second part of Kennedy's statement outlined anew the conditions under which the U.S. would revise its stand. It abounded in irrelevancies. It omitted all mention of missiles or bombers:

But let me make this clear once again. If at any time the Communist build-up in Cuba were to endanger or interfere with our security in any way, including our base at Guantanamo, our passage to the Panama Canal, our missile and space activities in Cape Canaveral or the lives of American citizens in this country, or if Cuba should ever attempt to export its aggressive purposes by force or the threat of force against any nation in this hemisphere or become an offensive military base of significant capacity for the Soviet Union, then this country will do whatever must be done to protect its own security and that of its allies.

The only remotely meaningful condition was the last one. In the context, it simply meant that if it ever became not a matter of defending Cuba, but of significantly enhancing the Soviet aggressive capabilities, the U.S. would reconsider. This proposition accepted and confirmed the validity of the strategic distinction between Cuba's defensive capability and the Soviet offensive capability. It drove home the proffered clarification of the U.S. position.

On the other hand, in relation to domestic opinion Kennedy's statement was sufficiently unclear to stimulate the first question from the floor of the press conference: "Mr. President, coupling this statement with the one of last week, at what point do you determine that the build-up in Cuba has lost its defensive guise to become offensive?" Kennedy's reply was difficult to follow:

I think if you read last week's statement and the statement today — I've made it quite clear, particularly in last week's statement when we talked about the presence of offensive military missile capacity or development of military bases, other indications which I gave last week. All these would of course, would indicate a change in the nature of the threat.

This was not very enlightening, and the second questioner persisted. Once again the reply was evasive and added nothing but tautologies to what Kennedy had already said. Kennedy managed not to betray himself in these two replies, but his evasiveness and obscurity tended to lessen slightly the credibility of his reassurance to the Soviets. Hence, when the Soviet Union on the very next day, September 14th, issued a statement of its own professing to accept Kennedy's words as a declaration that an invasion of Cuba was not being contemplated, it also gave evidence of a remnant of a misgiving: it regretted that the possibility of eventual attack had not been ruled out more definitively. Nevertheless, as events proved, Kennedy's word was believed in by Khrushchev.

**A**S EARLIER with the Soviet scheme, we must now consider briefly the feasibility of the American counterscheme. The plan was the essence of

simplicity. It required, to begin with, no more than the semantic skill to mislead both the Soviets and the American people at the same time. We have seen how this was done. Beyond that, it required only the ability to keep secret the photographic and other intelligence obtained between the time of the "warnings" and the time of the "discovery" of the missiles, several weeks later. Thereafter all normal governmental processes could be followed, including the eventual decision of the Executive Committee of the National Security Council concerning the specific measures to be taken against the Soviet Union. The only information that needed to be guarded for all time is that the U.S. government had knowledge of the missiles at the time when the "warnings" were issued.

In this connection we should note three facts. First, though all aerial reconnaissance of Cuba since 1960 and specifically during the months before the crisis had been done by the CIA's U-2's, on October 14, 1962 and thereafter the job was transferred to the U.S. Air Force's SAC. Indeed, it was the very first SAC U-2 flight on that date that "discovered" the missiles. The CIA is, of course, a more secure and compartmentalized organization than SAC, and the precise nature of the photographic information it gathered could remain the exclusive knowledge within the organization of no more than, say, two people, namely Director John A. McCone and one photographic intelligence officer.

Second, the U.S. government has persistently refused to make public any photographic evidence obtained between September 6th and October 13th. All its "before" pictures are dated September 5th or earlier, while all its "after" pictures are dated October 14th or later. This omission is especially important in the case of the so-called IRBM's which, unlike the fully portable, short-range missiles, required permanent installations and not simply a clearing in the woods. Now, the earliest photograph of IRBM bases made public by the U.S. government is dated October 17th: it shows the bases "nearing completion" and "having the final touches accomplished,"<sup>29</sup> so that construction must have begun some time before. Whether it had begun as much as six weeks before remains, of course, an estimate, and is not capable of proof. What can be proven, however, is that these bases were in existence for an unspecified time before they were "discovered."

Third, the U.S. government has alleged contradictory and, at times, absurd reasons to explain why (a) it was unable to photograph the missiles at an earlier date, (b) it was able to photograph them, but did not manage to do so, (c) may have photographed them, but lacked conclusive proof with which to back up a public accusation against the Soviet Union. For example, the government insinuated to the House Armed Services Committee that it exhibited only "before" pictures dated September 5th or earlier because later pictures did not have good photographic quality: "We have selected our best photographic materials covering these sites prior to October 14th and would like to review them very quickly. [Para.] This is the Remedios IRBM location as it appeared on September

29. *House Hearings*, p. 241.

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5th. . . ."<sup>30</sup> To the Senate investigating committee, however, one suggestion was that an amazing series of coincidences had prevented adequate photographic coverage during the period—for instance, a scheduled weekly flight having been cancelled (on account of unexplained difficulties), no one thought of ordering another flight until the next scheduled one, which took place one week later.<sup>31</sup> (Somehow this flight was "not wholly successful" either.) Taking another tack, the government explained that bad weather *continuously* prevented photography of the whole island between September 5th and 25th—and that after the weather lifted somehow it did not think of photographing the whole island, but only those parts which, as it turned out, did not have missile bases on them.<sup>32</sup>

The administration laid much emphasis on proving to a skeptical world opinion the existence of the missiles. But, strangely, it produced no evidence to support its claim about the exact nature or range of the missiles found in Cuba. Several reports<sup>33</sup> have pointed out that the evidence shown demonstrated only the existence of very short-range missiles, certainly not the type which are usually called IRBM's. The authoritative *Aviation Week* has actually suggested that the missiles should have been called PRBM's—Political Range Ballistic Missiles.<sup>34</sup>

In brief, the American counterscheme required essentially nothing else than security, and that security was ensured by two things. First, some physical secrecy was required, but it was not difficult to preserve. It had to do with the photographic intelligence obtained between September 5th and October 14th. Every other document could be placed in the public domain. Secrecy was required concerning their true meaning—which, in turn, could have been appreciated only in the light of the information that had been suppressed. Second, the number of people who had to be privy to the plan could be kept very small. Indeed, we may even make an intelligent guess at exactly who these were: Robert Kennedy, for obvious reasons; John A. McCone and one other CIA man, for reasons already given; Robert McNamara and his intelligence assistant, John Hughes, since in their briefings to House, Congress and public they introduced the equivocations, ambiguities and evasions required to avoid clearing up the mystery of the September 5th-October 14th photographic evidence gap. To these we might add McGeorge Bundy, given his rela-

30. *Ibid.*, p. 239. The same explanation was read by John Hughes, of the Defense Intelligence Agency, at McNamara's "Special Cuba Briefing," February 6, 1963; see the Department of Defense's transcript, p. 4.

31. *Senate Report*, p. 8.

32. *Ibid.* At the February 6, 1963 press briefing McNamara denied that there had been a "photography gap," explaining that photographs between September 5th and October 14th had not been shown at the briefing "for lack of time" (Transcript, p. 40). At another press conference later that month he reverted to the explanation that somehow reconnaissance flights in late September and early October had not photographed the whole island, but only those sections which, as it turned out, were free from missile bases.

33. *Newsweek*, November 12, 1962; *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, February, 1963; *The New Republic*, February 23, 1963; *The New Yorker*, March 2, 1963.

34. Pachter, p. 11.

tions to Kennedy, and also because the scheme is very much in his style. Possibly he completed the list. But Dean Rusk might be the last one to be admitted, if only because the forthcoming American case at the UN and in the courts of allied opinion would have to be handled by or through him. These eight persons were all who had to know. Kennedy's scheme was feasible, in the last analysis, because apart from security it hinged almost exclusively on two factors that could be fairly easily controlled by him: what he did not say to the American people, and what he did say to Khrushchev.

#### IV—THE DEFEAT OF THE SOVIET SCHEME

**T**O SAY THAT the U.S. counterscheme was highly feasible is not to say that it was bound to succeed. Kennedy's plan was, evidently, the last resort of a cornered man. Very probably the idea of misleading the Soviets in order later to protest was put together without any final decision as to what form that protest would take or how effective it could be — the most important thing was to secure popular backing. (As already mentioned, the final decision to blockade was hammered out only between October 15th and October 22nd by the Executive Committee of the NSC.) But, as events proved, the diplomatic position of the Soviet Union was stronger than the U.S. counterscheme allowed. If the Soviet scheme failed the reason was not the U.S. blockade.

The weakness of the blockade was twofold. Diplomatically it suffered from glaring illegality; the presence of even truly offensive capability in Cuba would not have violated international law. Since the crisis was settled bilaterally before the U.N. case reached its completion, we can only speculate as to what would have happened there. It is certain, in view of the Soviet veto, that the U.S. could not have secured the endorsement of the Security Council. If the case had gone to the General Assembly, it is doubtful that the U.S. would have fared well. The neutral bloc almost certainly would have voted against. Even the NATO allies, which ultimately would have sided with the U.S., did not show much sympathy with Kennedy's brinkmanship. The U.S. had wholehearted support only from its Latin American satellites.

Militarily also, as events showed, the blockade was ineffective. As long as the U.S. did not go beyond mere blockade the Soviet Union could afford to wait — as in fact it did — and either submit its commercial cargoes to search (under protest), or to use non-Soviet bottoms exclusively to carry ordinary supplies. After all, the weapons already were in Cuba. There was no reason to try to run the blockade. The case at the UN could proceed at its own pace. Eventually the blockade would have had to be lifted — or, at very least, the U.S. would have had to negotiate.

Evidently, Kennedy recognized very soon that the policy announced on October 22nd was not enough to defeat Khrushchev. But he held an ace up his sleeve, namely, his knowledge (probably partly reasoned, but

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surely intelligence-confirmed) that the weapons in Cuba remained under Soviet control.<sup>35</sup> Towards the end of the week of the crisis "through newspapers and allied nations, the information was leaked out [by the U.S. government] that an air strike [against the missile bases] might be executed 'shortly,'" <sup>36</sup> unless the Soviets agreed immediately to withdraw the weapons.

Of course, this put the situation in a new light. If the bases were attacked the Soviet Union would be placed in an impossible dilemma, for the attack would have directly impinged on *its* military force. It would have had, unthinkable, to submit supinely to military attack upon its troops, or it would have had to reply with its home forces — and this surely meant nothing less than a thermonuclear first strike. Khrushchev admitted defeat when he realized that Kennedy was now determined to launch a first, conventional strike upon the Soviet forces present in Cuba, regardless of consequences; that Kennedy was ready to go to war rather than abide the presence of the missiles, or otherwise suffer a diplomatic defeat of the magnitude here involved. Khrushchev was lost, in short, when he realized that his only alternative to withdrawing the missiles was to order a thermonuclear first strike. Kennedy's victory consisted in having maneuvered Khrushchev into that position.

Whatever Khrushchev's shortcomings, the disposition to go to nuclear war rather than suffer the corresponding humiliation and defeat was not one of them. Though it was probably foolish of him to have tempted a U.S. presidential circle renowned for its political pugnacity and for its Spartan self-conceit, proud of its "lean and mean" international image, it was surely fortunate for the world that he had enough wisdom to limit the risk even at the cost of a catastrophic diplomatic defeat.

But it is supremely ironic, in an episode rich in irony, that although Khrushchev suffered a crushing defeat (which very likely figured largely in his later downfall), Kennedy's victory was less than conclusive. The Cuban crisis so changed the world political climate that before many months had passed Kennedy himself had to face the fact that the forcible overthrow of the Cuban government was no longer expedient. (Shortly after he so declared the Soviet Union finally decided the time was ripe to undertake to regard an attack of Cuba as an attack on itself.) Part of the reason may be described analogously to why Britain and France's failure in Suez forbade them further future moves of the same sort: in today's incipient world political organization, organized force against a supposedly illegitimate opponent automatically legitimizes that opponent.

The Cuban crisis legitimized the Cuban Revolutionary Government in a variety of ways. The American move granted belligerency rights to

35. Even this knowledge was not strictly required. It was enough to know that the Soviets were *manning* the sites, a fact which had never been in doubt.

36. Pachter, p. 55. In his testimony to the House Committee on Armed Services McNamara confirmed, in answer to the question whether "we were prepared for a time to invade," that "we were prepared for whatever eventuality developed," *House Hearings*, p. 273.



the Cuban revolution against opposition from the U.S. And the U.S. policy logically implied that as long as Cuba did not offer a military threat to the U.S. (that is, as long as the interdicted weapons were withdrawn and kept out of Cuba), the U.S. had no right to apply military force.

By the same token, Kennedy's counterscheme focused the definition of illegitimacy upon nuclear deterrent weapons, on the grounds that every nuclear deterrent confers "offensive" capability. The logical implication was that other weapons (e.g. those of a parrying type, such as anti-aircraft missiles), were necessarily defensive. Therefore, their presence in Cuba did not justify an American attack. Now, in what category did this leave the Soviet-manned anti-aircraft bases? Or possibly even Soviet manned fighter aircraft? Or other defensive concentrations of Soviet troops? Evidently, they could not be classified as offensive. Ironically, the continued presence of Soviet troops in Cuba was, in the climate of the post-crisis, a sufficient deterrent to accomplish efficiently the defensive role in which the missiles had failed — though not enough, of course, to achieve the full original Soviet aim. In sum, the Cuban *military* situation was not radically changed by the withdrawal of the missiles — any more than it had been radically altered by their introduction. Kennedy eventually had to admit this into his calculations and, therefore, found it advisable to rethink his Cuban policy. Whereas in the climate before the crisis he might have dared to bomb Soviet troops in Cuba, after the crisis such a step had become unthinkable.

It seems, therefore, that there was an element of truth in Khrushchev's assertion that the imperialists learned their lesson. But since the Soviet Union withdrew the missiles long before they learned it, his representation was disingenuous. Moreover, it is probably incorrect to suppose that fear was the principal motive in Kennedy's reappraisal. I would like to think that when Kennedy reversed himself early in 1963 and renounced his alleged right to overthrow the Cuban government, the basic reason was the gradual acquisition, over the months since the previous November, of a world-political sobriety — indeed, a wisdom — which he had not previously enjoyed. We might even guess at an element of remorse, if not at the way in which he had dealt with Khrushchev and with the American people, at least at the way in which he had put the world in danger of thermonuclear holocaust. Whatever the reason, there is ample evidence that after the crisis a retrospective awareness of the enormity of the crisis entered Kennedy's calculations; there was even the hint of an admission that he had not been as clear-sighted during the crisis as he was now:

When that day comes and there's a massive exchange then it's the end . . . you're talking about . . . 150 million fatalities in the first 18 hours . . . nobody wants to go through what we went through in Cuba very often . . . I think Mr. Khrushchev realizes the care with which he must proceed now as do we . . . Cuba was the first time where the Soviet Union and the United States directly faced each other with the prospect of the use of military forces . . . which could possibly have escalated into a nuclear struggle.<sup>37</sup>

37. *CBS Script*, pp. 21, 31-32.

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The more general restructuring of Kennedy's world political perceptions became evident a little later in another declaration, in which for the first time since the onset of the cold war (and, to date, also for the last), an American President proposed the only American foreign policy which could make possible a stable peace between East and West. I refer to the policy of ending, rather than winning, the cold war:

What kind of peace do we seek? Not a *Pax Americana* enforced on the world by American weapons of war . . . I am talking about genuine peace . . . — not merely peace for Americans but peace for all men — not merely peace in our time but peace for all time. . . .

Some say that it is useless to speak of world peace or world law or world disarmament . . . until the leaders of the Soviet Union adopt a more enlightened attitude. I hope they do. I believe we can help them to do it. But I also believe that we must re-examine our own attitude . . . toward the possibilities of peace, toward the Soviet Union, toward the course of the cold war and toward freedom and peace here at home. . . .

For, in the final analysis, our most basic common link is the fact that we all inhabit this planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's future. And we all are mortal.<sup>38</sup>

**F**OR THE COLD WAR is not a conflict about whose military dominion shall be imposed upon the world. It is a quarrel about whose concept of peace shall be imposed upon the other side. It is, therefore, indeed tragic, if these words truly signified a sincere conversion, that Kennedy's life was extinguished at the very time when his newly acquired maturity, vision and wisdom had just begun to fructify. For there are no signs that these qualities survived him at any of the high levels of U.S. government. The tragedy of Kennedy's death is not simply that he passed away, but that many like, say, McGeorge Bundy, Dean Rusk and Robert McNamara remained behind, to give to a willing ear and a permissive intellect the same sort of advice that President Kennedy had once taken, but which, through the purifying agony of responsibilities faced, he eventually learned to reject.

38. Speech of June 10, 1963, at American University (*USIS Texts*).