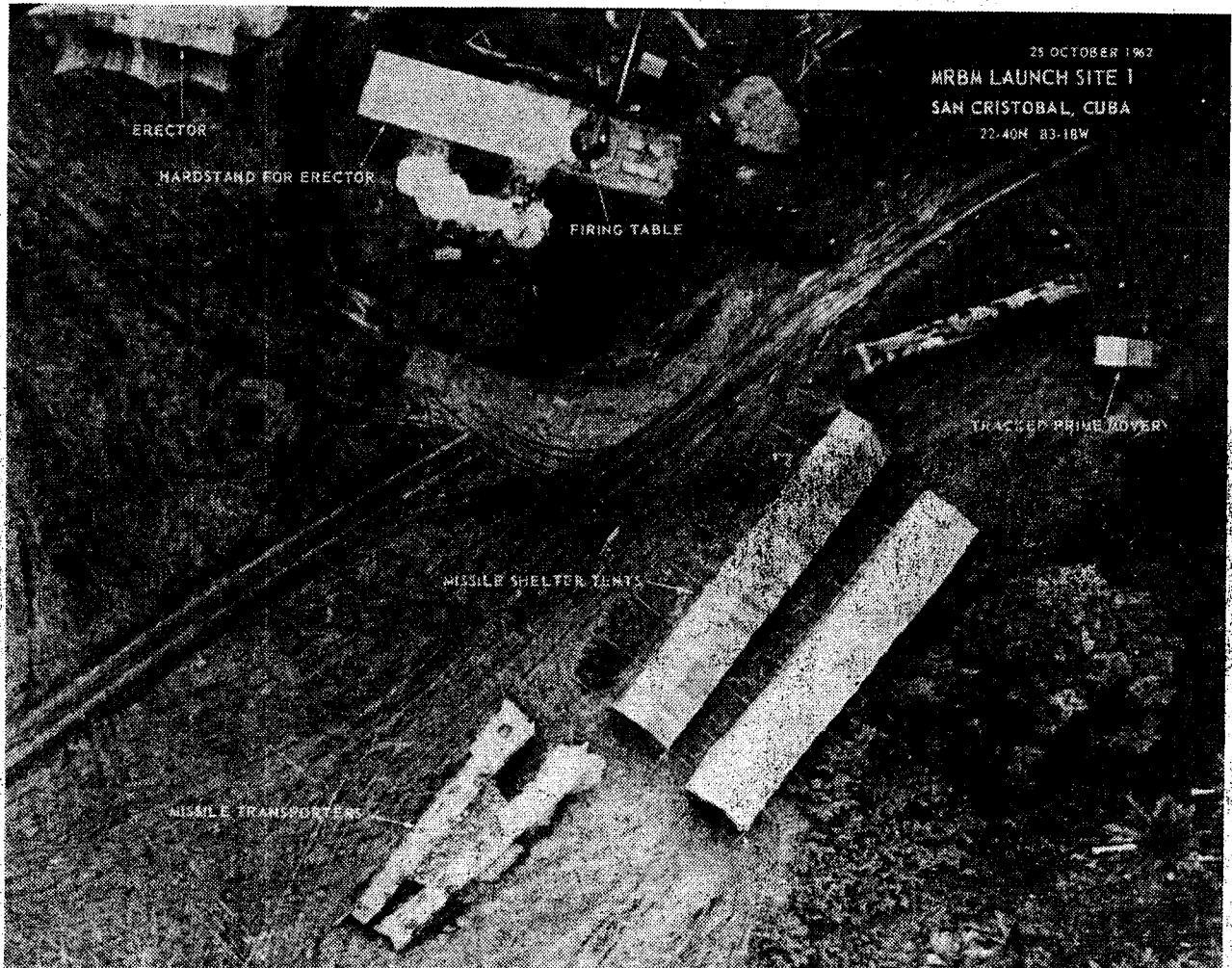


CIA Records Offer Behind-the-Scenes

Tiger file

Look at Cuban Missile Crisis



This CIA photograph, taken from a U.S. spy plane in October 1962, shows a Soviet-built medium-range ballistic missile site in northern Cuba.

By Walter Pincus
Washington Post Staff Writer

Thirty years after the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, newly released documents from the Central Intelligence Agency's files show that election-year politics and diplomatic sensitivities influenced handling of early intelligence about stepped-up Soviet military activities in Cuba.

The documents, which date from the summer of 1962 through early 1963, will be released today at an unusual public CIA seminar on the crisis. They add details to what is known about the failure of senior Kennedy administration officials and the agency itself to take seriously mid-summer signs in Cuba of increased numbers of Soviet forces and equipment and new construction.

The documents include a series of formerly secret memos providing further evidence that then-CIA Director John McCone was alone among Kennedy's advisers in warning in August 1962 that Communist Party leader Nikita Khrushchev was capable of putting missiles in Cuba. McCone forced Kennedy and top national security advisers that summer to consider options, such as blockades and quarantines, for reacting to what was then only a hunch about Soviet intentions.

But McCone left on a honeymoon trip in late August, and there was no immediate follow-up to these early discussions. Two months later, on Oct. 14, McCone's hunch turned into reality when U-2 spy plane photographs revealed construction of Soviet medium-range ballistic missile sites near San Cristobal, in northern Cuba.

The discovery raised the threat that Soviet nuclear warheads would be in position to reach the U.S. mainland with little warning time. After secretly studying options, Kennedy on Oct. 22 publicized the discovery, declared a naval quarantine of all Soviet and communist bloc shipping into Cuba and called on Khrushchev to remove the missiles.

In the succeeding days, the Soviets pushed work on the missiles to make them operational and accelerated construction of an air defense system to protect them against possible attack. Khrushchev, who had hoped to have the weapons installed before they were discovered, was certain he would have the upper hand once they were ready to fire.

Kennedy was determined to take action before that point was reached. By Oct. 27, termed "Black Saturday" by Kennedy aides, the crisis had reached a boiling point.

Today, at a time President Bush is making trust and experience in crisis-management a factor in electing a president, the CIA materials appear especially instructive. They expand previous behind-the-scenes accounts of how one of the nation's major nuclear-age crises was met by a relatively inexperienced, 45-year-old chief executive.

The documents, along with transcripts of tape-recorded White House meetings held on

Oct. 27, 1962, and released by the Kennedy Presidential Library, present vivid details of a critical stage of the missile crisis. They show Kennedy vacillating as the day progressed, before choosing a final course.

Among the materials being disclosed are CIA data given Kennedy the morning of Oct. 27, which reported that the agency considered 24 Soviet medium-range ballistic missiles (MRBM) on the island operational. The 1,000-mile-range missiles, if launched from Cuba, could reach as far as New Orleans, Nashville and Richmond, according to a map provided Kennedy.

Photographs confirmed that the missiles, which were kept separate from their launchers, had been moved to the launch site in nighttime exercises and that cables, fueling trucks and separate guidance equipment had been put in place.

"It would have taken only the time to fuel them, about six hours, to have them ready to fire," according to Dino A. Brugioni, a top CIA photo analyst who worked during the

crisis. Brugioni will be the keynote speaker at today's CIA conference.

Kennedy's recorded words on Oct. 27 reflect the varied pressures he faced. At times he talked of his belief that although he wanted to avoid war, the only way he could get the missiles out would be to attack Cuba or undertake a secret trade with Khrushchev that would be politically and diplomatically damaging if disclosed.

Nowadays, in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and its communist empire, it is hard to recall—and more difficult to recreate—the tensions that existed 30 years ago, particularly in Washington.

Two years earlier, President Dwight D. Eisenhower had announced that U.S. nuclear missiles would be stationed in Italy and Turkey, just over the border from Soviet territory. Although Khrushchev boasted about Soviet nuclear strength, he knew it was minuscule compared to the American nuclear arsenal carried on missiles and bombers surrounding his country.

In 1961, when the new, young American

president took office, Khrushchev decided to take Kennedy's measure. At a meeting in Vienna in June of that year, the Soviet leader determined that Kennedy could be pushed around, and he decided to test him.

The Berlin Wall went up in August 1961, and Soviet nuclear testing resumed that same month. As 1962 began, Soviet equipment started flowing into Cuba.

The congressional election campaign of 1962 provided a stage on which Republicans attacked Kennedy for being indecisive and weak in not facing up to the Soviet challenge, particularly in Cuba. In August 1962, Sen. Kenneth Keating (R-N.Y.) began talking specifics about the buildup and other Republicans followed suit. Kennedy was forced to defend the Cuba buildup as defensive in nature, a conclusion of his top aides and some CIA analysts.

But McCone, the hardheaded CIA director, did not agree.

On Aug. 21, 1962, at a noon meeting at the State Department, McCone set out his views in front of Kennedy's advisers, who

two months later would be wrestling with the question of how to get the missiles removed without triggering a nuclear war.

According to McCone's memo of that meeting, those present were Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Maxwell Taylor and McGeorge Bundy, the president's national security adviser.

McCone speculated that the buildup of Soviet personnel and materiel in Cuba involved construction of "highly sophisticated electronic installations" to gather intelligence or "missile sites, probably ground-to-air."

He sparked a discussion that included "various courses of action open to us in case the Soviets place MRBM missiles on Cuban territory. There was also discussion of blockades of Soviet and bloc shipping into Cuba or alternatively a total blockade of Cuba," according to McCone's memo.

Bundy brought up the very definite inter-relationship between Cuba and other trouble spots. Action taken against a possible Soviet missile site in Cuba, the presidential aides speculated, "would bring about similar action by the Soviets with respect to our bases and numerous missile sites, particularly Turkey," the memo noted.

Two days later, a similar discussion took place with Kennedy present. The president asked if Soviet missiles in Cuba could be taken out by an air attack "or would a ground offensive be necessary," according to another CIA memo.

Despite this preliminary review of U.S. options and further discussion that summer of what would be the real situation two months later, the CIA documents show that the Kennedy administration remained unprepared for what unfolded in the autumn.

McCone, even while honeymooning in France, sent cables to his headquarters in early September 1962 pushing for renewed U-2 flights over Cuba. Release of McCone's memos and the responses to them provide the first documentation of the infighting over resumption of U-2 flights over Cuba. The flights had been stopped in early September after one U-2 on a different mission strayed over Soviet territory in the Far East, and another was lost over China.

When flights over Cuba were allowed to take place at the end of September, Rusk insisted, because of concerns raised by the earlier mishaps, that the spy planes not fly directly over the island. He feared that Soviet ground-to-air missiles would shoot one down and cause an embarrassing international incident.

Instead, he said the U-2s should remain on the periphery or be allowed only "limited penetration." As a result, those missions failed to cover areas where missiles were eventually found.

Kennedy quietly got McCone to change the wording of certain reports, according to the CIA documents, proof that politicizing

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of intelligence information—which was one focus of attention during last year's Senate confirmation hearings of CIA Director Robert M. Gates—was going on 30 years ago.

In an Oct. 11, 1962, memo that was once classified "Secret EYES ONLY," McCone wrote that Kennedy feared that if information about the arrival of Soviet bombers in Havana "got into the press, a new and more violent Cuban issue would be injected into the campaign and this would seriously affect his independence to act."

As a result, McCone writes that Kennedy asked that the report indicate a "probability" rather than an actuality.

McCone said "the president further requested that all future information be suppressed." McCone got that order modified so that future intelligence about Cuba was to be given only to the president's closest advisers and top members of the intelligence community.

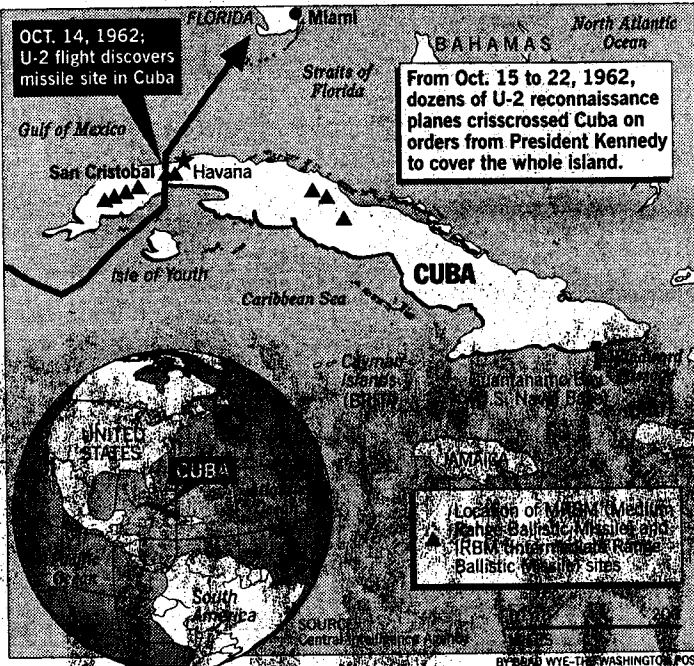
Orders already had been issued in September to limit internal distribution of data to prevent leaks to Republicans who were criticizing Kennedy.

A Sept. 1 CIA memo reported the president had instructed McCone's deputy, Maj. Gen. Marshall Carter, that "the clamps were to remain on the release of certain information concerning Cuba except for the barest minimum access on a need-to-know basis" for preparing presidential briefings. Those receiving the intelligence "were also to be advised that no actions were to be taken on the basis of the information."

On Sept. 6, Kennedy was told that a "detailed readout" of a photo mission led CIA analysts "to suspect the presence of another kind of missile site—possibly surface-to-surface—at Banes [Cuba]." The White House "put a complete freeze on this information."

On Oct. 26, as the crisis moved to its most frightening stage, Khrushchev sent Kennedy a rambling private telegram, the substance of which was that if the president pledged not to invade Cuba, the Soviet missiles would be removed.

On the morning of Oct. 27, Khrushchev broadcast another message, this time in public, saying that the Cuban missiles would be removed as part of a deal that had to



include removing U.S. missiles from Turkey.

In addition, Kennedy got word that morning of a U-2 that had strayed over Soviet territory. Shortly thereafter, he received reports that, for the first time, U.S. reconnaissance planes flying low over Cuba had been shot at by anti-aircraft guns.

"There's been quite a change in the character of orders given to the Cubans," McNamara told the president, according to a transcript.

Kennedy began discussions that morning by saying he wanted to take up Khrushchev's proposal for a joint withdrawal of missiles from Cuba and Turkey, but wanted to tie that to an immediate halt to further missile construction.

"We're not going to get these weapons out of Cuba, probably, anyway . . . by negotiation," Kennedy said. "We're going to have to take our weapons out of Turkey."

Llewellyn E. Thompson, a former ambassador to the Soviet Union who knew Khrushchev well, disagreed, suggesting that the Soviet leader had made the public offer of a trade "just to put pressure on us, I mean, to accept the other" earlier offer.

Late in the discussion, Kennedy mused that "we can't very well invade Cuba with all its toll . . . [if we could] have gotten [the missiles]

but by making a deal on the same missiles in Turkey."

The presidential transcripts and the CIA documents confirm that it was Kennedy who believed only an offer to remove U.S. missiles from Turkey would prompt Khrushchev to take the Soviet missiles out of Cuba. Kennedy voiced anger on Oct. 27 that his State Department advisers had not talked to the Turkish government the previous week about removing the missiles when he first told them to do so.

After Khrushchev announced the next day that the Cuban missiles would be removed, Kennedy's aides misled the public into believing that no deal had been made to take the U.S. missiles out of Turkey, a falsehood that was promoted for many years.

The new data also show the young president did not let the crisis interfere totally with his private life.

At noon on Oct. 27, the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire accompanied by British Ambassador David Ormsby-Gore came to the White House for lunch. A White House telephone record lists a call made at 3:40 p.m. to a Washington divorcee with whom Kennedy reportedly maintained a liaison. At 9 p.m., according to the records, Kennedy called actor Peter Lawford, his brother-in-law, who was in Las Vegas.