

The Cuban Missile Crisis Papers Project

The National Security Archive has been developing a comprehensive documentary record of the Cuban missile crisis for the last two years. This has coincided with increased public discussion of that historic confrontation between the United States, the Soviet Union, and Cuba. Buttressed by the expanded documentary record, scholars and former policymakers have unveiled a range of misunderstandings and miscast lessons about the crisis. In turn these have highlighted the necessity for comprehensive, organized documentation of the events and thus the importance of the Cuban Missile Crisis Papers Project itself.

Through the use of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), as well as comprehensive research at dozens of archival facilities, the Archive has amassed more than 15,000 pages of declassified and unclassified documents on the crisis. Without the initiative of the National Security Archive, many of these memoranda, internal papers, meeting transcripts, cables, and intelligence estimates and reports would not have been declassified for several decades. In addition, the Archive is the sole repository for many of these research materials; they are unavailable anywhere else, including the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

The National Security Archive is continuing to identify and request declassification of withheld materials as part of its commitment to preserving and bringing forth the historical record of the crisis. In addition, the Archive has begun to create a computer database and index of existing declassified materials and has developed an exhaustive narrative chronology of the events of the missile crisis based on the available documentation on the crisis.

The Archive has sought to fully document both the crisis itself and the events that surround the crisis. Included in the collection are records which describe the backdrop, such as the deployment of U.S. Jupiter missiles to Italy and Turkey, Soviet and Cuban perceptions of threat from the United States, U.S. and Soviet nuclear capabilities in 1962, the continuing deterioration of relations between the United States and Cuba following the April, 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion, and the U.S. intelligence community's assessment of the Cuban military build-up in 1962. Also included are materials on the continuing tensions between the U.S., U.S.S.R., and Cuba following attempts by the United States in November, 1962 to have Soviet IL-28 bombers also removed from Cuba.

The majority of these previously classified records come from the State Department, White House, and the National Security Council "Executive Committee" or "ExComm." Important additional material comes from the Central Intelligence Agency, Department of Defense, Joint Chiefs of Staff, U.S. Marine Corps, U.S. Navy, U.S. Air Force, Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, United Nations, the Organization of American States, and private papers.

Background on the National Security Archive

The National Security Archive is a non-profit research institute and library based in Washington, D.C. which acquires, organizes and disseminates government documents pertinent to important issues of U.S. defense, foreign, intelligence and international economic policy.

The records in the National Security Archive's collections are obtained through Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) declassification requests, as well as from

many other sources such as Federal agency repositories, donated record holdings, oral history collections, the U.S. Congress, official court records, and the Presidential Libraries. The Archive targets all documents used by U.S. policymakers during the period covered by the collection, with special attention to the inter-agency decision-making process. The constraints of security classification dictate that some relevant materials will be withheld from every collection. The Archive does, however, provide listings of all documents identified as relevant even if they are not yet obtained.

The National Security Archive's editorial process begins with a comprehensive review of the secondary literature and the identification of major scholars, researchers, journalists, present and former U.S. government officials directly involved in the events. These individuals are then enlisted as an informal review panel to define the project scope, target still hidden materials for acquisition, and review the overall progress and quality of the collection. An editorial board drawn from the review panel provides input into the publication of the collection and the finding aids for the set.

Publication of the Cuban Missile Crisis Project

In order to provide global access to these critical documents, the materials in the Archive's collection will be published in Fall, 1989 through the scholarly publisher, Chadwyck-Healey. In addition to publishing the entire document collection on microfiche, Chadwyck-Healey will publish the Archive's two-volume finding aid containing a subject and names index, a chronological document bibliography, an events chronology, and personal and corporate names glossaries. The finding aid is intended to allow the collection to be used as readily for reference and curriculum use as for scholarly research.