

revolution, when Negro aspirations widened to include desegregation in the private sector and were spectacularly supported by sit-ins and street demonstrations. As President, Kennedy not only gave full executive backing to the enforcement of court decisions but personally identified himself with the goals of the Negro revolution and gave them the full moral support of the Presidency.

By 1960, Kennedy had become an aggressive fighter for Negro rights. With the South lined up behind the Lyndon Johnson candidacy, Kennedy's nomination depended on the support of the Northern liberals and the metropolitan areas outside of the South. During the election campaign, Kennedy's strategy was geared to winning the Negro vote in the big cities of the states with large electoral votes. Kennedy's new militancy carried over to his Presidency.

But by 1963, it appeared that what had been a political advantage might turn into something of a political liability. "The Kennedys" were denounced in the South, and the President faced the loss of much of that section in 1964. More serious, there were indications that the civil rights issue would cost Kennedy many votes in the North, where considerable opposition to the Negro drive had developed. However, by this time Kennedy had chosen his course, and while there might be temporary shifts in tactics, there could be no turning back. Robert Kennedy has stated that at this point the Administration really did not have any choice and that, besides, the Administration's course was the correct one. He reports the President as saying: "If we're going to lose, let's lose on principle."

There seems little question that Kennedy would have been reelected in 1964, but the civil rights issue would have been his biggest worry. In sizing up Kennedy as a politician, it is significant that he appears not to have anticipated the extent to which his position on civil rights might become politically hazardous. Otherwise it is difficult to explain the appointment of his brother as Attorney General, upon whom the brunt of enforcing the civil rights court decisions would necessarily fall. Astute rulers take care to divert the political lightning of an offended public from themselves to subordinates. But in appointing his brother Attorney General, the President left himself no "out." Those hostile to the

Negro revolution could not say: "President Kennedy is all right; it is that Attorney General of his." Instead, they blamed "the Kennedys." With another Attorney General, President Kennedy might well have escaped some of the venom of the opposition. And incidentally, Robert Kennedy, in some other important job, would have been made better available for high politics in the future.

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In foreign policy, the first two years of Kennedy were ambiguous. In the third year, there was a clearer sense of direction, one which promised to harmonize American policy with emerging new realities in the world.

At the time of the Kennedy accession, the postwar world was disintegrating. Bipolarization was giving way to depolarization. The Sino-Soviet rift was widening. With the single exception of little *Vietnam*, all the old European colonies that had recently gained their independence had escaped Communism, although there were Communist guerrilla activities in some of them. The trend was to a new pluralism, a new diversity. The nuclear revolution in war and the American-Soviet nuclear deterrents had rendered an ultimate military showdown unthinkable. The United States was ahead in the nuclear arms race.

In Europe, despite Khrushchev's bluster about West Berlin, the existing arrangements in East and Central Europe were ripening into a more overt *modus vivendi*, by way of tacit understanding rather than formal political agreements. Trade and intercourse between East and West Europe were increasing, the satellites were operating more independently of Moscow, and an all-European economic and cultural cooperation seemed slowly to be replacing the postwar's clear-cut division between the "two Europes." West Europeans were becoming less interested in NATO because they were more and more convinced that there would be no Soviet military aggression in Europe, due to the nuclear deterrent and other reasons. The drive to West European political integration was slackening, owing to the decline of external pressures and to de Gaulle's opposition to the supranational approach. Forces within the Six, composing the Common Market, were honestly

From: JFK and the New Frontier, ed. by Rick Donald (Holt & Wiley, N.Y., 1962). This piece from Carlton Kennedy in History: An

Early Appraisal, Fall, 1964

divided over whether they wanted an inward-looking European community or an outward-looking Atlantic one.

In short, Kennedy was confronted with a new fluidity, a necessity and an opportunity for a reappraisal of American foreign policy. How much of the old foreign policy was still applicable? What aspects required a new orientation? To what degree was it safe, realistic, and advantageous to strike out in new directions? In some ways this ambiguous situation was more agonizing to decision makers than the obvious crisis situation with which Truman and Acheson had had to deal in the late 1940's and early 1950's. It is no wonder that some aspects of the Kennedy record in foreign affairs seem somewhat confused, even contradictory.

The chief stumbling block to an American-Soviet *détente* continued to be Berlin, the two Germanies, and the territorial arrangements in East and Central Europe. Kennedy rejected explorations of a definitive settlement, and if in the future a genuine American-Soviet *rapprochement* develops, this rejection is likely to be held against him. However, he did move informally in the direction of a more openly tacit recognition of the existing arrangements in East and Central Europe. He deferred less to Adenauer's views than previous administrations had done. In his interview in *Izvestia*, remarkable for its clarity and candor, he agreed that it would not be advisable to let West Germany have its own nuclear weapons. After the Communists built the Berlin Wall, Kennedy resisted all pressures to use force to tear it down.

Nevertheless, during his first two years in office, Kennedy seems needlessly to have fanned the tensions of the dying cold war. (It may be that "needlessly" is too strong a word; perhaps Kennedy thought he needed to force the country to obtain a more balanced military program, more foreign economic aid, the Alliance for Progress; perhaps he thought, too, that a truculent tone was necessary to convince Khrushchev that America would stand firm under duress for its rights in Berlin.) His Inaugural Address was alarmist, already historically off key, more suited to the Stalinist era than to 1961. His first State of the Union Message was even more alarmist. The nation was told that the world tide was unfavorable, that each day we were drawing near the maximum danger. His backing of the Cuban invasion in April, 1961, further

fanned the cold war. His statement to newspaper publishers and editors gathered at the White House in May—that the United States was in the most critical period of its history—increased the popular anxieties. He overreacted to Khrushchev's Vienna ultimatum in June, for in recent years Khrushchev's repeated deadlines and backdowns over West Berlin had become a kind of pattern. But for Kennedy, Vienna seems to have been a traumatic experience. On his return home he appealed to Americans to build do-it-yourself bomb shelters, and this produced a war psychology in the country and all manner of frenetic behavior, caused right-wingism to soar (1961 was the year the membership and financial "take" of the right-wing organizations reached their peak⁷), and weakened confidence abroad in Kennedy's judgment.

There are no defenders of the Cuban fiasco of April, 1961. Even had the expedition of the Cuban exiles been given American naval and air support and forced a landing, there is scant evidence that the Cubans, at that time devoted to Castro, would have revolted en masse and welcomed the invaders as deliverers. More likely a nasty civil war would have followed, with the Americans, giving increasing support to the invaders, cast in the role of subjugators. The CIA had already rejected the social-revolutionary leadership of the anti-Castro Manuel Rey for a nonletist leadership, and this would have made the task of overthrowing Castro even more difficult. The world would have looked on with dismay, and outside the United States the whole affair would have come to be regarded as "another Hungary." It is ironic that Kennedy, the generalist with a critical intelligence, the politician with a feel for popular moods, should on this occasion have been taken in by the bureaucrats and the "experts." Prodded by his own anti-Castro stand during the election campaign, Kennedy must have wanted desperately to believe in the reliability of those assessors of the intelligence agents.

With respect to Western Europe, the Kennedy Administration underestimated those forces within the Common Market that wanted a European community rather than an Atlantic community, at first regarded de Gaulle as a kind of maverick without

⁷ Donald Janson and Bernard Eismann, *The Far Right* (McGraw-Hill, 1963) pp. 56 and 127.

group support for his position, and framed the Trade Expansion Act of 1962 in such a way that the most decisive tariff cuts between the United States and the Common Market would depend upon Britain's inclusion in the Market. Nevertheless, the Act as written still allowed for much liberalization of trade, even with Britain outside the Market, and the responsibility for failure to take advantage of this opportunity must be borne by parochial-minded groups and interests inside the Market.

The Kennedy Administration's contributions to national defense were notable. It emphasized a balanced and diversified establishment—both strategic and tactical nuclear weapons, conventional arms, and guerrilla forces—so the nation would never have to make the choice between the ultimate weapons and no other adequate defense. It was realistic in its shift from bombers to missiles as the chief nuclear carriers of the future, and in its dismantling of the intermediate missiles bases in Britain, Italy, and Turkey as the Polaris submarines and intercontinental missiles became increasingly operational. Its attempt to find a formula for a NATO multilateral nuclear force was a way of countering de Gaulle's blandishments to the West Germans and of balancing the possibility of a *détente* with Russia with reassurances to Bonn. Its experiments with massive airlifts of ground troops was in part a response to the desires of many of America's NATO allies for less rigidity, less insistence on fixed ground quotas, and more flexibility. However, NATO was plainly in transition, and while the Polaris submarines and intercontinental missiles were making the United States less dependent on European bases, ways were not yet actually implemented to share America's nuclear weapons with European allies on a genuine multilateral basis and satisfy their desires for less centralized direction from the United States.

There was an honest facing up to the terrible responsibilities inherent in the nuclear deterrent. That deterrent was put under tighter control to guard against accident and mistake, and the "hot line" between Washington and Moscow was set up. A much more determined effort was made to get arms-control agreements and a treaty banning nuclear-weapons testing than had ever been made by Kennedy's predecessors. Negotiations with the Soviet Union had been going on for years, but the Americans now so yielded in

their former demands for strict international inspection as to put the Russians on the defensive, making world opinion for the first time believe that it was the Russians and not the Americans who were the obstructionists. Kennedy's Administration believed that the United States and Russia had an enormous common interest in preventing the spread of nuclear weapons to other countries, that the Sino-Soviet rift gave Khrushchev a new freedom and a new urge to make agreements, and that the increasing accuracy of national detection systems made the possibility of cheating on a test-ban treaty, even one without international inspection, "vanishingly small."

Kennedy's regime also showed its international-mindedness in its firm support of the United Nations. It defended the Secretariat, the executive, from Soviet attacks, and in practice the activities of the Secretariat were widened. The organization was saved from bankruptcy by American financial aid. The operation of the United Nations military force in the Congo, backed by the United States, showed that the American government had no sympathy for "neocolonialism" as practiced by the Katanga secession, and it added another successful precedent for international enforcement of international decisions.

With respect to the underdeveloped nations, the Kennedy policies paralleled the trend of history. Anticolonialism and self-determination were more valiantly espoused than in the preceding administrations. The Dulles doctrine that neutralism is "immoral" was abandoned, and neutralism was cordially accepted for nations which wanted it. Neutralism was positively encouraged in Laos and in the Congo. Help to South Vietnam was so hedged as to prevent the guerrilla war there from escalating into another Indo-China war, another Korea. Foreign economic aid was increased. The Food for Peace program was expanded. The Peace Corps was launched. The Alliance for Progress, an ambitious economic-aid program in Latin America coupled with domestic reforms, an experiment in "controlled revolution," was undertaken.

However, Kennedy, like his predecessors, did little to make the average American understand foreign economic aid—that it is not only an attempt to raise living standards, prevent Communism, and contribute to the world's economic well-being and stability,

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but is also a substitute for those obsolete ways in which the old colonialism supplied capital to the underdeveloped areas. Until an American President takes to television and in a series of fireside chats explains to Americans in simple terms the real meaning of the foreign-aid program, that program will be in jeopardy.

The Cuban crisis of October, 1962, provoked by the discovery of secret Soviet intermediate missiles in Cuba, was the high point, the turning point, in the Kennedy Administration. Could this crisis have been avoided? This will be debated by future historians. True, Khrushchev could not have declined giving Castro economic aid, technical assistance, and some military help, even had he desired to do so, for to have refused this would have been tantamount to surrendering Communist leadership to the Chinese. But why did he go to the length of planting intermediate-missile bases in Cuba? As an appeasement to the Stalinist and Chinese opposition? As a countermeasure to American missile bases in Turkey (which were soon to be dismantled)? As a means of blackmailing Americans into making a compromise on Berlin? To extract a promise from the Americans not to invade Cuba? Whatever the causes, some future historians will have nagging questions: Might this terrible gamble in nuclear brinkmanship have been prevented had Kennedy previously shown more disposition to come to a *détente* with the Soviet Union by a somewhat clearer recognition of the two Germans and other *de facto* boundaries and arrangements in East and Central Europe; and if so, did this Kennedy reluctance, coming in part out of regard for West German opinion, represent a realistic appraisal of the world situation?

Anyway, when the crisis came, even neutralist opinion seemed to feel that Khrushchev's attempt to compensate for his own intercontinental-missiles lag and the open and avowed American intermediate missiles in Turkey did not justify the sneaky Soviet operation in Cuba. America's quiet, deliberate planning of countermeasures, both military and diplomatic, was mastery. America's prudent use of force, enough but not more than enough to achieve its objective, won world-wide acclaim. Khrushchev and Castro lost face. The Chinese denounced the Soviet backdown, and Chinese-Russian relations worsened. Most important, the peak of

the crisis, a spectacular nuclear brinkmanship, cleared the atmosphere like a bolt of lightning. The lunacy of an ultimate nuclear showdown was traumatically revealed. Khrushchev's personal correspondence to Kennedy, reputedly revealing a highly emotional state and a genuine horror of nuclear war, the President had the grace, sportsmanship, and wisdom to keep secret.

Thereafter Khrushchev spoke even more insistently about the need to avoid nuclear war and pursue a policy of peaceful but competitive coexistence. From then on Kennedy gave more public recognition to emerging new international realities, the world's escape from monolithic threats, the trend to pluralism and diversity. In his address at American University in June, 1963, Kennedy spoke as if the cold war scarcely existed and emphasized the common stake both the United States and the Soviet Union had in world peace and stability. This address, one of the noblest and most realistic state papers of our time, will be remembered long after Kennedy's Inaugural Address is forgotten.

The new spirit in world affairs expressed itself concretely in the consummation of the limited nuclear test-ban treaty in the summer of 1963, the first real break in the American-Soviet deadlock. After this, Kennedy proposed a joint American-Soviet effort to explore the moon, and he agreed to permit the Soviet Union to purchase American wheat.

By 1963, then, Kennedy had come to much awareness that the postwar world was ending and to a determination to attempt more shifts in American foreign policy in harmony with the emerging fluidity. By this time, too, he had developed close personal relations with a large number of premiers and heads of state the world over. It was felt that after his reelection in 1964 he would be in an unusually strong position to give American foreign policy a new direction, that the test-ban treaty was but a forerunner of more significant measures yet to come, measures which might lead to an American-Soviet *détente*, eventually even to a *rapprochement*. Thus the President's life ended in a tragic sense of incompleteness and unfulfillment.

Every twentieth-century American President with a fair for world politics and in power in time of momentous international decision has been felled by sickness or death before his term was