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Soviet intelligence and the Cuban missile crisis

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The Cuban missile crisis was a severe test for the Soviet leadership. Had it succeeded, Operation ‘Anadyr’ would have established a significant Soviet military base in Cuba, with intermediate-range and medium-range ballistic missiles, nuclear-armed diesel submarines, bombers and over 50,000 Soviet troops. Instead the United States discovered Soviet plans before the operation could be completed and after a dangerous test of wills, Moscow had to retreat, its tail between its legs. ‘This incident damaged the international prestige of our government, our party, our armed forces’, complained Presidium-member Dmitri Polyanski at the session removing Nikita Khrushchev in October 1964, ‘while at the same time helping to raise the authority of the United States’.

Soviet intelligence contributed to the disappointments of 1962. The Komityet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti (KGB) and the Soviet Army’s Glavnoe Rasvedyvatel’noe Upravlenie (GRU) both failed to provide the Kremlin with sufficient warning of President John F. Kennedy’s intentions toward Cuba in the months preceding October 1962. Later, during the missile crisis itself, Soviet intelligence proved incapable of providing precise reports of the activities of the Executive Committee of the National Security Council (ExComm). When scapegoating began in Moscow following the missile crisis, the intelligence services received a good portion of the blame. In early December 1962, the Soviet leadership decided to fire Colonel General Semyon Ivanov, the chief planner of Operation ‘Anadyr’ and the member of the General Staff responsible for the GRU. The Kremlin also launched an investigation of the GRU. The KGB escaped this investigation but its chief representative in Washington, Aleksandr Feklisov, would soon be removed.

At the height of the Cold War, there was misunderstanding in the West about the role of the secret services, especially the KGB, in Soviet
policymaking. There is no denying that the KGB permeated the lives of Soviet citizens, who, even after Khrushchev’s secret speech of 1956, had reason to fear the organization. But as a factor in Soviet foreign-policymaking the KGB was far less pervasive, and ultimately less influential. Allied fears of Soviet subversion fed this tendency to exaggerate the power of the KGB. Testimonies from Soviet defectors, especially from those who had served in the intelligence services, often served to confirm these assessments. A man like Anatoly Golitsyn, who feared retribution after his defection to the United States in 1961, naturally overestimated the importance of the organization that was trying to find him in his exile. But with the benefit of KGB and Presidium documents, this myth can be punctured. In the case of the Cuban missile crisis, at the very least, the KGB under Vladimir Semichastny was a secondary factor.

Although not the pivotal player one might have assumed it to be, the Soviet intelligence community nevertheless performed an essential service in informing the Kremlin about the United States and Cuba in 1962. The activities of Soviet intelligence in the Cuban missile crisis reveal much about the state of Soviet information gathering at the time and the analytical contribution made by the secret services.

THE MECHANICS OF THE SOVIET INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY

When he was appointed Chairman of the KGB by Nikita Khrushchev in 1961, Vladimir Semichastny knew almost nothing about intelligence gathering and was inclined to refuse the position. Khrushchev naturally prevailed but added, in a revealing aside, that he expected Semichastny to be his political representative in the organization. He wanted a tough manager who was loyal to him and not a professional intelligence officer. The job at the KGB was open because Khrushchev had promoted the loyal and respected Aleksandr Shelepin to the Presidium. Semichastny was Shelepin’s protégé, having already preceded him on every rung of the bureaucratic ladder before this new promotion.4

Despite this fine pedigree, Semichastny never matched the power of his patron. Unable to emerge from Shelepin’s shadow, even after replacing him at the KGB, Semichastny enjoyed far less influence as Russia’s spymaster than his nominal equivalent in the United States, the Director of Central Intelligence. Consequently, in the Cuban missile crisis the Chairman of the KGB would neither be invited to a Presidium meeting nor have a single face-to-face meeting with Khrushchev.5

Nikita Khrushchev was his own intelligence analyst. Every day he received a collection of paraphrased reports selected by the KGB. Before an intelligence report landed on Khrushchev’s desk it had to survive a series of
challenges. Every field report went first to the cable section of the First Chief Directorate (FCD), the foreign intelligence component of the KGB, where it would be paraphrased and indications of source removed. If considered of sufficient interest it was sent to the chief of the First Chief Directorate, Aleksandr Sakharovsky, a crusty intelligence professional who would decide whether to forward it to the secretariat of the Chairman of the KGB, Vladimir Semichastny. Semichastny himself decided whether to pass the report to the Presidium. On rare occasions a report with policy implications went to Khrushchev alone. Generally, important reports were also sent to Andrei Gromyko or his deputy at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to Marshal Rodion Malinovsky at the Defense Ministry, to Boris Ponomarev at the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and to Presidium members Frol Kozlov and Mikhail Suslov.6

The FCD saw itself primarily as an intelligence gathering service. No section of the Directorate wrote intelligence estimates, and what the Russians themselves describe as ‘analyses’ were more like exercises in information management than statements of what the official mind believed about a certain problem at any given time. The KGB typically furnished these ‘analyses’ at the request of the Foreign Ministry, the International Department of the Central Committee, or the Presidium. The 16th department of the FCD, which prepared them, was the dumping ground for officers whose cover had been blown overseas or who were otherwise considered undesirable for operational duty. In the early 1960s, the analyses bore the signature of the chief of the service, Feodor Mortin, or the chief of the FCD, Aleksandr Sakharovsky. Largely compilations of information collected on a topic, these reports lack any overarching argument. The paragraphs are disjointed and often contradict whatever argument there is in the report’s final sentences.7

Professional prudence was the principal reason for the inadequacy of Soviet intelligence analysis. In the Soviet system, where the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union served as the fount of all policy and expertise, it behove the KGB not to take any chances in suggesting a reality that might challenge the next day’s resolution of the Presidium. Besides the constraints of Soviet life, KGB analytical work also suffered from a limiting institutional ethos. Having partly modeled itself on the British foreign intelligence service, MI6, the FCD specialized in collecting secret intelligence and resisted reporting information to the Kremlin that came from open sources. ‘Do not disseminate: repeats press speculation’ was a mantra of sorts for Sakharovsky, who often wrote out on the cables themselves his reasons for not sending them to higher authority. Occasionally, when there was no
secret material available at all on a topic of interest to the leadership, the KGB would provide a press summary. As a result of this grudging use of journalism, KGB analyses did not reflect a synergy of enlightened press comment and secret intelligence. The Kremlin leaders were expected to learn what the *New York Times* and the *New York Herald Tribune* were saying from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The details of the reporting tree of Soviet military intelligence, the GRU, in the period of the Cuban missile crisis are less certain. Certainly, GRU chief Ivan Serov reported either to Soviet Defense Minister Malinovsky or to his first deputy and Chief of the General Staff, Marshal Matvei Zakharovsky. Because Malinovsky had a direct line to Khrushchev, GRU information enjoyed the same level of support in Khrushchev’s inner circle as did that of the KGB because of Aleksandr Shelepin’s high position. On the Cuban question, the GRU could draw on reports from its representative in Havana, Colonel Meshcheriakov, and from its representatives in New York, Washington, and the other major Soviet legations. GRU officials enjoyed the typical and transparent covers of military attachés. In addition, like the KGB, the GRU made use of TASS cover.

**SOVIET INTELLIGENCE SOURCES, 1962**

*Soviet Intelligence Gathering in the United States*

In 1962 Aleksandr Feklisov, a 20-year veteran of Soviet intelligence, ran the KGB’s principal US station in Washington DC. Originally described by US intelligence as ‘reclusive’, Feklisov and his assistants eventually developed extensive contacts. From a study of the intelligence available to the Presidium during the missile crisis, it is evident that Feklisov had little success in penetrating the chief power centers in Washington. He relied to a large extent on the semi-official gossip and speculation that circulated around the US and foreign press. With the assistance of Anatoli Gorsky, ostensibly a TASS correspondent who was a member of the National Press Club, Feklisov developed a number of useful journalistic sources. One network in Washington included, for example, foreign correspondents from some European newspapers. In addition, John Scali, the moderator of ABC’s ‘Issues and Answers’ (and later US Permanent Representative at the United Nations), often met with Feklisov as an FBI-sanctioned contact. The KGB also had an agent in Walter Lippmann’s circle.

The KGB was not completely shut out from official sources. Good material, sometimes even excellent reports, came from Washington’s foreign diplomatic community. Sources in the Argentine and Nicaraguan embassies forwarded interesting reports on meetings with Americans, most
significantly Vice President Lyndon Johnson's military aide General William Jackson. But the Soviets had a much harder time penetrating the US government itself. There were two agents with regular State Department contacts, and some information from the State Department's German and Venezuelan experts, possibly through these men, flowed to Soviet intelligence. A KGB officer roamed the corridors of the US Congress and provided snippets of information to Moscow, some of which came from a staffer around Senator Hubert Humphrey. Occasionally information came from a source friendly with a CIA officer.

The KGB filtered the information from these sources through an interesting interpretive prism. The KGB's assessments of the American policy system were straightforward, simplistic, but essentially not ideological. The KGB did not stalk the major capitalists of New York in search of the 'real' policy of the United States. Instead the KGB reported on two tendencies in Washington – the hawkish 'position of strength' lobby and an amorphous 'liberal' side – and the likelihood that President Kennedy did or did not belong to the more militaristic of the two.

Although Soviet intelligence could not boast of any major sources of American political intelligence in this period that had the dazzle of the Burgess-Blunt Cambridge Ring, it did play a role in shaping, or at least confirming, Khrushchev's understanding of John F. Kennedy. Before the 1960 election, the Kremlin received little from its principal sources of foreign political information, the KGB and the Soviet foreign ministry, that was not readily available in the US press. In an analysis of the Senator just after his nomination by the Democratic Party, the Soviet Embassy described Kennedy as 'a typical pragmatist', and had a hard time placing him in any particular foreign policy camp. '[O]n relations between the USA and the USSR', Soviet Americanists noted, 'Kennedy's position ... is quite contradictory'. Although the candidate chastised the Republicans for failing to come up with imaginative ways to improve US-Soviet relations, Kennedy seemed to Moscow to be interested only in minor palliatives – arms control, for example, instead of disarmament – and seemed not to reject out of hand the possibility of reversing the tide of Socialism in Eastern Europe and China. The Embassy warned that because Kennedy believed in a strategic missile gap between the superpowers, he was unlikely to engage in any meaningful negotiations before he had restored the United States' 'position of strength'. Soviet diplomats also made a point of noting the strong anti-communism of his father, Joseph P. Kennedy, the former US Ambassador to Great Britain, who was friendly with the notorious Senator Joseph McCarthy. Although not explicit, the possibility of old Joe having some nefarious influence over his son was left implied.

Initially the KGB was a little more hopeful for better superpower
relations if Kennedy were elected. The Soviet foreign intelligence service chose to place the young Kennedy in the liberal Stevenson wing of the Democratic Party. Adlai Stevenson had twice run unsuccessfully for president against Eisenhower and was associated with a comparatively less belligerent view of the Soviet Union and a commitment to domestic reform, such as civil rights. But over the 1960 campaign, Kennedy’s tough sparring with the Republican candidate Richard Nixon over foreign policy caused a slight shift in the KGB’s assessment. Perhaps the son was capable of the sins of his notorious father. ‘Now ... the character of Kennedy’s statements’, the KGB reported, ‘is close to that of the Democratic leadership, which lies somewhere between the moderate-liberal faction and the reactionary faction of Southern Democrats.’

By the beginning of 1962 Soviet intelligence was developing an interesting picture of John Kennedy. Remarkably, the Bay of Pigs fiasco in April 1961 seemed to confirm for Moscow that Kennedy was no hawk. In the days and weeks following the event, the KGB received a stream of intelligence that blamed the CIA and other hawkish influences for bullying the President into attacking Cuba. If left to his own devices, these reports implied, Kennedy would be less aggressive toward Fidel Castro. In sum, the American President seemed to be the kind of leader with whom Moscow could work; but his pragmatism combined with his relative youth made him vulnerable to the heirs of the John Foster Dulles approach to superpower relations. Extending beyond the KGB, this understanding of the President would come to influence Nikita Khrushchev’s future actions.

Soviet Intelligence Gathering in Latin America

In contrast with its limited ability to inform the Kremlin’s understanding of the United States, the KGB played a central role in shaping the Kremlin’s thinking on Fidel Castro and his regime. Longtime Soviet intelligence professional Aleksandr Alekseev, who set up shop in Havana in October 1959, became a confidant of the Cuban leader and acted as the principal back channel between Havana and Moscow prior to the Cuban missile crisis.

Before the opening of the Havana KGB station (rezidentura) in October 1959, Mexico City had been the central collecting point for information about the Cuban Revolution and its enemies. Members of the Cuban communist party (the Partido Socialista Popular) traveled to Mexico City to report on the transformation of Cuban society under Fidel Castro. The young KGB officer Nikolai Leonov, who was assigned to the office, was an important link to the communists in Fidel Castro’s entourage. One of those communist informants was Che Guevara’s assistant Emilio Aragónés, who provided detailed information on the pace of radicalization of the Revolution.
Once Alekseev was in Cuba, however, Havana assumed Mexico City’s importance as an intelligence center in the region. In large measure, Alekseev himself deserves credit for this. In the late 1950s, when some in the Kremlin sensed the opportunity for an expansion of Soviet influence in Latin America, Alekseev was one of the few area specialists to whom the leadership could turn. Recalled from the KGB station in Buenos Aires in 1958, Alekseev took over the Latin American division of the Council of Ministers’ Committee on Cultural Relations. The Spanish-speaking Alekseev was quick to apply his expertise and knowledge of Latin American personalities to devising propaganda operations. He was also eager to visit Cuba. In his opinion there was something unusual about the Cuban Revolution. It did not fit the pattern of the typical Latin American coup: neither the military nor the local US representative seemed to have taken control of the new government. In January 1959, Alekseev suggested to his superiors that he might be sent to Cuba as a Soviet observer. His bosses in the KGB agreed, assigning him a ‘special mission’ to establish contact with the top levels of the Cuban leadership, but it took over seven months for the Cubans to grant him a visa.\(^\text{17}\)

In 1960 and 1961, the deepening Soviet-Cuban political and military relationship led to extensive liaison in intelligence matters. The Cubans responded positively to Soviet offers of intelligence assistance and a few men were sent from Havana to Soviet intelligence schools in 1960. The Soviets offered to build a signals intelligence service for the Cubans in the summer of 1960. Moscow, which was able to read Cuban diplomatic correspondence, assumed that the United States could as well. Liaison reached an unusual level of intensity following the Bay of Pigs operation. Chastened by the poor performance of its intelligence services before the US-sponsored attack, Havana restructured its intelligence community, asking Moscow to staff key positions in Cuban intelligence and to accelerate the training of a Cuban intelligence cadre.\(^\text{18}\) In October 1961, Soviet military intelligence officially came to the island at the request of General Sergio del Valle, the chief of staff of the Cuban army. Del Valle’s support allowed the GRU to resist a challenge from Alekseev who did not want competition from a rival agency for the attention of the Castro brothers.\(^\text{19}\)

Soviet Intelligence Gathering Elsewhere

Some of the Soviets’ more detailed sources on US policy toward Cuba were in Europe. In particular Soviet appreciations of Kennedy’s policy benefited from excellent sources in the French and Belgian foreign offices. The KGB was able to provide the Kremlin with verbatim copies of French diplomatic traffic from Moscow and Washington. Not only did Nikita Khrushchev
receive copies of cables sent to Paris by the French Ambassador in the United States, Hervé Alphand, but he was also given detailed reports on visits to Paris by influential Americans, such as Dean Rusk – and even President Kennedy. From the Belgian foreign ministry, Soviet intelligence acquired reports written by the Belgian mission in Havana on the internal situation in Cuba and on Castro’s policy of assisting other Latin American revolutionary groups.

THE MISSILE CRISIS

For the purpose of evaluating the performance of Soviet intelligence in 1962, it is useful to divide the Cuban missile crisis into three phases. Despite a lack of startling sources, the KGB and the GRU exhibited little reluctance in forwarding what in retrospect appears as gossipy or second-rate information to the Kremlin. Although these reports were not always believed, Khrushchev paid attention to them and the Soviet intelligence community was often tasked to acquire certain kinds of information before the leadership rendered a major policy decision.

Phase One: January–June 1962

As best as can be concluded, neither Soviet intelligence, nor any particular product of the intelligence community, sparked Khrushchev’s decision to deploy ballistic missiles to Cuba. Instead the May 1962 decision came at the end of five months of discussion involving Nikita Khrushchev and his closest advisors over what new steps should be taken to assist Fidel Castro. The process was set in train when news reached Moscow of some candid comments that President Kennedy had made in a meeting with Khrushchev’s son-in-law Aleksei Adzhubei on 30 January 1962. Adzhubei’s report that Kennedy was impatient with the status quo in Cuba shook the Kremlin and re-opened a debate over Fidel Castro’s security that had started at the Cuban leader’s instigation in September 1961. A few months after the Bay of Pigs, Castro had requested a qualitative improvement in Soviet military assistance to his regime. But after showing some interest in doing more to shore up Cuban defenses, Moscow had let the matter slide into 1962.20

Kennedy’s comments instantly returned Cuba to a matter of short-term concern for the Kremlin:

‘The Cuban question’, the President told Adzhubei, ‘will be decided on Cuba, and not by the involvement of outsiders’.

‘But there remains a threat to Cuba’, Adzhubei countered.
'I already told N.S. Khrushchev that I consider the invasion which took place – a mistake; however we cannot fail to follow the development of events on Cuba. You are also not indifferent to events in Finland, for example'.

If this had been all that Kennedy had said, then the Kremlin might not have reassessed its support for Cuba in February 1962. However, Kennedy would not just draw a comparison between Soviet anxieties about Finnish developments and his own about Cuba; he took the opportunity of Khrushchev's son-in-law's visit to use even more graphic terms to warn the Soviets to leave him alone in the Caribbean:

Adzhubei: 'You have a right to be interested in events in Cuba. But when we read that the US is gearing up to invade Cuba, we think to ourselves that this is not your right'.

Kennedy: 'We have no intention of intervening in Cuba'.

Adzhubei: 'But what about the attacks from Guatemala and some other countries? Have you changed your opinion that the April 1961 invasion was an American mistake?'

According to Adzhubei, this last comment provoked Kennedy to bang his fist on the table.

Kennedy: 'At the time I called Allen Dulles into my office and dressed him down. I told him: you should learn from the Russians. When they had difficulties in Hungary, they liquidated the conflict in three days. When they did not like things in Finland, the president of that country goes to visit the Soviet premier in Siberia and all is worked out. But you, Dulles, have never been capable of doing that'.

Kennedy's comments not only moved Khrushchev to endorse the shipment of military supplies that Castro had asked for six months earlier, but it provoked the Kremlin to order the KGB to present a new assessment of US intentions in the Caribbean. In July 1960, the KGB had written that a US invasion of Cuba was unlikely unless the Cubans invaded the US naval base at Guantánamo or the Soviets themselves attempted to put nuclear missiles on the island. In the 18 months that followed, which included the transition from the Eisenhower to the Kennedy administration, it appears the KGB had not been asked to reassess this position. But in the climate of concern that followed the Adzhubei-Kennedy meeting, the Kremlin finally called for a new opinion.

On the basis of available intelligence in March 1962, the KGB could not reach any overarching conclusions about the likelihood of a US invasion.
For months Cuban security had been reporting an increase in counterrevolutionary activity. Rebel bands had grown in number and were receiving additional supplies of weaponry, food and medicine. Yet it was not clear that the United States was preparing for a second and bigger paramilitary assault. Interrogations of captured rebels were turning up evidence of a change in CIA instructions. The rebels were now expected to emphasize intelligence gathering and sabotage operations, hardly what one would expect on the eve of an attack. Consequently, the Cuban services assumed that rather than planning a near-term invasion, the United States was instead attempting to create a general crisis on the island by paralyzing the economy.23

Evidence from America's European allies shed little light on Washington's objectives regarding Cuba in 1962. Moscow acquired the report of a NATO committee empaneled in September 1961 to investigate Latin America. The NATO report outlined European concerns that tension would rise with economic hardship in Latin America. The Soviets noted that NATO experts feared that the expansion of the Common Market would harm trade between Europe and the Latin American countries. But there was no indication that the United States was eager to use force to settle the question in 1962.24 In the two countries where the KGB had scored spectacular successes in the 1950s, Great Britain and West Germany, the KGB had to admit to the Kremlin that it could not produce any intelligence material of any value on Cuba or the Latin American question.25

The best European indications in this period on Kennedy's Cuban policy came from Soviet intelligence's excellent French sources. The Soviets received reports on the substance of Charles de Gaulle's conversations with President Kennedy about Cuba. There was nothing here to help an assessment of Kennedy's feelings toward Cuba in 1962. It seemed that the young man admitted his unhappiness about the failure at the Bay of Pigs and was looking for European support in isolating Cuba. De Gaulle and Kennedy agreed that Europe needed to expand economic and cultural ties with Latin America to remove the sense in those countries that the only obvious choices were US hegemony or communism. But, once again, there was nothing in this basket of information about US designs in 1962.

The KGB's spring assessment of Kennedy's immediate plans for Cuba was equivocal because its man in Washington doubted that an American military intervention was on the horizon. Aleksandr Feklisov believed that Kennedy would have to be provoked to use military force in Cuba. Before being sent out to the US to run the KGB's principal station there, Feklisov had overseen the intelligence assessment in 1960 that Eisenhower was unlikely to invade without a Cuban assault on Guantánamo or the creation of a missile base on the island. Two years later, he still believed this, despite
the change in administration and the experience of the Bay of Pigs. In the middle of March 1962, Feklisov reported that Kennedy was unlikely to approve an invasion because a military intervention would undermine the Alliance For Progress, which was Kennedy’s preferred weapon to use against the regional appeal of Fidel Castro. Besides a provocation, an uprising might tempt Kennedy to invade. Kennedy knew about the serious food shortages in Cuba and had called for measures that would further aggravate the situation. But the tone of Feklisov’s report suggested that the American President was not overly concerned about Cuba.26

When the KGB instructed Feklisov in the spring of 1962 to exploit his sources to determine the current threat to Castro, the KGB station chief turned to the ring of foreign journalists that he ran in Washington, DC. There appear to have been at least three people in the ring. Without exception all reported to Feklisov in March 1962 that a US military intervention in Cuba was unlikely.27

Feklisov also sought confirmation from another highly regarded source. This source, whose location was not indicated on the summary prepared for the leadership of the KGB, reported that Kennedy would not risk a military operation before the November congressional elections because of his concern that the Republicans would use it against him. The source suspected that if the intervention came it would be launched from Central America.28

Although secret information had not inspired the Kremlin’s anxiety over Cuba in the spring, the fact that neither the KGB nor the GRU could provide any confirmation of Kennedy’s warning encouraged Moscow to table the question of future military assistance to Castro until mid-April. Then two events stirred Khrushchev again. The first was a massive military maneuver launched by the US armed forces near Cuba. LANTPHIBEX-62 was the largest Atlantic-Caribbean military exercise ever conducted. It involved 40,000 men aboard 84 ships, who would participate in two amphibious landings.29 The second was a political offensive launched by Fidel Castro against some of the most powerful communists in his entourage.

Although the KGB did not supply any significant information on US activities, the organization played a role in providing the Kremlin with worrisome reports on the state of Cuban-Soviet relations. Through its contacts in Havana, Soviet intelligence was able to report in late March on the devastation of the positions of some of the top communists in Cuba because of the dismissal of Aníbal Escalante.30

In response to the loss of one of its closest allies in Havana, the Kremlin ordered the intrepid Aleksandr Alekseev back from Cuba in April 1962. Aleksandr Shelepin, Semichastny’s predecessor, participated in the decision to elevate Alekseev to the position of Soviet Ambassador to Cuba in the
wake of the Escalante affair. Khrushchev respected Alekseev’s expertise and knew that he was close to Fidel Castro. The Soviet leader, however, was less interested in Alekseev’s ideas as to what should be done in Cuba than he was in using the experienced KGB officer to test his assumptions about what Fidel Castro might accept. It was in the course of Alekseev’s four-week stay in Moscow that Khrushchev decided to put ballistic missiles on the island. Yet neither Alekseev, nor his boss Semichastny, was consulted on the project, which became known as Operation ‘Anadyr’. Moreover, it is quite clear that in its desire to maintain the strictest secrecy surrounding the plan, the Kremlin did not make use of the KGB to collect additional information on Kennedy’s tolerance for a Soviet military base in the region. It was not uncommon for KGB headquarters to send out a general questionnaire to all stations if the Kremlin were suddenly seized with interest in a certain matter. In January 1961, for example, KGB residents in all of Latin America received a six-part questionnaire reflecting the KGB’s ignorance of the new Kennedy administration’s policy toward Cuba. Nothing like this was sent in April or May 1962. Instead of trying to track down additional information on Kennedy’s possible sensitivity to a Soviet missile base 90 miles off the coast of Florida, Aleksandr Feklisov at the KGB station in Washington spent much of May 1962 devising a covert operation to increase tensions in Franco-American relations.

For Western scholars, it is even more startling that no one in the KGB was asked for a formal assessment of the likely American reaction to the placement of missiles in Cuba. Since World War II, the US intelligence community had attempted to provide estimates of the intentions and capabilities of important foreign countries. While these estimates often evinced the flaws of committee-generated reports, they at least reflected an effort to coordinate and make sense of secret knowledge on a certain policy matter. In some cases, these reports sought to clarify the murky world of the subjunctive, to illuminate what might happen. Called ‘intelligence estimates’ in the Anglo-Saxon intelligence world, these reports were foreign to Soviet experience. In Moscow, ‘what if’ questions were reserved for the consideration of the Presidium alone.

The most startling proof of how far the KGB was from the events that led to the decision to deploy nuclear missiles in the Caribbean was Khrushchev’s apparent inattention in May 1962 to the problem of reconciling the need to keep ‘Anadyr’ secret with evidence of US high-altitude reconnaissance flights over Cuba. As of the spring of 1962, Soviet intelligence was well aware that Washington was regularly sending U-2s over the island. On at least two occasions Feklisov reported to Moscow that U-2s were scouring the skies above Cuba. The Soviets took great pains to cover the movement of the missiles from the Ukraine. The planning
documents for Operation ‘Anadyr’ detail the use of physical deception to create the impression that the shipments were intended for Siberia. Yet there appear not to have been any specific measures taken to confuse the cameras of a U-2 flying over the construction sites on the island. Only in July 1962 – well after the decision to send ballistic missiles had been made – did Khrushchev and the Soviet leadership evince concern that U-2s might discover the deployment in Cuba, and reverse the order in which missiles were to be deployed (anti-aircraft missiles first; strategic nuclear missiles second).

The role of the GRU in the events preceding the missile decision is harder to determine. The Kremlin records for the decision do not include anything resembling a Soviet military intelligence assessment of US intentions toward Cuba. The most relevant intelligence reports seem to have reached Moscow in mid-March. According to two reports from a well placed source in the US national security bureaucracy, the huge Soviet nuclear test in August 1961 had deterred the United States from proceeding with plans to launch a pre-emptive nuclear strike on the Soviet Union. This source, who was considered reliable and whose reports were passed on to the Soviet leadership, reported that between 6 and 12 June 1961, the United States had decided to launch a nuclear strike on the USSR in September 1961. It was due only to the Soviet announcement of the new series of atomic tests that the United States reversed its decision. According to the GRU’s informant, the tests convinced the United States that the Soviet nuclear arsenal was more powerful than previously assumed.

Soviet military intelligence may have focussed Khrushchev’s mind on the perils of remaining strategically inferior to the United States. That same spring Khrushchev had learned that it would take quite a few years for Moscow to have enough of the Soviet Strategic Rocket Forces’ new SS-7 intercontinental ballistic missiles to match the land-based leg of the American nuclear triad. But the GRU information, like that from the KGB, neither provoked doubt in Khrushchev’s own mind about his assessment of the challenges of the world around him, nor persuaded him to embrace a different set of assumptions.

Phase Two: June 1962–22 October 1962

With the Cuban crisis moving into a more critical phase, Nikita Khrushchev was as usual acting as his own intelligence analyst. In the summer, political reporting from Washington seemed to reinforce Khrushchev’s expectation that Kennedy would ultimately accept the missiles. In early July, a KGB source in the entourage of the Nicaraguan military attaché Colonel José Morales reported on a conversation that Morales had with General Jackson, Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson’s military aide:
Leaders of Pentagon doubt that Cuban émigré and Central American detachments, trained by the United States, could successfully fight Castro's well-prepared army. The leaders of Pentagon believe that an intervention in Cuba could only bring about the overthrow of Castro if specially prepared US troops would participate in this operation.36

This excellent piece of political intelligence concluded with an insightful comment on President Kennedy's own views on the matter:

John F. Kennedy is against the participation of US troops in military operations vs. Cuba. He is afraid that USSR and China would respond with an attack on West Berlin and Southeast Asia, which could bring the US into a world war.37

Although unwilling to involve his intelligence services in his own policymaking, Khrushchev was prepared to use these services to deceive Kennedy. Since April 1961, a member of the Soviet military intelligence station (GRU) in Washington, Colonel Georgi Bolshakov, had acted as a special channel between the Kremlin and the President. In more than 50 meetings with Attorney General Robert Kennedy, Bolshakov conveyed messages authorized by Khrushchev. In August 1962, the Soviet leader decided to use the unwitting Bolshakov to mask the significance of the shipments to Cuba.

Soviet signals intelligence – generated by means of the interception and decryption of foreign communications – provided little warning of the growing crisis.38 Unable to break any high-level US ciphers, the signals intelligence component of the KGB focused on analyzing the volume of US communications traffic. In the days immediately preceding Kennedy's blockade speech, the Soviets detected unusual activity but could not determine the exact reason for it. Similarly, the GRU disseminated worrisome but inexact signals of trouble ahead. As of 21 October, the headquarters of the GRU had received four different reports suggesting that Kennedy was considering some form of military action in the Caribbean. Noting unusual activity by the US Air Force, the GRU reported on a convoy of military planes that had left for Puerto Rico. It also appeared that the number of bombers on duty in the Strategic Air Command had inexplicably increased. On the high seas, the Soviets detected that the US Navy had increased its presence in the Caribbean as part of an exercise.39 Finally, there were indications that this was only the beginning of some US military operation. The Soviet military picked up Robert McNamara's order that senior military officers remain near the Pentagon to participate in a series of intensive meetings.
Phase Three: 22 October–November 1962

The report card for Soviet intelligence is mixed in this period. The Presidium appears not to have had any special advance warning of John F. Kennedy’s speech to the nation on Monday, 22 October. Berlin and Cuba were both on the agenda for the scheduled Presidium meeting that day, indicating uncertainty over which Cold War volcano might be about to blow.40

The KGB detected after the speech that the decision to blockade Cuba had been made by a special group around Kennedy, but its information about the composition of that group was flawed. ‘The decision to blockade Cuba’, source D5-72 reported on 24 October, ‘was prepared by small group of men (around 10)’. When asked to name these men the source added, ‘Robert Kennedy is part of it, as are some of his people and three individuals from the Pentagon.”41

These first reports in the wake of Kennedy’s speech on Monday, 22 October, disappointed the chief of the FCD, Sakharovsky. ‘Basically this report does not contain any secret information. Do not use on its own’, he wrote on a cable from New York regarding a conversation with a member of the United States’ UN delegation, Viner.42 On another cable from New York that reported on an increase in the number of New York City cops patrolling Manhattan, Sakharovsky wrote, ‘I ask that this be combined with other materials.’ Sakharovsky considered the report empty on its own and not worthy of dissemination to the Kremlin. In some cases, Sakharovsky just threw the report away, such as the one that also arrived in Moscow on 24 October reporting that Gorsky had not been invited to the State Department’s press conference for American and foreign correspondents. ‘The report does not contain any secret information. Do not use’, an obviously exasperated Sakharovsky ordered.43

It was in the context of this barren reporting from the United States that Gorsky’s coup on the evening of 24–25 October loomed large. While making a late night visit to the Tap Room in the National Press Club, Gorsky was approached by the bartender. The bartender was very worried and wanted to unburden himself. While pouring drinks at about 10 p.m., he had overheard a conversation between two celebrated American journalists, Robert Donovan and Warren Rogers, both correspondents of the New York Herald Tribune. Apparently, Donovan was supposed to fly south that very night ‘to cover the operation to capture Cuba, which is expected to start the next day’. This was the first solid indication that Gorsky had received in the crisis that Kennedy had decided on war, and he rushed back to the Embassy that night to make his report.44

The KGB’s informant had the story half right. Rogers and Donovan had
been discussing the invasion; but it was Rogers, not Donovan who was on the Pentagon’s list to go if the invasion happened. Earlier in the day the list was circulated to news rooms in the city. There was to be one reporter per major newspaper. As far as Rogers knew, eight men had been selected. One journalist, who worked for one of the television networks, had refused the assignment for an unspecified reason; otherwise, the rest were keen to go, though they were well aware of the consequences for themselves, and for the country. Donovan, who was Washington Bureau Chief, had selected Rogers for the assignment.

It was a mark of the limitations of Soviet intelligence in this crisis that information from Warren Rogers, who was not especially close to any member of the Kennedy administration – and who was in fact persona non grata around Robert McNamara – would make its way from the alcoholic haze of the National Press Club to the desk of Nikita Sergeyvich Khrushchev.

Though flimsy, this intelligence resonated with something just picked up by the Soviet military. While the bartender, Johnny Prokov, was overhearing the two American journalists, the GRU office in the Embassy was eavesdropping on an even more ominous signal. The military attachés in the Embassy regularly scoured the skies for Pentagon radio signals. The US military routinely transmitted changes to the Defense Condition (DefCon) status of Americans forces en clair, in an unclassified form. At 10 p.m., Washington time, on Wednesday, the GRU intercepted an order from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Strategic Air Command placing SAC on a nuclear alert. In the 15 years of intercepting US Cold War military messages, the Soviet military intelligence service had never seen anything like this.

In light of these threatening signals, Gorsky and his boss, Feklisov, discussed the urgent need to corroborate the bar story. Rogers was known to have irregular contact with one of the political officers in the Embassy. This man, a young second secretary whom Warren Rogers remembers today only as ‘Boris something’, was called at home and told to find a way to intercept Rogers before late morning. Boris knew that Rogers usually parked his car in the lot used by many journalists behind the Willard Hotel. The Embassy decided to have Boris hang around the lot from the crack of dawn to be sure that Rogers was kept under observation. If the journalist’s information was accurate, Moscow would have less than a day to react.

This dramatic spy story led to the writing of dispatches that would command Khrushchev’s full attention on 26 October. Khrushchev had already successfully proposed a diplomatic settlement to the rest of the Presidium. This he did on 25 October, before the Kremlin received the reports on Warren Rogers and the DefCon 2 alert. But the new information
from Washington accelerated Khrushchev’s own timetable for making an offer to the White House.

Ironically, at the climax of the crisis a KGB operation had more influence on the actions of the US government than it did in Moscow. On 26 October, Aleksandr Feklisov re-established contact with John Scali. Feklisov and Scali had been meeting infrequently since the end of 1961. On 6 July 1962, for example, Scali had discussed with Feklisov Secretary of State Rusk’s recent trip to Europe. Despite Feklisov’s claim in his memoirs that he met Scali on 23 October, the 6 July meeting appears to have been the last before the two men had their dramatic meeting at the Occidental Restaurant on 26 October.

THE MYSTERY OF THE OCCIDENTAL MEETING

A plaque on the wall of the Occidental Restaurant celebrates a lunch meeting 36 years ago that was said to have averted a nuclear war. A few years after the crisis, Assistant Secretary of State Roger Hilsman – and later Scali himself – revealed the role that the journalist had played at the climax of the Cold War. Simple and dramatic, the story as they told it went as follows: on the morning of 26 October, Scali received a telephone call from the KGB resident in Washington, Aleksandr Fomin, who requested an urgent meeting. Scali sensed the agitation in Feklisov’s voice and agreed to meet for a late lunch at the Occidental. Soon after it began, the meeting took on the character of a probe. Feklisov – alias Fomin – had a set of proposals that his government wanted Scali to convey to the White House. In essence, the Soviets were looking for a diplomatic solution to the crisis, involving a US commitment to lift the blockade and a pledge not to try to invade Cuba in return for the removal of the Soviet missiles. Scali carried these proposals to Kennedy through his friend Roger Hilsman at the State Department.

There was always something about the traditional story that did not make sense. If indeed Feklisov was a message carrier for Khrushchev, why did the Kremlin not wait for the Kennedy administration to respond to this trial balloon before issuing a new, and more exacting, set of terms on 27 October?

In recent years, Scali and Feklisov have contributed to oral histories but have done little to solve this puzzle. When glasnost’ allowed Aleksandr Feklisov to make his first public comments on the case, he shocked Scali and historians by denying that he had suggested anything at the Occidental. Scali, Feklisov asserted, was the author of the proposal for a diplomatic settlement. Nevertheless, in an interview conducted only a few months before his death, Scali clung just as resolutely to his own version, and dismissed Feklisov as a liar. ‘No one can convince me’, he said, ‘that Feklisov was acting without instructions.’
Was Feklisov acting under instructions? Soviet records are consistent with Feklisov's version of what happened. There is no record of an instruction from the Presidium to the Foreign Ministry or the KGB on 25 October to seek a diplomatic settlement. The Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation (SVR), the successor to the KGB's FCD, has informed us that it could not find any separate instruction to Feklisov during the crisis. Feklisov's cable of 26 October, both as it was transmitted and in its disseminated (spravka) form, also suggests that Feklisov was a passive recipient of an offer from the Kennedy administration. Information about how Feklisov's cable was handled in Moscow provides additional evidence that whatever happened at the Occidental was not authorized by the Kremlin: the KGB secretariat sent it to Semichastny's office, where it languished for four hours before being sent on to Andrei Gromyko. Had the Presidium tasked the KGB to probe Kennedy, presumably this cable would have been handled more expeditiously.

Nevertheless, despite evidence corroborating the thesis that the Soviets were passive players at the Occidental Restaurant, there is reason to believe that the documents do not tell the full story. We now know from V. A. Malin's notes of the 25 October Presidium meeting that Khrushchev suggested a possible diplomatic settlement to his colleagues on that day. Although not yet ready to act, he prepared his colleagues for ultimately offering to remove the missiles in return for a non-invasion pledge. 'Let's look around', he said, implying that it was not yet time to retreat. But a retreat was expected.

The striking similarity between the formula presented by Khrushchev to his colleagues on 25 October and the deal discussed only a few hours later by Scali and the KGB's chief representative in Washington invites speculation about the possibility of a special KGB operation. One of those who heard Khrushchev make his suggestion on 25 October was Aleksandr Shelepin, former Chairman of the KGB and a Presidium member. Shelepin remained close to his former protégé, Vladimir Semichastny, and it is plausible to imagine that Shelepin leaked the story of the meeting to him.

Evidence to support this thesis is lacking. Semichastny and Feklisov disagree over what happened at the Occidental. Although both deny that Moscow sent any instructions to meet Scali, Semichastny credits Feklisov with having engaged in private diplomacy of his own. Not surprisingly, Feklisov today is angry at his former boss for suggesting that he has been lying all of these years. Feklisov has come to believe that the KGB mounted a little deception campaign against him. When shown the archives' copy of the disseminated form (spravka) of his famous 26 October dispatch, he pronounced it nonsense. His reasons for rejecting the spravka are quite trivial. However, Feklisov's feelings of betrayal lend some credence to the
possibility that in October 1962 Shelepin and Semichastny schemed to use Feklisov to present Khrushchev with an ‘American proposal’ that would make retreat less humiliating. And now Feklisov refuses to accept the credit for what might then have been an independent foreign policy initiative by the KGB.

There is one other intriguing possibility. There is no evidence that Scali initiated the proposal at the first meeting of the men on 26 October. If he had, Feklisov would certainly have reported it to Moscow. But he did not. Instead Feklisov’s only report of that day came after the second meeting at 7:30 p.m.

Perhaps the two men had a freewheeling discussion in the morning and misunderstood each other. Scali rushed to see his contact at the State Department, Roger Hilsman, thinking that the stony-faced Feklisov had made a tentative offer. Meanwhile Feklisov returned to his Embassy not sure of what had actually transpired. In this case, Scali is the participant who has not told the full story of his role.

The Scali-Feklisov case illustrates how governments in the grip of a crisis can misunderstand each other. While it is only speculation that the contradiction between the accounts suggests that Scali and Feklisov misunderstood each other on 26 October, it is certain that the United States and the USSR misunderstood what went on between the two men.

In following the course taken by this important telegram, we see that it did not play any role in shaping Khrushchev’s letter of 26 October, which proposed a US guarantee of the territorial integrity of Cuba as a means of resolving the crisis, or even in influencing the letter of 27 October that demanded the removal of US intermediate range ballistic missile bases in Turkey. Feklisov’s telegram arrived in Moscow at 2:20 p.m. on 27 October. The fact that this telegram was not given priority treatment strengthens the case against this being a KGB initiative. The KGB sat on it so long that by the time the Ministry of Foreign Affairs received a copy of the Feklisov cable, Khrushchev had already sent to Kennedy his second letter demanding a missile trade.

We know from a curious instruction that Khrushchev sent Alekseev on 28 October that he eventually learned about the Scali-Feklisov discussions. In it, Khrushchev asked his ambassador in Havana to inform Fidel Castro about this remarkable source (Scali) who provided an intriguing suggestion from the Kennedy administration, which unfortunately came too late to influence the course of the crisis. Khrushchev’s purpose in sharing this information with Castro, it seems, was to enlist his support for the diplomatic settlement by indicating Kennedy’s sincere interest in finding a peaceful way out of the crisis.35

Meanwhile, as Scali and Feklisov may have been confusing each other
at the Occidental Restaurant, the weight of KGB information pointed toward a US attack in the near future. On 26 October, Feklisov turned to his principal sources. It has been argued that there was a shift in the information Khrushchev received on 27 October that influenced his letter of that day. An examination of the intelligence available to him that morning refutes this speculation. It was not the information that changed but Khrushchev’s understanding of the crisis.

Khrushchev at the Helm

Unfortunately, Nikita Khrushchev did not bequeath a set of tapes of the crisis-era Presidium meetings to historians. The best we have are the colorful yet often elliptical notes of his amanuensis, Vladimir N. Malin. The Malin notes of the key Kremlin meetings between 22 and 28 October reveal Khrushchev as an avid consumer of information who was having a hard time making up his mind about his adversary. On 22 October, Khrushchev assumed the worst. News of the forthcoming speech by Kennedy filled him with dread that the United States had discovered the missiles and would invade, as Kennedy had indicated he might in a 4 September press statement.

The flimsy information from the National Press Club squared with Khrushchev’s fear that Kennedy was going to invade. Nevertheless, despite these fears, Khrushchev continued to maintain a somewhat contradictory view of the nature of his adversary. In the depths of his soul, Khrushchev had doubts that Kennedy would actually go through with an attack. From the very first assessments of the young President, the Soviets distinguished between Kennedy and the Pentagon. When frustrated by a lack of progress in a area of superpower discussion, Khrushchev would bait Kennedy and his advisors with the taunt that JFK lacked the courage of his convictions.

This inner sense of Kennedy prevailed in Khrushchev’s own thinking, without the aid of outside information or counsel. The picture gleaned from KGB reporting remained bleak on 27 October; but that day Khrushchev on his own decided that he could up the ante for a diplomatic settlement. Over the concerns of his Kremlin colleagues, Khrushchev proposed the additional demand that the United States remove its Jupiter IRBMs from Turkey as part of the price for Moscow dismantling its Cuban missile sites.

CONCLUSIONS

The Kremlin’s decision to exclude Soviet intelligence from the policy process weakened the support that Khrushchev could have received from the KGB or GRU. Rather than wasting time in May 1962 dreaming up schemes to drive a wedge between France and the United States, for
example, Aleksandr Feklisov should have been trolling for information about US intentions in the fall of 1962. Aleksandr Alekseev was the only KGB field officer who was briefed on the Cuban initiative.

The failure to integrate intelligence in the policy process was only one reason for the GRU and KGB’s secondary role in the missile drama. Neither organization had sources in the United States that were well placed enough to detect the innermost thinking of the Kennedy administration. The GRU’s Georgi Bolshakov was without a doubt the best placed Soviet intelligence operative in Washington. He visited with RFK at least five times during the summer. But lacking any instructions to ask about Cuba, he spent most of these visits discussing Berlin, Laos and a nuclear test ban.

Unable to provide information of the quality of the American U-2 photographs, which might have turned the thinking of the Soviet leadership around and convinced Khrushchev that he was right to assume Kennedy would not invade Cuba, the Soviet intelligence services provided Khrushchev with sufficient evidence to conclude both that the United States was about to invade Cuba and that Kennedy did not want to invade Cuba. It was left to Khrushchev himself to decide which of the two scenarios (or perhaps some combination of the two) seemed more likely. Perhaps with the sole exception of the information that reached Moscow on the night of 25–26 October, none of the intelligence alone accounted for the dramatic shifts in Khrushchev’s assessments of the situation between 22 and 28 October.

Following the crisis, Soviet intelligence picked up signs that Kennedy was not committed to the non-invasion guarantee. Khrushchev, however, would choose to ignore this information out of a sense that the crisis had placed him in a position in Moscow where he had to rely on Kennedy to keep his word. If Kennedy’s pledge were insincere, then Khrushchev’s critics in Havana and Moscow were right to describe the entire affair as a Soviet defeat. For Khrushchev’s purposes the most useful intelligence came through the KGB’s liaison with the Cuban government, which allowed the Kremlin to follow the course of Fidel Castro’s slow acceptance of the October settlement.

In 1984, Christopher Andrew and David Dilks challenged international historians to explicate the ‘missing dimension’ of world politics: the intelligence dimension. In the case of the Cuban missile crisis, the most significant missing piece of the puzzle up to now was the thinking of the Kremlin in general, and the inner workings of the mind of Nikita Khrushchev in particular. Intelligence was a factor in that process; but only one of many.
NOTES

3. Vladimir N. Malin, [Brief notes on the sessions of the Presidium of the CC of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union], Protocol 75, 30 Dec. 1962, APRF.
4. Interview with Vladimir Semichastny, Moscow, 10 June 1994.
5. Ibid. Semichastny's name does not appear on any of the routing slips for draft letters or instructions routinely sent by the Presidium to non-members Defense Minister Rodion Malinovsky and Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko. These documents are located in Folio 3, List 65, APRF.
6. This statement is based on analysis of foreign policy files in Folio 3, Lists 65 and 66 at the Archives of the President of the Russian Federation; as well as on analysis of the KGB’s spravka [summary] files regarding Cuba and the United States.
7. Nikolai Leonov reformed the FCD’s analytical branch in the 1970s. Interview with Nikolai Leonov, Moscow, Sept. 1994. In most cases, the distribution of field cables is indicated on the summaries (spravki) in the files. Distribution seems to have been a matter of discretion for Aleksandr Sakharovsky and Semichastny. Unlike CIA information cables from this era, which carry a printed distribution list, each KGB spravka appears to have had its own particular distribution. File 90238, Vol. 1, in the archives of the SVR [the successor organization of the KGB’s FCD], contains spravki on the Cuban crisis.
8. John Scali recalled the FBI encouraging him to meet regularly with Aleksandr Feklisov, after the latter made the first approach. The FBI described the KGB resident, whose alias in the United States was ‘Aleksandr Fomin’, as unusually reclusive. Interview with John Scali, July 1994.
9. Washington to Center, 6 July 1962. Copies of this cable can be found in File 88631 and File 116, Vol. 1, SVR.
10. Washington to Center, 21 Feb. 1963, SVR.
11. Ibid.
12. Shelepin to Central Committee, 29 June 1960, SVR.
14. Information Department (Department 16) to chief of D Department, 31 May 1961, pp. 96–109, SVR.
16. Havana to Center, 12 April 1960, File 78825, p. 227, SVR.
23. KGB headquarters tended to downplay the concerns of the Cubans, concluding that the counterrevolution, even with outside assistance, was likely to fail. The Center sent
information collected from outside Cuba to Alekseyev in Havana that tended to underscore the weakness of the counterrevolution. Somewhere in Europe, probably France, the KGB had acquired a review of the status of Latin American countries that foresaw a rosy future for Cuba. In late March, the KGB instructed Alekseyev to read it and to pass it on to Castro.


27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
30. Semichastny to CC, 11 April 1962, File 88497, Vol.1, pp.61-8, SVR. For further discussion, see the discussion by Domingo Amuchastegui in the next essay.
32. Feklisov to Center, 18 May 1962, File 116, Vol.1, SVR.
34. However unbelievable this report may seem, Soviet leaders did receive it, and appear to have assimilated it.
35. Spravka, Archives of the Main Department of the General Staff of the Russian Federation [GRU].
36. Washington to Center, 9 July 1962, SVR.
37. Ibid.
38. Letter, Russian Signals Intelligence Service to Aleksandr Fursenko.
39. PHIBRIGLEX-62, in which US Marines practiced amphibious landings on the island of Vieques to liberate the mythical ‘Republic of Vieques’ from its mythical dictator, Ortsac (‘Castro’ spelled backwards).
42. Spravka, New York to Center, 24 Oct. 1962, from cable 30517/1462 (also 24 Oct.), File 90238, Vol.1, SVR.
45. Dobrynin to MFA, 25 Oct. 1962, Folio 3, List 65, File 905, pp.69-70, APRF; Spravka, ‘Cables Received in Moscow’, GRU; Feklisov to Center, 25 Oct. 1962, File 116, Vol.1, pp.1026-7, SVR. On 24 Oct. SAC went to DefCon 2 for the first and only time in its history. Had it gone one level higher, to DefCon 1, the United States would have been waging a nuclear war.
48. Feklisov to Center, 6 July 1962, File 116, Vol.1, SVR.
53. Vladimir Semichastny made this claim most recently in a Russian TV documentary on the
Cuban missile crisis, aired in July 1997.

54. Written statement by Aleksandr Feklisov, dated 20 Sept. 1994, SVR.

