The event referred to as the “Cuban missile crisis” in the United States is called the “Caribbean crisis” in the Soviet Union, and the “October crisis” in Cuba; but in all three countries it is widely acknowledged to have been the single most dangerous episode of the Cold War. Analysis of the crisis has heretofore been one-sided. Although information about the American side of the crisis is relatively plentiful, both Cuba and the Soviet Union have closely guarded the histories of their sides of the event.\textsuperscript{1} \textit{Glasnost}, however, has led to a series of unprec-

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For a compilation of excerpts from these various sources through 1980, extensively annotated, see Pope, \textit{Soviet Views on the Cuban Missile Crisis}. Useful and revealing treatments stimulated by the Cambridge and Moscow conferences include Aleksandr I. Alekseev, “Karibskii krizis: kak eto bylo” (The Caribbean crisis: as it really was), \textit{Ekho planety}, No. 33 (November 1988), pp. 27–37; A.I. Alekseev, “Karibskii, Kubinskii, Oktiab’skii krizis” (The Caribbean-Cuban-October
edent discussions between East and West on the history and significance of the crisis, culminating in a tripartite conference in Moscow in January 1989. Drawing on the evidence and testimony presented at that conference, at the earlier U.S.-Soviet conference in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in October 1987, and in supplemental interviews, we present here a summary and analysis of the new light that has recently been shed on “all three” crises.2

2. See David A. Welch, ed., Proceedings of the Cambridge Conference on the Cuban Missile Crisis, October 11–13, 1987, CSIA Working Paper 89–2, Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard University (hereafter CCT for “Cambridge Conference Transcript”); and James G. Blight and David A. Welch, On the Brink: Americans and Soviets Reexamine the Cuban Missile Crisis (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), chs. 5 and 6. The key participants at the Cambridge conference were, on the Soviet side, FYodor Burlatsky, political commentator for Literaturnaya gazeta and chief of the philosophy department, Social Sciences Institute, Moscow, as well as political adviser for socialist countries of Eastern Europe and speech-writer for Chairman Nikita S. Khrushchev and General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev; Sergo Mikoyan, editor, Latinskaya amerika (Moscow), and formerly personal secretary to his father (Soviet First Deputy Premier Anastas I. Mikoyan, close associate of Nikita Khrushchev, and special envoy to Cuba at the conclusion of the Cuban missile crisis); and Georgy Shakhnazarov, personal aide to General Secretary Gorbachev. The key participants on the American side were McGeorge Bundy, special assistant for national security under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson; Robert S. McNamara, secretary of defense in both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations; and Theodore C. Sorensen, special counsel to President Kennedy—all of whom were members of President Kennedy’s Executive Committee of the National Security Council, or “ExComm.”

Burlatsky, Mikoyan, Shakhnazarov, Bundy, McNamara and Sorensen also participated in the Moscow conference in January 1989. Other participants in the Moscow conference included: on the Soviet side, the late former Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko; former Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Dobrynin; former Ambassador to Cuba (1962–68) Aleksandr Alekseev;
New information and testimony illuminate the longstanding debate about Soviet motives for deploying missiles to Cuba; the meaning, significance, and perceptions of American military activities and covert operations in 1962; the genesis, terms, and conduct of the missile deployment; the operational status of the missiles; decision-making during the early phases of the crisis; the origin of Khrushchev’s Turkish missile trade proposal; the U-2 shoot-down of October 27; the diplomacy leading to a resolution of the crisis; the sources of Khrushchev’s sense of urgency at the climax of the confrontation; and the acute tensions in Soviet-Cuban relations immediately following its resolution. We organize our treatment by topic—and, where possible, in chronological order—on the assumption that the reader will be familiar with the main events of the crisis itself. We highlight those areas in which recent discussions have most significantly advanced our understanding of the event.

Motives for the Soviet Deployment

The Soviet decision to deploy medium- and intermediate-range ballistic missiles (MRBMs and IRBMs) in Cuba appears to have been a response to three main concerns: first, the perceived need to deter an American invasion of Cuba and prevent the destruction of the Cuban revolution; second, the perceived need to redress the gross imbalance in deliverable strategic nuclear weapons that favored the United States; and third, the desire, born of national pride and prestige, to counter American deployments of nuclear weapons on the Soviet periphery, by exercise of the Soviet Union’s “equal right” to deploy its own nuclear missiles on territory adjacent to the United States. According to recent Soviet testimony, the first and second appear to have been the most important motivations, though there is disagreement on the
proper assignments of weight to each. Interestingly, Soviets have continued
without exception to deny any direct connection between the Cuban missile
crisis and the unstable Berlin situation; in Moscow, Andrei Gromyko added
his voice to the chorus.3

The desire to deter an American invasion of Cuba emerged shortly after
the crisis itself as the official Soviet rationale for the deployment.4 Most
Western commentators have dismissed or discounted this motivation, how-
ever, because it seemed calculated to justify the public terms on which the
crisis was ultimately resolved—the missiles in Cuba were withdrawn in
return for an American pledge not to invade the island.5 But several well-
placed Soviets, including Andrei Gromyko, Aleksandr Alekseev, Sergei
Khrushchev, and Sergo Mikoyan, have insisted that fears of an American
invasion were in fact uppermost in Khrushchev’s mind.6 These fears were
grounded in what appeared to be a consistent and deliberate pattern of
American activity designed to subvert and overthrow the regime of Fidel
Castro, leading up to and including the use of American military force if
necessary.7

3. See MCT; and Blight and Welch, On the Brink, pp. 296–297.
4. In his speech to the Supreme Soviet on December 12, 1962, Khrushchev stated that this was
his sole purpose in deploying medium- and intermediate-range ballistic missiles (MRBMs and
IRBMs) in Cuba. See Pope, Soviet Views on the Cuban Missile Crisis, p. 83. In the second volume
of his memoirs, Khrushchev reiterated that the defense of Cuba was his sole motivation; 
Khrushchev Remembers: The Last Testament, pp. 510–512. But in the first volume of his memoirs,
Khrushchev stated, “In addition to protecting Cuba, our missiles would have equalized what
the West likes to call the ‘balance of power’.” Khrushchev Remembers, pp. 493–494.
5. For discussion and references, see Blight and Welch, On the Brink, pp. 116–117, 293–297,
and sources therein cited.
argued that the United States considered the Castro regime “unacceptable” and that this was
the “beginning of the whole chain of events.” Jorge Risquet also said that Khrushchev told him
in August 1964 that the “sole idea” behind the deployment was to defend Cuba. MCT.
7. President Kennedy cut off all diplomatic relations with Cuba in January 1961; he eliminated
the Cuban sugar quota in March; and most ominously, he approved the abortive Bay of Pigs
invasion in April, in which a group of hastily-trained and poorly-armed Cuban exiles, organized
and supported by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), sought to trigger an anti-Castro revolt
by establishing a beach-head on the southern coast of the island. Though the operation was a
dismal failure, it did not dissuade the CIA from pursuing a substantial covert action campaign,
code-named “Operation Mongoose,” ostensibly intended to bring about the liquidation of the
Castro regime. Castro’s position began to look especially precarious in January 1962, when, at
Punta del Este, Uruguay, the United States managed to persuade the Organization of American
States to declare the government of Cuba incompatible with the inter-American system, to
ostracize Castro diplomatically, and to agree on measures of collective defense against possible
Cuban attempts to export revolution to other countries of the Western hemisphere. When
Kennedy declared an embargo on all trade with Cuba in February, all of the pieces appeared to
the Cubans to be in place for the expected American move: Cuba had been isolated in the
When asked by Khrushchev, Defense Minister Rodion Ya. Malinovsky reportedly informed the Soviet premier that Cuba could resist a full-scale American invasion for three or four days—hardly long enough to send reinforcements. According to Ambassador Alekseev, Khrushchev maintained at meetings with Presidium members that “there was no other path” to save the Cuban revolution than through the installation of nuclear missiles. Thus, Khrushchev may have believed that a deployment of conventional forces to the island as a trip wire would not have sufficed (possibly because of the marginal credibility of any explicit or implicit strategic nuclear threat undergirding it), and that the Soviet Union could not credibly deter an American invasion by threats of retaliation elsewhere.

However, at the Moscow conference, Cuban participants sharply contradicted Khrushchev’s analysis in several ways. Though stopping short of insisting that Cuba could have held off a full-scale American attack, Cuban Politburo member Jorge Risquet contended that Cuba could have resisted far longer than three days, and expressed indignation at the estimate attributed to Malinovsky. Sergio del Valle, chief of staff of the Cuban army in 1962, claimed that Cuba had armed and mobilized 270,000 people—double Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara’s 1962 estimate. If this is correct, then the five American divisions slated for the invasion under 316 OPLAN would certainly have faced stiffer resistance than the United States anticipated.


10. In a later interview, del Valle claimed that the 270,000 armed and mobilized troops were divided into fifty-six existing divisions, which had been brought up to full strength from reserves. Although they varied considerably in size, each division had on average 4800 men, considerably smaller than an American division. Twenty-eight divisions deployed on the western side of the island included some of the largest and strongest, since this was where the first wave of an invasion was expected to land. Authors’ interview with Sergio del Valle, May 18, 1989, Havana.
11. The commander-in-chief of the Atlantic Command (CINCLANT) prepared three contingency plans for military action against Cuba. Operational Plan No. 312-62 (312 OPLAN) set out air strike options, and Operational Plans 314-62 and 316-62 (314 OPLAN and 316 OPLAN) set out invasion options. The invasion force, ready on October 27, would initially have involved five Army divisions and one Marine division: the 82nd Airborne, 101st Airborne, 2nd Infantry, 1st Armored, 1st Infantry, and 2nd Marines. The 5th Infantry, 2nd Armored, and 4th Infantry
Even more striking, the Cuban delegation maintained that Fidel Castro's grounds for approving the deployment differed significantly from Khrushchev's grounds for proposing it. Dismissing the utility of Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba for deterrence or defense (noting that they served primarily to turn Cuba into a target), Emilio Aragones, one of the six members of the Cuban Communist Party Secretariat in 1962, claimed that Castro and the Cuban leadership accepted the deployment for two reasons: first, because the missiles would have shifted the global correlation of forces in favor of socialism; and second, because Cuba should accept "its share of the risk," since Cuba owed a debt of gratitude to the Soviet Union for efforts made on its behalf. Although the deployment posed certain risks for Cuba, the Soviet Union had already taken risks in support of the Cuban revolution. Castro himself has made similar statements in the past. It is clear, however, that Cuba's national pride is better preserved by these claims than by the admission that Cuba required assistance from another nation, in the form of a nuclear deterrent, to protect her own sovereignty and independence. In subsequent interviews, both del Valle and Aragones acknowledged that in 1962, they had been attracted to the idea of the deployment largely because of its potential for deterring an American invasion.

The Cubans' argument at the Moscow conference, however, serves to highlight the link between the deployment of missiles to Cuba and the Soviet desire to redress the strategic nuclear imbalance. General Dimitry Volkog-

divisions were to be held in reserve. See Raymond Garthoff's remarks, MCT; and CINCLANT Historical Account of Cuban Crisis (1963), ch. II, pp. 17–23 (available at the National Security Archive, Washington, D.C.). According to Emilio Aragones, the Cubans estimated in 1962 that as many as 800,000 people would have died in the event of an American invasion (MCT); CINCLANT Historical Account, pp. 55–56, estimated in 1962 that 316 OPLAN would succeed after ten days and that the U.S. armed forces would suffer between 18,000 and 19,000 casualties.
12. MCT.
14. Del Valle interview, May 18, 1989; James G. Blight (JGB) and David A. Welch (DAW) interview with Emilio Aragones, May 19, 1989, Havana. In an interesting inversion of public rationales, Aragones claimed that "even though it seemed to me that the [Soviets'] main goal of the deployment was to change the correlation of forces, the missiles would have had the effect of protecting Cuba, and so I was very much in favor of the idea."
15. U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric's destruction of the "missile gap" myth, in a 1961 speech, undercut Khrushchev's theretofore very assertive foreign policy, which rested heavily on pretended Soviet nuclear superiority and overt nuclear threats; thus it may have increased Soviet anxiety about American first-strike capability. The Soviets had no ICBM or long-range bomber assembly lines in operation that could fill the gap relatively quickly; the only systems available in the short term were medium- and intermediate-range SS-4s and SS-5s incapable of covering key targets in the United States unless they were deployed close to the
onov, who had reviewed the relevant archival materials, stated at the Moscow conference that in 1962, the Soviet Union had succeeded in deploying only twenty ICBMs capable of reaching the United States, far fewer than the seventy-five hitherto estimated by Western intelligence analysts. Thus the disparity in strategic nuclear weapons appears to have been even greater than was appreciated at the time. A successful Cuban deployment could have more than quadrupled the number of warheads that Soviet missiles could have delivered on the United States.16 Most Western analysts have assumed that some such calculation was the primary, though not fully articulated, initial motivation for the deployment of missiles.17 Even if Khru-

16. On October 19, the CIA reported that the Soviet Union was installing twenty-four SS-4 (Soviet designation R-12) MRBM launchers in Cuba—four each at four sites near San Cristóbal, and four at two sites near Sagua la Grande. Each launcher could have been equipped with two missiles, for a possible total of forty-eight MRBMs. Twelve SS-5 (R-14) IRBM launchers were observed under construction, four each at two sites near Guanajay, and four at one site near Remedios, suggesting that twenty-four IRBMs could have been deployed to Cuba (including reloads). With one warhead per missile (25 kt-2 MT yield for the SS-4s, 3-5 MT yield for the SS-5s), seventy-two warheads could have been deployed to Cuba. In such a case, the number of land-based missile warheads capable of reaching the United States would have more than quadrupled, increasing from twenty (the ICBMs in the Soviet Union itself) to ninety-two (twenty on ICBMs, seventy-two on MRBMs and IRBMs in Cuba). See CIA memorandum on the construction of missile sites in Cuba, October 19, 1962, National Security Archive, Washington, D.C. According to General Volkogonov, however, the deployment consisted of three SS-4 regiments (eight launchers each for a total of twenty-four) and two SS-5 regiments (eight launchers each for a total of sixteen); MCT. Raymond Garthoff claims that only one warhead was to be provided per launcher even though two missiles were assigned to each (to offset reliability problems). Garthoff, Reflections on the Cuban Missile Crisis, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1989), p. 20. If this is so, the deployment would have tripled the number of warheads that Soviet land-based missiles could have delivered promptly on the United States, from twenty (the ICBMs in the Soviet Union) to sixty (twenty on ICBMs, forty on MRBMS and IRBMs in Cuba). American intelligence estimated in 1962 that the Soviets had also deployed 155 cruise and ballistic missiles on submarines, and approximately 200 long-range bombers. Although these were severely constrained operationally (because of geographical, logistical, and technical factors), and although they did not represent a serious first-strike threat, they might have succeeded in delivering some number of nuclear warheads on the United States in the event of war. The missiles in Cuba, therefore, probably no more than doubled the number of nuclear weapons of all kinds that the Soviets could have delivered, though an accurate estimate of this increment is impossible to make. See Scott D. Sagan, “SIOP-62: The Nuclear War Plan Briefing to President Kennedy,” International Security, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Summer 1987), pp. 27-28; and Raymond L. Garthoff, Intelligence Assessment and Policymaking: A Decision Point in the Kennedy Administration (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1984), p. 55.

17. Among those in the West who have viewed the deployment primarily or exclusively as an attempt to redress the strategic nuclear imbalance are Roger Hilsman, To Move a Nation: The Politics of Foreign Policy in the Administration of John F. Kennedy (New York: Doubleday, 1967), pp. 200-202; Arnold Horelick, “The Cuban Missile Crisis: An Analysis of Soviet Calculations and Behavior,” World Politics, Vol. 16, No. 3 (April 1964), p. 376; Arnold Horelick and Myron Rush, Strategic Power and Soviet Foreign Policy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965),
shchev’s chief concern had been the political problem of preserving a socialist Cuba, the strategic value of the deployment probably contributed to the attractiveness of the deployment. Indeed, several Soviets, including Volchkogonov himself, maintain that the missiles served a “dual purpose.” Defense Minister Malinovsky and Deputy Defense Minister and Commander of the Strategic Rocket Forces Marshal S.S. Biryuzov may have supported the idea primarily for its strategic value. In short, different individuals within the Soviet decision-making establishment, and different branches of the Soviet state, seem to have understood the deployment in different ways, which may have complicated Khrushchev’s task of enlisting support for the terms on which the crisis was ultimately resolved.

There is little doubt that Khrushchev was attracted to the idea of deploying missiles to Cuba at least partly because of its apparent symmetry with the deployment of American Jupiter missiles in Turkey. His speeches in Bulgaria in May, 1962—where, he writes in his memoirs, the idea of the deployment first occurred to him—refer repeatedly and vehemently to the presence of American nuclear missiles so close to the Soviet border. Moreover, Fyodor Burlatsky reports that Yuri Andropov gave him a letter to edit from Khrushchev to Castro, in which Khrushchev emphasized the symmetry between the deployment of missiles in Cuba and the deployment of Jupiters in Tur-

p. 141; Michel Tatu, Power in the Kremlin: From Khrushchev’s Decline to Collective Leadership, trans. Helen Katel (London: Collins, 1969), p. 231; and Jerome H. Kahan and Anne K. Long, “The Cuban Missile Crisis: A Study of Its Strategic Context,” Political Science Quarterly, Vol. 87, No. 4 (December 1972), pp. 564–590. Sergei Khrushchev denied at the Moscow conference that the deployment of missiles to Cuba was a cost-effective solution to the strategic nuclear imbalance, arguing that stationing ICBMs on Soviet soil, which required nothing extra in the way of conventional defenses and involved none of the added expense of dismantling, crating, shipping, and assembling missiles thousands of miles away, would have been a more sensible solution. He therefore discounts the strategic nuclear rationale behind the deployment of missiles to Cuba. His argument, however, overlooks the difficulties that the Soviets were experiencing in producing three-stage long-range rockets. There was simply no long-range option available in 1962. See Horelick and Rush, Strategic Power and Soviet Foreign Policy, pp. 105–106; and Graham T. Allison, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), pp. 20–21.

18. MCT. This point was echoed by Shakhnazarov and Burlatsky at the Cambridge conference: both suggested that the deployment was primarily intended as the first step towards strategic parity. CCT, pp. 80–81.


20. In Varna on May 16, 1962, for example, Khrushchev asked, “Would it not be better if the shores on which are located NATO’s military bases and the launching sites for their armed rockets were converted into areas of peaceful labor and prosperity?” The United States, he said, “is pulling Turkey deeper and deeper into the coils of the NATO military alliance.” Nikita Khrushchev, “Celebration of Fraternal Friendship on Bulgarian Soil,” Speech in Varna, Bulgaria, May 16, 1962, reprinted from Pravda in Current Digest of the Soviet Press, Vol. 14, No. 20 (1962), p. 3.
key. But though this seems to have been on Khrushchev’s mind, there is no evidence that it rivaled the other motivations in urgency or importance. It is more likely that the perceived symmetry with the Turkish deployment bolstered, rather than led to, the idea in the first place.

In any retrospective discussion, of course, it is appropriate to ask whether the motivations and contingencies were, in the event itself, well-thought-out in advance. Khrushchev's personality was undoubtedly an important factor. Gromyko acknowledged that "Khrushchev was an emotional man. He had enough emotion for ten people—at least." But, not surprisingly, Gromyko argued that the deployment had been decided upon only after a thorough, careful, "cool-headed" evaluation. Jorge Risquet, on the other hand, expressed some doubt, claiming that "Comrade Khrushchev did not think through all the moves in advance." Anatoly Dobrynin agreed to some extent, stating that there was "improvisation as things unfolded; at least, that is what we felt in the embassy." The discussions at the Moscow conference gave little reason for revising the common wisdom that the venture was, in important respects, ill-conceived and subject to insufficient critical examination.

The American Threat to Cuba: Perception and Misperception

American intentions toward Cuba in 1962 have long been the subject of debate, and continue to be so. The crucial question is whether or not the Kennedy administration intended, at some point, to use American military force to oust Fidel Castro and establish a regime more congenial to American interests. Soviet and Cuban fears that this was the case seem to have played an important part in the decision to deploy nuclear missiles; disavowals of any such intention by former Kennedy administration officials have long been received with skepticism by Soviets, Cubans, and revisionist historians in the United States. More is at stake in the debate than simply the accuracy

21. MCT. Burlatsky reports that this letter was given to him by Yuri Andropov to edit during Khrushchev's visit to the Seventh Congress of the Socialist Unity Party in East Berlin, January, 1963. Personal communication to Bruce J. Allyn (BJA).
22. The supposed symmetry between the two deployments was far from obvious to the members of the Kennedy administration, who noted that the Soviet deployment was much larger than the American deployment; it involved no dual-control arrangements; and, perhaps most importantly, it was undertaken in strict secrecy behind a cloak of deception.
23. MCT.
of the historical record or the reputation of the Kennedy administration. The issue sheds important light on the role of perceptions and misperceptions in the genesis of a crisis.

Former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara insisted at the Moscow conference that, "If I was a Cuban and read the evidence of covert American action against their government, I would be quite ready to believe that the U.S. intended to mount an invasion." The frankness on this point was welcomed by both the Soviet and Cuban delegations. McNamara insisted, however, that despite the extent of American covert operations against Castro, and despite the preparation of military contingencies in October, 1962, the Kennedy administration did not intend to invade Cuba; that is, no political decision to invade Cuba had been taken, and no serious discussions to consider such an operation had taken place among senior policy-makers. The Cuban and Soviet delegations in Moscow expressed skepticism on this point.

Several publications have called into question the veracity of McNamara's disclaimer. Attention has focused on recently declassified documents that show that the Kennedy administration actively sought to destroy the Castro regime. One memorandum, for example—the "Cuba Project" program review dated February 20, 1962, and signed by Chief of Operations Brigadier General Edward G. Lansdale—specified late October 1962 as the target for Castro's ouster, and suggested that American military force might be required to accomplish that objective. CINCLANT (commander in chief, Atlantic fleet) Admiral Robert L. Dennison's official retrospective history of the crisis records that on October 1, more than two weeks before the missiles were discovered, orders were given to prepare the air strike option, 312 OPLAN, for "maximum readiness" by October 20.

These documents show clearly that the United States was increasingly harassing the government of Fidel Castro, and that the Kennedy administration was actively laying the military groundwork for possible contingencies, such as a discovery of nuclear weapons in Cuba. This much, both McNamara

25. MCT.
28. CINCLANT Historical Account, p. 39.
and McGeorge Bundy concede.29 However, the stronger claim—that such
documents show that the Kennedy administration had actually decided to
use American military force against Cuba—is entirely speculative. The
evidence suggests otherwise. For example, the tapes of the White House dis-
cussions on October 16, immediately following the discovery of the missiles
in Cuba, strongly evince a belligerent attitude on the part of the president
and his advisers, but nowhere refer to any prior decision to invade Cuba,
any established intention to invade Cuba, or even any previous exploration
of the desirability of such an invasion.30 If indeed there had been serious
consideration of the possibility, one would expect it to be reflected in those
early, formative discussions, because an invasion would have been a com-
paratively well-formulated option already on the table. Instead, the process
of option-formation began from scratch. President Kennedy's reluctance to
use more than a display of force during the crisis itself further reinforces
doubt that he had harbored an intention to initiate serious military action
against Cuba before the discovery of the missiles.

Despite the fact that there is no evidence of intent on the part of the
Kennedy administration to invade Cuba prior to the deployment of the
missiles, it seems clear that Cuba and the Soviet Union quite understandably
applied worst-case analyses to the various covert activities of CIA operatives
in Cuba and to the activities of the American military in 1961 and 1962. The
Cuban participants at the Moscow conference reported that Cuba had well-
placed informants in the American defense and intelligence communities
who kept them abreast of the various contingencies under consideration.
Ambassador Alekseev explicitly claimed that the Cubans had “precise data”
about American plans to invade the island.31 Although operational plans and
operational contingencies are not conclusive evidence of political intentions,
they are nevertheless strong evidence of the worst possible case, and were
apparently interpreted by Cuban and Soviet intelligence as reflecting a policy
decision of the Kennedy administration to invade Cuba and to overthrow
Castro. When McNamara explicitly refers to these interpretations as Soviet
and Cuban “misperceptions,” he correctly points out that mistaken conclu-
sions were drawn from the available evidence. But the United States had

29. Bundy, however, said that he viewed American covert operations against Castro as a
“psychological salve,” and that he had no expectation that they would succeed in their stated
30. See Marc Trachtenberg, ed., “White House Tapes and Minutes of the Cuban Missile Crisis,”
31. MCT.
provided virtually no evidence suggesting otherwise. As current Deputy Foreign Minister Viktor Komplektov argued at the Moscow conference, “Everything suggested that there were intentions.” Indeed, it was the avowed policy of the United States to destabilize the Castro regime, and part of that effort involved convincing Cuba of its vulnerability to American attack. The Kennedy administration, therefore, actively promoted the very “misperceptions” that led, in part, to the Soviet decision to deploy nuclear missiles to Cuba.

The Genesis, Terms, and Conduct of the Deployment

In his memoirs, Khrushchev claims that the idea to deploy nuclear missiles in Cuba first occurred to him when he was in Bulgaria, between May 14 and 20, 1962.32 But, according to Sergo Mikoyan, Khrushchev had already discussed the idea with First Deputy Premier Anastas I. Mikoyan at the end of April, during a walk in the Lenin Hills. The aim, Khrushchev told Mikoyan, would be to deploy the missiles very rapidly under a cloak of secrecy, in September and October, and to reveal their presence to the U.S. president after the mid-term congressional elections in November, by means of a letter delivered to Kennedy by the Soviet ambassador in Washington, Anatoly Dobrynin.33

Gromyko reports that Khrushchev first discussed the idea with him on the flight home from Bulgaria.34 Soon after his return, Khrushchev assembled a small group to consider the matter; its members included Mikoyan, Gromyko, Malinovsky, Biryuzov, and Secretary of the Central Committee Frol R. Kozlov. Shortly thereafter, the whole Presidium was included in the deliberations.35

According to Gromyko, the discussions during the formative phase were candid and exploratory, though Khrushchev was clearly the “dominant” figure.36 Sergei Khrushchev reports that Anastas Mikoyan expressed strong reservations, cautioning that this was “a very dangerous step.”37 According to Sergo Mikoyan, his father had two misgivings: first, he did not believe Castro would agree, and second, he did not believe it would be possible to

33. CCT, pp. 42–43.
35. CCT, p. 43.
36. MCT.
37. MCT.
install the missiles secretly.\textsuperscript{38} The only other member reported to have expressed doubt in Presidium meetings was Otto Kuusinen.\textsuperscript{39} Gromyko reports that he told Khrushchev in May that a deployment of nuclear missiles in Cuba would trigger a "political explosion" in the United States, but Khrushchev seemed bent on the plan.\textsuperscript{40} Though it was not characteristic of Gromyko to object to an idea proposed by Khrushchev, it is quite plausible that he voiced pros and cons of the idea. If his testimony is accurate, then Khrushchev ultimately decided to disregard the cautions of both Mikoyan and Gromyko, two of his advisers who knew American politics best.

Aleksandr Alekseev was at that time a Soviet press representative in Cuba who was on very friendly terms with both Fidel Castro and his brother, Minister of Defense Raúl Castro. On Mikoyan’s recommendation, Alekseev was urgently recalled to Moscow at the beginning of May and informed that he would be the new ambassador to Havana, replacing Sergei M. Kudryavtsev, whom Castro strongly disliked. Alekseev was officially appointed ambassador effective May 31, by order of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet on May 7. When Khrushchev returned from Bulgaria, Alekseev was informed of the plan to deploy nuclear missiles to Cuba and was included in the decision-making circle.\textsuperscript{41} When Khrushchev asked him how Castro would react to the proposal, Alekseev reports that he expressed grave doubts that Castro would agree.\textsuperscript{42} Khrushchev decided to send a special mission to Cuba to find out, and to determine whether the missiles could be installed secretly.

A ten-day Soviet "agricultural mission" traveled to Havana at the very end of May.\textsuperscript{43} The mission included Alekseev, Sharif Rashidov, an alternate member of the Presidium, Biryuzov, traveling under the pseudonym "engineer Petrov," and two other rocket specialists named Ushakov and Ageyev.\textsuperscript{44} The

\textsuperscript{38} CCT, p. 43.
\textsuperscript{39} MCT. Otto Kuusinen was a Soviet Presidium member of Finnish origin.
\textsuperscript{40} Gromyko, "Karibskii krizis," p. 5. Alekseev reports that Gromyko told him privately in August 1962 that he had "strong reservations" about the idea, and that he had expressed them to Khrushchev in private. Authors’ interview with Aleksandr Alekseev, April 27, 1989, Moscow; and Alekseev, "Uroki karibskogo krizisa."
\textsuperscript{41} Alekseev interview.
\textsuperscript{42} Alekseev claims that the reason he thought Castro would not accept the missiles was that he would jeopardize his support in Latin America if he were to be perceived as too tightly bound to the Soviet Union, and that in that meeting Malinovsky, evidently strongly in favor of the plan, took exception to his doubts. Alekseev says in retrospect that he underestimated Castro’s internationalism, and he now believes Castro was sincere when he said he would accept the missiles to bolster socialism on the world scale. Alekseev interview.
\textsuperscript{43} MCT; and Raymond L. Garthoff, "Cuban Missile Crisis: The Soviet Story," Foreign Policy, No. 72 (Fall 1988), p. 66.
\textsuperscript{44} Alekseev interview; and MCT.
group arrived in Havana even before Kudryavtsev had been informed of his imminent departure, which indicates the secrecy and urgency surrounding the operation. Upon arrival, Alekseev informed Raúl Castro that “engineer Petrov” was actually the commander of the Strategic Rocket Forces, and a meeting was arranged with Fidel Castro for that same evening. According to Alekseev, Fidel Castro expressed immediate interest in the proposal, and left to confer with the other five members of the Cuban secretariat. Aragonés reports that all five—Raúl Castro, Che Guevara, President Osvaldo Dorticós, Blas Roca, and himself—were unanimously in favor of the idea.

Much to Mikoyan’s surprise, Biryuzov returned to the Soviet Union with Fidel Castro’s agreement and with an optimistic assessment of the chances of deploying the missiles secretly. At a meeting of the Presidium on June 10, Biryuzov reported the results of the negotiations. The Presidium officially ordered the Defense Ministry to develop specific plans for the missile deployment, as well as the deployment of associated air and coastal defense forces.

In early July, a Cuban delegation led by Raúl Castro visited Moscow to discuss Soviet arms shipments to Cuba, and to finalize operational details of the missile deployment. Delegations led by Raúl Castro and Marshal Mali- novsky met for two weeks, with Khrushchev himself present at meetings on July 3 and 8. The first step would be to install a network of the latest Soviet SA-2 surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) around the perimeter of the island, and especially near the MRBM and IRBM sites at San Cristóbal, Sagua la Grande, Guanajay, and Remedios. The first SAMs and supporting equipment for the MRBMs were shipped at the very end of July.

46. Aragonés interview.
47. Although the reasons for Biryuzov’s personal optimism are unclear, Sergio del Valle notes that “Cuba’s geography lent itself to a secret deployment. Our terrain and our vegetation made it quite simple to hide the missiles effectively.” Del Valle interview. Sergio Mikoyan believes that Biryuzov’s estimate was influenced by his fervent desire to redress the strategic nuclear imbalance. Allison and Ury, Windows of Opportunity, pp. 108–109.
48. MCT. Volkogonov noted that a decision was taken to send four motorized rifle regiments to defend the missile sites; air defense forces (including radars, SAMs and MiG-21s); and a coastal defense regiment, including Komar torpedo boats and IL-28 bombers.
50. At the time of the crisis, no IRBMs were present in Cuba, and the first IRBM was not expected to become operational until well into December. Central Intelligence Agency memorandum, “Subject: The Crisis USSR/Cuba,” October 27, 1962, National Security Archive, Washington, D.C.
51. Authors’ interview with Othon Montero, Researcher at the Instituto de Historia de Cuba, May 15, 1989, Havana.
While in Moscow, Raúl Castro and Malinovsky drafted an agreement covering various details of the deployment, including the rights and obligations of the host country and of the Soviet forces building and manning the missile sites. The agreement was a formal treaty with the following terms: (1) the Soviets would at all times have complete custody and control of the nuclear missiles in Cuba (but the exact number of missiles was not specified); (2) the Soviets would be given temporary use of the sites as rocket bases for a period of five years, though the sites themselves would remain sovereign Cuban territory; (3) after five years, there would be a further decision to annul or continue the arrangement; (4) all costs associated with the deployment were to be borne by the Soviet Union; and (5) some SAMs were to be provided to the Cubans, though the SA-2 SAMs would initially be installed, manned, and operated by the Soviets until Cuban forces could be trained to operate and maintain them. Raúl Castro and Malinovsky signed each paragraph of the agreement, and space was provided at the end of the document for the signatures of Fidel Castro and Nikita Khrushchev. But the two leaders, intending to sign it at a public ceremony in Havana in November, never did so.52

When Raúl Castro returned from Moscow with a draft of the document in hand, his brother elaborated and modified the wording of the preamble. His amended version declared that the purpose of the agreement was “to provide mutual military assistance” rather than “to save the Cuban revolution,” and it strongly affirmed the legality of the deployment.53 Che Guevara and Emilio Aragonés traveled to Moscow at the end of the summer (August 27–September 2) to secure Soviet approval for Castro’s changes.54 While there, they proposed that the agreement be made public immediately, prior to the deployment itself, to remove any pretext for a hostile American reaction. The Cubans warned the Soviet leadership that the situation in the United States was becoming increasingly volatile. Concerned by the prospect that rising suspicions in the United States might eventually lead to war hysteria, they sought to draw international attention to the legality of the deployment.55 Aragonés reported that they told Khrushchev that there might be “a preventive strike with severe consequences for us” if the Americans were not given

52. Alekseev interview.
53. MCT; and Alekseev interview.
54. Montero interview; Aragonés interview; and MCT.
55. Aragonés interview.
adequate opportunity to reconcile themselves to the deployment; but Khrushchev assured the Cubans that there would be no problem.\footnote{56} Making the deployment public would be a terrible mistake, Khrushchev insisted; it might precipitate the very invasion the missiles were intended to forestall. And if the Americans did attack Cuba in the meantime, Khrushchev proclaimed, then he would promptly send the Baltic Fleet. Though skeptical of Khrushchev’s promise of naval support, the Cubans deferred to Khrushchev’s assessment of the Americans, because of the Soviets’ greater experience in foreign affairs, and agreed to let the matter drop.\footnote{57} At the Moscow conference, the Cuban delegation identified Khrushchev’s judgment as a serious mistake.\footnote{58}

The Soviet expedition to Cuba was under the overall command of General Issa Pliyev, a former cavalry officer with no experience with nuclear missiles. Why Khrushchev chose Pliyev is unclear, though one plausible explanation is offered by Ambassador Alekseev, who suggests that he did so to throw American intelligence off the scent.\footnote{59} As part of the operation, according to General Volkogonov, over 40,000 Soviet troops were sent to Cuba, under secrecy so tight that only the commanding officers of the units dispatched knew where they were headed.\footnote{60} Unaware of their destination, Soviet sol-

\footnote{56} MCT; Aragonés interview.
\footnote{57} Aragonés reports: “He said to Che and me, with Malinovsky in the room, ‘You don’t have to worry; there will be no big reaction from the U.S. And if there is a problem, we will send the Baltic Fleet.’” Asked, “Did you think he was joking, or did you think he was serious?” Aragonés replied, “He was totally serious. When he said it, Che and I looked at each other with raised eyebrows. But, you know, we were deferential to the Soviets’ judgments, because, after all, they had a great deal of experience with the Americans, and they had superior information than we had. We trusted their judgment.” Aragonés interview. Khrushchev may have believed from the start that the United States would react to the news of Soviet missiles in Cuba with moderation. Alekseev reports that in May, Khrushchev “said the Americans are a pragmatic people and would not attack if there were missiles in Cuba.” Alekseev interview. The Soviet Baltic fleet, however, would have been completely incapable of providing timely or effective naval support, and it is difficult to credit the claim that Khrushchev was serious on this point.
\footnote{58} When asked at the Moscow conference whether the deployment could have been undertaken openly, Gromyko insisted that a secret deployment was the only viable option. His opinion was widely shared among the Soviet delegation, echoed most forcefully by Viktor Komplektov and Georgy Shakhnazarov, who noted that secrecy was “characteristic of the times.” Theodore Sorensen asserted that the president would have found it much more difficult to mobilize world opinion on his side if the deployment had been done openly; McGeorge Bundy strongly agreed. MCT.
\footnote{59} Alekseev interview. This clarifies the rather unclear passage on this point in Alekseev, “Uroki karibskogo krizisa,” p. 5.
\footnote{60} Volkogonov’s report is consistent with Sergo Mikoyan’s claim at the Cambridge conference that 42,000 Soviet troops were involved in the Cuban deployment. Del Valle claims that the
diers reportedly brought with them full winter gear, and were only told where they were going after their ships had passed the Strait of Gibraltar. Some Soviet sources claim that the commanders of the vessels involved in the operation were instructed to open sealed orders, at a predetermined point in the voyage, that charged them to scuttle their ships if an attempt was made to stop and search them, and that when American reconnaissance planes flew overhead, Soviet personnel would dance on deck in an attempt to look like tourists.

The first SS-4 MRBM s arrived on September 15, eleven days after President Kennedy's first major warning against the deployment of "offensive weapons" to Cuba, two days after his second warning, and just four days after a denial by TASS that any such deployment was in the offing. Once in Cuban ports, the missiles and their related equipment were off-loaded under cover of darkness, with elaborate precautions to ensure that the shipments went undetected. As part of the deception, Soviet troops wore civilian sportshirts to disguise their numbers and identities. One of those who came off a Soviet ship was the thirty-nine-year-old commander of a motorized infantry regiment, Lieutenant Colonel Dimitry Yazov, now Soviet Minister of Defense.

Only Soviets were involved in the unloading, transportation, and installation of the missiles; indeed, the Soviets themselves had even chosen the total number of Soviet military involved in the deployment was closer to 44,000, of which approximately 20,000 were armed regulars, the remainder being logistics and construction personnel. Del Valle interview. This figure is much higher than previous American intelligence estimates, which ranged from 4,500 to 16,000 in October and November, 1962, and later went to 22,000. See Raymond L. Garthoff, Reflections on the Cuban Missile Crisis, first ed. (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1987), p. 21 n.

63. Montero interview.
66. An article about Yazov in Cuba in 1962 was printed in the Cuban armed forces paper, Bastión, and reprinted as "I Have My Uniform, Ready to Fight" (interview by Captain Mario H. Garrido) in the Granma Weekly Review, April 23, 1989.
locations of the missile sites.67 The Cuban armed forces’ role in the deployment was limited to guiding the preliminary exploration of the terrain, choosing the routes from the ports to the missile sites, and building roads where necessary.68

Camouflage was also a Soviet responsibility;69 yet the Soviets’ failure to camouflage the missile sites permitted American intelligence to discover the deployment prematurely, by means of reconnaissance photographs taken on October 14. It appears that the reason the Soviets failed to camouflage the missiles is that Soviet standard operating procedures for constructing nuclear missile sites did not include the use of camouflage. All previous installations had been on Soviet territory; the installation crews in Cuba simply overlooked the importance of disguising their activities on foreign soil under the watchful eyes of the Americans.70 Castro is reported later to have expressed his astonishment and dismay that Cubans had not been consulted on camouflage measures; the sites could easily have been disguised as agricultural projects, Castro maintained, had the Soviets only asked for help.71

Soviet Missiles in Cuba: Warheads, Targets, and Orders

One of the more persistent puzzles of the Cuban missile crisis concerns whether or not nuclear warheads for the Soviet MRBMs ever reached Cuba. American intelligence never detected nuclear warheads in Cuba, and interpreted the fact that the assembly of likely warhead storage bunkers at the missile sites was incomplete (shown by reconnaissance photographs), as evidence that they had not yet arrived.72 But the Kennedy administration, in the face of uncertainty, operated on the assumption that they had.73

67. Authors’ interview with Jorge E. Mendoza, Director of the Instituto de Historia de Cuba, May 15, 1989, Havana.
68. Montero interview.
69. Montero interview.
70. Sergio Mikoyan, CCT, p. 48. Mikoyan’s account is consistent with Graham Allison’s hypothesis; see Allison, Essence of Decision, pp. 110–111.
71. Sergio Mikoyan, CCT, p. 48.
72. See, e.g., Ray S. Cline, “Nuclear War Seemed Remote,” Washington Post, February 5, 1989, p. D8. The United States had solid intelligence that warheads were on the way to Cuba aboard the freighter Poltava (out of Odessa) when the quarantine was imposed. See Garthoff, Reflections on the Cuban Missile Crisis, first ed., pp. 20–22. The Poltava stopped short of the quarantine line and returned to the Soviet Union.
According to General Volkogonov, twenty nuclear warheads had arrived in Cuba in late September or early October, and twenty others were in transit aboard the Poltava when the quarantine went into effect.\textsuperscript{74} Apparently, the Soviets did not keep the Cubans well-informed of the warhead shipments. General del Valle, the Cuban chief of staff, was informed on October 23 or 24 by General Pliyev merely that "everything was ready," which del Valle interpreted to mean that warheads had arrived. Only later did he learn the details of the warhead shipments, and discover that they were incomplete.\textsuperscript{75}

According to Volkogonov, the warheads that had arrived in Cuba were kept "well away" from the missiles themselves, and at no time were measures taken to mate them, even when alert levels were raised following President Kennedy's speech of October 22. Had the order to prepare the missiles come down, Volkogonov claimed, they could have been targeted in four hours, and would have required a subsequent countdown of fifteen minutes.\textsuperscript{76}

Sergei Khrushchev claimed at the Moscow conference that the inaccuracy of the SS-4 missiles restricted their useful targets to large cities and industrial centers such as Washington or New York. Contrary to newspaper accounts of the conference, however, at no time did Khrushchev suggest that either Washington or New York was actually targeted, because at no time were targeting procedures under way. "My father would not have allowed [the warheads] to be mounted," Sergei Khrushchev insisted. "He felt that would have made it easier for a madman to start a war."\textsuperscript{77}

General Volkogonov said that the standing orders given to the three SS-4 and two SS-5 regiments deployed to Cuba were extremely clear. He read from Defense Ministry Archives to the Moscow conferees that: "The rocket forces are to be used only in the event of a U.S. attack, unleashing a war, and under the strict condition of receiving a command from Moscow." Both conditions had to be satisfied before the missiles were to be used.\textsuperscript{78} While these orders defined the limits of the local commanders' authority to launch nuclear missiles, however, none of the Soviets interviewed for this study

\textsuperscript{74. MCT.}  
\textsuperscript{75. Del Valle interview. The details of the deployment in Cuba evince a high degree of Soviet self-reliance, and an equally high degree of Cuban deference. There may have been a dearth of trust on the one side, and an excess of trust on the other.}  
\textsuperscript{76. MCT.} American intelligence estimated in 1962 that the fastest an SS-4 missile could have been fired from a cold start was eight hours. CIA memorandum on the construction of missile sites in Cuba, October 19, 1962.  
\textsuperscript{77. MCT.}  
\textsuperscript{78. MCT.}
believed that physical mechanisms preventing unauthorized use (such as modern permissive action links) were built into the warheads.

*The Early Phase of the Crisis: October 16–26*

President Kennedy learned of the Soviet deployment on October 16; he and his advisers spent almost a full week formulating a response before announcing the discovery publicly. During that week, on October 18, Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko paid a visit to the White House which he described as “the most complex discussion” of his diplomatic career.79 Kennedy did not ask Gromyko directly about the presence of Soviet missiles in Cuba, nor did Gromyko volunteer any information about them, much to the relief of both. Gromyko has since asserted, however, that he was instructed to be forthcoming if confronted directly. At the Moscow conference, he maintained merely that he would have given a “proper answer” to a direct question from the president; but in a subsequent article, he claimed that he was instructed by Moscow to say that the Soviets were deploying a “small quantity of missiles of a defensive nature” to Cuba, and to encourage quiet diplomacy if Kennedy’s reaction were negative.80

On October 22, at 7:00 p.m. Eastern time, President Kennedy went on national television to announce the discovery of Soviet missiles in Cuba and his intention to impose a naval quarantine on all shipments of offensive weapons to the island. Just an hour before, Secretary of State Dean Rusk had handed Ambassador Dobrynin an advance copy of the president’s speech. Rusk recalls, “I saw him age ten years right in front of my eyes.”81 We now know why: Dobrynin had not been informed by his own government of the deployment.82

Khrushchev apparently reacted to Kennedy’s speech with anger, ordering work accelerated on construction of the missile sites, and ordering Soviet ships to ignore the naval quarantine, scheduled to take effect at 10:00 a.m. on Wednesday, October 24. The order to ignore the quarantine seems to

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82. When Dobrynin stated at the Moscow meeting that he did not know about the missiles in Cuba until Dean Rusk told him, Gromyko queried, “What, Anatoly Fyodorovich, you mean I did not tell you, the Ambassador, about the nuclear missiles in Cuba?” Dobrynin responded, “No, you did not tell me.” Gromyko wryly replied, “That means it must have been a very big secret.” MCT.
have been rescinded before the first Soviet vessels reached the quarantine line.\textsuperscript{83} But not until October 26 would Khrushchev publicly take a conciliatory, cooperative attitude toward resolving the crisis.\textsuperscript{84} The Cuban response to Kennedy’s speech was also angry, bellicose, and defiant, but unlike Khrushchev’s, it appears not to have mellowed as the days passed.\textsuperscript{85}

From Wednesday, October 24, to Friday, October 26, stalemate set in. Neither the United States nor the Soviet Union backed away from its public position, but both sides avoided a confrontation. At 1:00 p.m. on October 26, Aleksandr Fomin, an official at the Soviet embassy in Washington known to be the senior KGB official in Washington, met ABC’s State Department correspondent John Scali, at Fomin’s request.\textsuperscript{86} Fomin asked Scali to determine whether or not the United States would be interested in resolving the crisis by pledging not to invade Cuba in return for the withdrawal of the nuclear missiles. In so doing, Fomin was apparently acting on his own initiative.\textsuperscript{87} Scali replied at 7:30 p.m. that the administration was interested in Fomin’s suggestion. Dobrynin was uncertain whether this channel re-

\textsuperscript{83} Khrushchev began “denouncing the naval blockade as banditry, the folly of degenerate imperialism . . . [and] issued orders to the captains of Soviet ships as they were approaching the blockade zone to ignore it and to hold course for the Cuban ports.” Roy Medvedev, \textit{All Stalin’s Men}, trans. Harold Shukman (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1985), p. 52. Sergio Mikoyan has confirmed Medvedev’s account. Medvedev says Anastas Mikoyan was successful, however, in his attempt “to pre-empt any precipitate action on the part of Khrushchev” (pp. 51–52). According to Joseph Bouchard of Stanford University, declassified U.S. Navy documents indicate that the Soviet ships had halted and reversed course on the evening of October 23 or early morning of October 24, and that several Soviet vessels were intercepted moving away from the quarantine line. At a press conference on February 6, 1963, McNamara revealed that on the evening of October 23, eighteen Soviet ships had been bound for Cuba. Later that night, sixteen of those ships, including the five large-hatch ships suspected of carrying missiles, had turned back and were tracked into the Baltic and the Mediterranean. Laurence Chang, Donna Rich, and Chris Wallace, \textit{A Chronology of the Cuban Missile Crisis} (Washington, D.C.: National Security Archive, 1988), p. 143. However, two ships, the \textit{Gagarin} and the \textit{Komiles}, appear to have continued toward Cuba, with submarine escort, stopping just outside the quarantine area before 10:25 a.m., October 24. If Medvedev’s report is accurate, one is left to wonder when the order to hold course for Cuba was given, when it was rescinded, and whether it originally applied to all eighteen vessels, or just to some.

\textsuperscript{84} See the discussion in Blight and Welch, \textit{On the Brink}, pp. 305–309, 312–316.


\textsuperscript{86} Cf. John Scali, "I Was the Secret Go-Between in the Cuban Crisis," \textit{Family Weekly}, October 25, 1964, pp. 4, 5, 12–14; and Hilsman, \textit{To Move a Nation}, pp. 217–223.

\textsuperscript{87} MCT.
flected the views of the White House, and did not authorize a telegram to Moscow. Fomin may have cabled a report notwithstanding.

The State Department began to receive a private, conciliatory letter from Khrushchev to Kennedy between 6:00 and 9:00 p.m. on Friday, October 26, vaguely proposing to conclude a deal along the same lines as Fomin had suggested to Scali. Most students of the crisis have assumed that the letter merely formalized Fomin’s earlier trial balloon; but it appears now that this assumption is incorrect. The American embassy in Moscow had begun to receive the message at 4:43 p.m. Moscow time (early Friday morning in Washington), many hours before Fomin’s initiative. The Fomin-Scali communication would have been too late to influence the content of the letter.

Khrushchev’s letter clearly evinced exhaustion and anxiety. His tone of somber realism convinced many in the ExComm that Khrushchev was looking for a peaceful way out of the crisis; it convinced many in Cuba that Khrushchev was losing his nerve and that he was about to cave in to American pressure. In his memoirs, Khrushchev acknowledges that his anxiety during this time was “intense.” The pressure had led him to look for a relatively quick way out of the confrontation, even on what he himself must surely have recognized as sub-optimal terms. Khrushchev later reported a feeling among some of his military advisers during the crisis that a harder line was in order. But Western suppositions, that Khrushchev at this point faced a divided Presidium and threats to his own authority, have been unequivocally denied by knowledgeable Soviets.

The Origin of the Turkish Missile Trade

On Saturday, October 27, before President Kennedy could respond to Khrushchev’s letter of the day before, a second letter, taking a harder line, was broadcast by Radio Moscow. Khrushchev now insisted that the United States

88. Dobrynin reports that Robert Kennedy had asked him on October 26 to disregard messages from other channels of communication because they did not reflect the president’s views. MCT.
89. See p. 166, below.
90. See Pope, Soviet Views on the Cuban Missile Crisis, p. 48.
92. Aragonés interview.
94. See CCT, esp. pp. 39–40; and MCT. Khrushchev recalled feeling pressured by “military advisers” to take a harder line. In an interview shortly after the crisis with American journalist Norman Cousins, Khrushchev referred to those advisers as “maniacs.” See Pope, Soviet Views on the Cuban Missile Crisis, p. 92.
remove its intermediate-range Jupiter missiles in Turkey in return for the removal of Soviet missiles in Cuba. Khrushchev’s quick about-face has always puzzled not only Western students of the crisis, but members of the ExComm as well, who show considerable surprise and confusion in the transcripts of the October 27 meetings.

In 1987, Georgy Shakhnazarov conveyed a message from Anatoly Dobrynin to the participants in the Cambridge conference, indicating that the idea for the missile trade had been hatched in the Soviet embassy in Washington. His rather cryptic remark remained unclear until the Moscow conference, where Dobrynin provided further details previously unknown. He and Robert Kennedy met secretly on the night of Friday, October 26, as part of a series of private, late-night back-channel discussions between the two. Dobrynin remarked to the attorney general that the administration’s extreme reaction to the deployment of Soviet missiles in Cuba was puzzling in view of the fact that the United States had deployed similar missiles in Turkey, next door to the Soviet Union. In raising the issue, Dobrynin says, he was acting entirely on his own initiative, not expecting it to be interpreted as part of a negotiating position. He was merely attempting to make the point that the Soviet side had an equal right to provide for its own security. Dobrynin reports:

Robert Kennedy said, “You are interested in the missiles in Turkey?” He thought pensively and said, “One minute, I will go and talk to the President.” He went out of the room. . . . [He] came back and said, “The President said that we are ready to consider the question of Turkey, to examine favorably the question of Turkey.”

Dobrynin immediately reported this conversation to Moscow. Shortly thereafter, Khrushchev demanded the missile trade. Dobrynin hastened to

95. For the text of the letter, see Larson, The “Cuban Crisis” of 1962, p. 185. For an account by a Soviet journalist who waited outside Khrushchev’s office while this letter was being written, see Sturma, “Dialektika karibskogo krizisa,” p. 5. Sturma recalls watching through an open door as Malinovsky and other military stood before a large map, responding to Khrushchev’s questions.
98. MCT. It is worth noting that the idea of a missile trade was not a new one, and that, indeed, the president seems to have been expecting the Soviets to propose it for some time. See David A. Welch and James G. Blight, “The Eleventh Hour of the Cuban Missile Crisis: An Introduction to the ExComm Transcripts,” International Security, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Winter 1987/88), pp. 12–13. The missile trade was also proposed by Walter Lippmann in his October 25 column in the Washington Post, and had been the subject of considerable public debate.
add that although he believes his cable to have been the source of the missile trade proposal, it is possible that the idea arose simultaneously in Moscow. No one at the Moscow conference, however, offered the latter interpretation, even though some, such as Andrei Gromyko, were presumably in a position to know.

If Dobrynin’s story is accurate, then some traditional understandings of the climax of the crisis must give way. The tapes of the ExComm meetings of October 27 clearly indicate that the question of the missile trade dominated the discussion, and that the president himself was its strongest advocate. But at no point in those discussions did the president or his brother discuss Robert Kennedy’s meeting with Dobrynin of the previous day; nor did they reveal that they had already communicated to the Soviet Union that the Jupiter missiles in Turkey were negotiable. In conjunction with the recent revelation of the “Cordier maneuver,”99 and in view of the secrecy surrounding Robert Kennedy’s October 27 meeting with Ambassador Dobrynin (several members of the ExComm were unaware even that such a meeting was to take place), the president’s reticence in the transcripts of the October 27 meetings strongly suggests that the ExComm had become largely irrelevant to the president’s decision-making at the height of the crisis. Crucial decisions were being made by the president and a few close advisers, well away from—and unknown to—the ExComm as a whole. The group that had played a central role in the early option-formation phase of the crisis seems to have been left out of important aspects of decision-making at its climax.100

The U-2 Shoot-down of October 27

As the ExComm puzzled over Khrushchev’s new demand on October 27, word reached Washington that an American U-2 reconnaissance aircraft had been shot down over Cuba by an SA-2 surface-to-air missile fired from the Los Angeles battery, near the port of Banes. It has generally been supposed in the West that the missile that downed the aircraft was fired by Soviet troops, because the SA-2s were believed to have been under strict Soviet

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99. President Kennedy instructed Dean Rusk on the night of October 27 to prepare a contingency plan whereby Columbia University President Andrew Cordier, upon a further signal, would contact U Thant, acting secretary general of the United Nations, to propose a public missile trade. See Welch and Blight, “The Eleventh Hour of the Cuban Missile Crisis,” pp. 15–16.
control. But it has always been difficult to imagine why Khrushchev would have risked a serious escalation of the crisis at that point. Some have surmised that the shoot-down was the unauthorized act of a Soviet officer in Cuba. Others have supposed that Cubans had in fact fired the missile, either after seizing control of the SAM site in a firefight with Soviets, or by exercising their discretion in a dual-control arrangement of some kind. Most fantastic is Carlos Franqui’s recent report that Castro once claimed that he himself had shot down the aircraft.

At the Moscow conference, the Soviet side released new details confirming that the U-2 shoot-down was indeed an unauthorized act by Soviet air defense forces. According to Alekseev, two generals were involved in the decision-making when the U-2 was detected at approximately 10:00 a.m. on Saturday, October 27. General Volkogonov publicly identified one as Pliyev’s deputy for air defense, the late Lieutenant General Stepan N. Grechko. The

101. Cf. Garthoff, Reflections on the Cuban Missile Crisis (first ed.), p. 52 n.; and Bundy and Blight, “October 27, 1962: Transcripts of the Meetings of the ExComm,” pp. 66–71. For example, in the ExComm discussion immediately following the U-2 shoot-down, Undersecretary of State U. Alexis Johnson said, “You could have an undisciplined anti-aircraft—Cuban anti-aircraft outfit fire, but to have a SAM-site and a Russian crew fire is not any accident” (p. 71).


103. Seymour M. Hersh, “Was Castro Out of Control in 1962?” Washington Post, October 11, 1987, pp. H1–H2. Cf. Daniel Ellsberg, “The Day Castro Almost Started World War III,” New York Times, October 31, 1987, p. 27; see also Adrian G. Montoro, “Moscow Was Caught Between Cuba and U.S.,” New York Times, November 17, 1987. According to Ellsberg, as told to Hersh, an intercepted radio message from the Soviet naval base at Banes indicated that fire had been exchanged with “non-Russians,” and that casualties had been taken. The clash was reported to have taken place at the Los Angeles SAM site on Friday, October 26, the day before that very same site shot down the American U-2. Hersh and Ellsberg speculate that Cubans might have seized control of the site and downed the American plane. At the Moscow conference, Ambassador Alekseev claimed that the incident was a mishandling of ammunition, which resulted in an explosion at the SAM site and several Soviet casualties. MCT. Sergio del Valle, however, claims that the event occurred in 1964 at Guantana, in Pinar del Rio, at the other end of the island. Del Valle interview, Sergio Mikoyan reports that neither he nor, so far as he knows, his father, ever heard of any conflict between Soviet soldiers and Cuban regulars, from either Soviet or Cuban sources. Mikoyan did admit the possibility, however, that there may have been a skirmish at the Los Angeles SAM site between Soviet forces and one of the many bands of anti-Castro “worm squads” known to be operating in the area. Personal communication to DAW. The truth of the matter remains unclear.


105. Franqui, Family Portrait with Fidel, p. 193. Castro, however, denied this in an interview with Jim Hoagland, February 12, 1985 (see Chang, Rich, and Wallace, Chronology, p. 305), and Castro’s denial was confirmed at the Moscow conference by Jorge Risquet, who noted that, at the time, Castro was on the other end of the island.
second general was apparently Leonid S. Garbuz, now retired, then Pliyev’s deputy for military training.106

Once the U-2 was spotted near Banes, the two generals had twenty minutes to make a decision whether or not to fire. After attempting unsuccessfully to contact General Pliyev, they decided to shoot on their own authority. As recently disclosed by the newspaper of the Cuban armed forces, Bastión, the local commander who actually gave the order to fire was General Georgy A. Voronkov, now retired and living in Odessa.107

Contrary to previous accounts of the shoot-down, which suggested that Soviet SAM units had standing orders not to fire on American aircraft, Alekseev claims that there was “no direct prohibition” against doing so.108 Del Valle confirms this, noting that the officer on site was criticized by Khrushchev, but that he defended himself by saying that he had only followed Soviet standing orders “to fire on any aircraft that flies overhead in wartime,” an action for which he was later decorated by Fidel Castro personally.109 From the Cuban point of view, the situation could indeed have been construed as “wartime.” Throughout the crisis, Castro had authorized his own anti-aircraft (AA) artillery to fire at groups of two or more low-flying American planes; on October 26, he ordered his AA units to fire on any American aircraft within range.110 That same day, Voronkov received an order to begin operating the radar stations.111 Cuban Politburo member Jorge Risquet claimed at the Moscow conference that Soviet air defense forces were willing to fire on American aircraft on October 27 because they had been “inspired by the enthusiasm of the Cubans.” Indeed, the downing of the U-2 was a tremendous boost to Cuban morale; news of it spread rapidly throughout the island, and was greeted everywhere with wild celebration. As Risquet put it, “our people felt that we were not defenseless.”112 But

106. BJA discussions at the Soviet Central Committee and the Soviet Defense Ministry Institute for Military History, July 1989. In 1987, General Igor D. Stasenko told Sergio Mikoyan that he personally gave the order to fire on the U-2. But Stasenko was in Cuba with the Strategic Rocket Forces and was not in the air defense decision-making loop. In giving false testimony, Stasenko may have sought to make public the fact that the shoot-down was indeed an unauthorized act by Soviet forces; military secrecy would not then have allowed him to release the identities of those who actually did make the decision.
108. Alekseev interview.
109. Del Valle interview.
110. Alekseev interview; del Valle interview. According to both Othon Montero and Sergio del Valle, the Cuban Armed Forces had no surface-to-air missiles, only artillery.
111. Juárez, “El General Que Dio la Orden De: ¡Fuego!”
112. MCT.
many Cuban leaders reportedly felt that the shoot-down was "very dangerous," and worried "that it would inflame the situation."113

At the Moscow conference, Volkogonov read from Malinovsky's telegram to Pliyev immediately following the shoot-down, rebuking him for "hastily [shooting] down the U.S. plane" because "an agreement for a peaceful way to deter an invasion of Cuba was already taking shape." This contradicts the English version of Khrushchev's memoirs, which indicate that he believed that it was Cubans who had shot down the American plane.114 Yet Sergei Khrushchev insists that his father knew at the time that Soviets had shot down the plane, and that in the tape recordings on which Khrushchev's memoirs were based, he clearly stated this. Strobe Talbott, editor and translator of Khrushchev's memoirs, reports the discrepancy in the English edition as a "mistake." The Russian language version of Khrushchev's memoirs published by Progress Publishers (currently in limited special circulation in the Soviet Union) also states that Cubans shot down the plane, because it is a re-translation of Talbott's English version.

There is some evidence to suggest that there may have been a partial, unsuccessful cover-up attempt by the Soviet military. Ambassador Alekseev reported that he did not find out that Soviets were responsible for the shoot-down until over a decade later, and he has speculated that Malinovsky himself may have tried to prevent details of the event from spreading in order to prevent embarrassment to the Ministry of Defense and the responsible Soviet officers in Cuba.115

We now know that the ExComm's reaction to the shoot-down was more measured and restrained than the hysteria suggested in many memoirists' previous accounts.116 Khrushchev, however, must have been seriously shaken by the event, which made it painfully clear that his control over developments in Cuba had significantly eroded. Kennedy's control over events, as it turned out, was equally tenuous. Later that same day, an American U-2 on a routine air sampling mission in the Arctic strayed into Siberian air space as the result of a navigational error. Khrushchev may have

113. Aragonés interview.
115. Personal communication to BJA and JGB. It is worth noting that Statsenko himself told U Thant that Cubans shot down the American U-2. This, too, may have been part of a cover-up. Hersh, "Was Castro Out of Control in 1962?" p. H2.
read the incident as a provocation, but also seems to have been sensitive to the possibility that it was accidental. According to several Soviets at the Moscow conference, the risks that unintended actions might lead to an escalation of the confrontation were very much in the forefront of Khrushchev's mind as the crisis reached its crescendo.

The Resolution of the Crisis

At 7:15 p.m. on Saturday, October 27, Robert Kennedy telephoned Dobrynin to request another meeting. The two met at 7:45 in the Department of Justice. The reports of important aspects of the meeting in Robert Kennedy's Thirteen Days were starkly contradicted by Ambassador Dobrynin in Moscow. First, Robert Kennedy reported telling Dobrynin that "we had to have a commitment by tomorrow that those bases would be removed. I was not giving them an ultimatum but a statement of fact. He should understand that if they did not remove those bases, we would remove them." Though the attorney general explicitly denied that this was an ultimatum, it has generally been interpreted by Western historians as a clear compellent threat. However, Dobrynin denies that Robert Kennedy issued any ultimatum or made any threats. He further denies that Robert Kennedy warned of an imminent coup or loss of civilian control of the military, in contradiction to Soviet accounts of the meeting, including Khrushchev's own. In fact, according to Dobrynin, Robert Kennedy soft-pedaled the danger of imminent American action, and Dobrynin claims that his cable to Moscow reporting the meeting was similarly low-key on that point.

119. Daniel Ellsberg interviewed Robert Kennedy in 1964, when Kennedy claimed that he had warned Dobrynin that he had just forty-eight hours to remove the missiles; that if dismantling had not begun by that time, the missiles would be attacked and an invasion would follow; and that any further shoot-downs of American reconnaissance planes would result in an attack on "all the SAM sites immediately and probably the missile sites as well." Hersh, "Was Castro Out of Control in 1962?" p. H2. Ellsberg's conclusion is that, because Khrushchev well understood that he no longer controlled the Cubans, and that he may also have lost control over the SAM batteries, the Soviet leader was compelled to interpret Robert Kennedy's message as an ultimatum, requiring an immediate cessation of the crisis. Personal communication to JGB and DAW.
120. Personal communication to the authors.
121. MCT. For earlier written accounts, see Khrushchev, Khrushchev Remembers, pp. 497-498; and Pope, Soviet Views on the Cuban Missile Crisis, pp. 214-215. At the Moscow conference, Dobrynin revealed that coded messages from the Soviet embassy in Washington were transmitted to Moscow via bicycle courier and Western Union.
The second respect in which Dobrynin contradicts Robert Kennedy's account of the meeting helps explain the first, and concerns the status of the missile trade. Robert Kennedy wrote:

He asked me what offer the United States was making, and I told him of the letter that President Kennedy had just transmitted to Khrushchev. He raised the question of our removing the missiles from Turkey. I said that there could be no quid pro quo or any arrangement made under this kind of threat or pressure, and that in the last analysis this was a decision that would have to be made by NATO. However, I said, the President had been anxious to remove those missiles from Turkey and Italy for a long period of time. He had ordered their removal some time ago, and it was our judgment that, within a short time after this crisis was over, those missiles would be gone.122

Dobrynin insists that it was Robert Kennedy who pursued the idea of an explicit "deal" on the Turkish missiles; that he wished to portray it as a significant concession by the United States; and that he never said that the president had already ordered their removal.123 Dobrynin's version of the meeting was confirmed in an important respect at the Moscow conference by Theodore Sorensen, who edited Thirteen Days prior to its publication. Sorensen confessed that the missile trade had been portrayed as an explicit deal in the diaries on which the book was based, and that he had seen fit to revise that account in view of the fact that the trade was still a secret at the time, known to only six members of the ExComm.124

Andrei Gromyko stressed at the Moscow conference that the question of the Turkish missiles was "not trivial," and that the Soviet Union had a solid foundation to consider that their removal was part of the terms on which the crisis was resolved.125 Indeed, Khrushchev sent the president a letter after the conclusion of the crisis, in which he described the withdrawal of the Jupiter missiles from Turkey as an integral part of the agreement on which the crisis was resolved. In Moscow, Sorensen conceded that this letter had been received, but explained its absence from the collected Kennedy-Khrushchev correspondence by noting that the administration decided against acknowledging the withdrawal of the Jupiters as a quid pro quo, and returned the letter as if it had never been opened.126

123. MCT.
124. MCT.
125. MCT.
126. MCT.
It appears, therefore, that the withdrawal of the Jupiter missiles from Turkey in the spring of 1963 was indeed part of a private deal that led to the withdrawal of Soviet missiles from Cuba in November, 1962. However, both the United States and the Soviet Union have subsequently found it expedient not to insist on this point, the United States because of the complications and ill-will it would cause among its NATO allies (and because of the domestic political consequences to the president had he publicly acknowledged the trade of the missiles), and the Soviet Union because of Castro’s objection to being treated like a “bargaining chip” on a par with a “minor” NATO ally such as Turkey.127

Khrushchev’s Sense of Urgency

Between the time Dobrynin took his leave of Robert Kennedy on October 27 and the time the ExComm met again at 9:00 on Sunday morning, Khrushchev had decided to bring the confrontation to an end.128 Western students of the crisis have long wondered what caused Khrushchev to do so at that particular time. Dobrynin’s claim that he did not interpret Robert Kennedy’s message of October 27 as a threat or an ultimatum only adds to the puzzle, since Robert Kennedy’s account of the meeting has been widely regarded as the best explanation of Khrushchev’s sense of urgency.

That Khrushchev felt a sense of urgency can hardly be questioned. According to Fyodor Burlatsky, the letter of October 28 accepting Kennedy’s non-invasion pledge in return for withdrawal of the missiles from Cuba “was prepared at Khrushchev’s dacha [at Kuntsevo] thirty kilometers from Moscow. When the letter was finished, a man was dispatched with it to drive very quickly to the radio station. He was told to have it for transmission before three o’clock. They were very nervous.”129 Sergei Mikoyan added, “At Radio Moscow there are six elevators in the building. Someone had telephoned ahead, and they reserved one elevator just for this letter to arrive.”130

127. See Blight and Welch, On the Brink, pp. 309–310.
128. For the text of Khrushchev’s October 28 message, see Larson, The “Cuban Crisis” of 1962, pp. 189–193.
129. CCT, p. 74. Working on the letter with Khrushchev, according to Burlatsky, were Andrei Gromyko, Leonid F. Ilychev (Khrushchev’s ideological ally and a member of the Communist Party Secretariat, though not a member of the Presidium), Marshal Malinovsky, and one or two others. CCT, p. 75.
130. CCT, p. 74.
If indeed Khrushchev's urgency was a reaction to any verbal message, it may have been to that of John Scali, rather than to Robert Kennedy's. At the Moscow conference, Aleksandr Fomin reported that in his meeting with Scali on Saturday, October 27, at which Scali attempted to ascertain the reason why Khrushchev's Friday letter had been so quickly superseded by a letter demanding a missile trade, Scali angrily threatened that there would be an American attack within hours if the missiles were not removed. After the resolution of the crisis, Fomin communicated a personal message from Khrushchev to Scali that his outburst had been "very valuable."\textsuperscript{131}

It seems probable, however, that Khrushchev was paying greater attention to his own intelligence sources than to Scali's extracurricular theatrics, since Scali was not the only one who appeared to be speaking for the administration. During the night of October 25-26, Soviet intelligence apparently reported persuasive evidence of an imminent American attack, leading Khrushchev to propose conciliatory terms in his Friday letter. Later in the day on October 26, Soviet intelligence reversed its earlier estimate, possibly encouraging Khrushchev to toughen his terms in the second letter. But some time still later on October 26 or October 27, Soviet and Cuban intelligence appear once again to have concluded that an American attack could be expected momentarily. If this indeed was their assessment, it may have weighed heavily in Khrushchev’s decision to bring the crisis to an end.\textsuperscript{132}

Other factors apparently played a significant role. The U-2 shoot-down and the inadvertent straying of another American U-2 over Soviet air space on October 27 indicated that events were slipping out of control. But perhaps as important, it appears that Khrushchev was influenced by a communication from Castro through Alekseev on October 27. That message came to light at the Moscow conference, and was reported in the press as Castro’s attempt

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\textsuperscript{131} Scali, "I Was the Secret Go-Between in the Cuban Crisis," p. 14. The number of cases where representatives of the governments of the superpowers appear to have conducted freelance diplomacy appears quite striking in retrospect. Fomin, Dobrynin, Robert Kennedy, and Scali all seem to have made important approaches to the other side without prior discussion with their responsible decision-making bodies: Fomin in proposing terms for settling the crisis; Dobrynin in raising the issue of Turkish missiles; Robert Kennedy in suggesting a deal (with the president's knowledge, but not the ExComm’s); and Scali in delivering an ultimatum. There is a good deal of discussion about the dangers of unauthorized and inadvertent acts on the part of the military; these episodes suggest that a certain amount of effort should be devoted to exploring the dangers and consequences of inadvertent diplomatic acts.

\textsuperscript{132} See, e.g., Garthoff, "Cuban Missile Crisis: The Soviet Story," pp. 74-76.
to urge Khrushchev to fire the nuclear missiles in Cuba against the United States.\textsuperscript{133}

It remains unclear exactly what Castro communicated to Khrushchev. We have reason to believe that in an unpublished passage of his memoirs, Khrushchev reported it thus: "Suddenly, we received through our Ambassador a cable from Castro. The Ambassador reported that Castro had given him the report face-to-face. Castro informed him that he had reliable information that an American invasion would take place within a few hours. Therefore, he was proposing to preempt the invasion and inflict a nuclear strike on the U.S."\textsuperscript{134}

But well-placed Soviets and Cubans deny that Castro’s message urged a nuclear strike. According to both Ambassador Alekseev (who transmitted the message to Khrushchev) and Emilio Aragonés (who helped draft it, and who had felt on October 26 that Khrushchev’s resolve was weakening), the telegram was intended to communicate the Cuban people’s willingness to fight to the last man and the last bullet in the event of an American attack, and to urge Khrushchev to show firmness. Both Alekseev and Aragonés believe that Khrushchev misinterpreted the telegram as urging a preemptive strike, an entirely plausible belief given Khrushchev’s state of mind at the climax of the confrontation.\textsuperscript{135}

Until the cable itself is made public by the Soviets or Cubans, the issue cannot be resolved conclusively. A great deal depends upon the precise wording of the telegram, and whether it accurately reflects Castro’s verbal communication to Alekseev.\textsuperscript{136} But if Khrushchev did misinterpret the tele-


\textsuperscript{134} This was conveyed to the authors by a knowledgeable source. This passage did not appear in the manuscripts that were delivered to the West in 1970.

\textsuperscript{135} Alekseev interview; Aragonés interview.

\textsuperscript{136} A confidential source informed the authors that in February 1989, Castro remarked that he believed the missiles should have been fired in the event of a full-scale American invasion, though not preemptively or in the event of an air strike; del Valle reports that in 1962, he shared this sentiment (del Valle interview). This is an understandable attitude; as del Valle put it, Cuba had "no atomic culture" at the time, meaning Cubans had not yet developed the understanding of the consequences of nuclear explosions that existed in the United States and the Soviet Union. But in any case, the consequences for Cuba of a full-scale American invasion would not have differed from the consequences of a nuclear war in important respects; in either event, Cuba faced devastation. Castro’s apparent willingness to see Soviet nuclear missiles fired from Cuban soil in the event of a full-scale invasion must be understood from this perspective.

What does seem clear is that, in the telegram in question, Alekseev communicated to Khru-
gram from Castro, then it would stand as one more reminder of the significance of major miscommunications during crises. In this case, a misinterpretation may have facilitated a rapid resolution; in other circumstances, it might have complicated one.

Cuba and the Conclusion of the Crisis

Castro’s displeasure at Khrushchev’s failure to consult him before agreeing to withdraw the missiles from Cuba is a matter of record. Apparently, Cuba first heard of Khrushchev’s decision on the radio. Ambassador Alekseev reports that upon hearing the news, “I felt myself the most unhappy man on earth, as I imagined what Fidel’s reaction to this would be.” Indeed, Castro refused to see him for several days. 137

Part of Castro’s fury at not having been consulted may have stemmed from his conviction that Khrushchev did not get as much as he could have from the Americans. At the Moscow conference, Jorge Risquet insisted that the “five conditions” Castro had publicly proclaimed as the price for his assent to the withdrawal of the missiles had indeed been within reach, including American withdrawal from Guantánamo. 138 If indeed Castro was convinced that this was a concession to which the United States would agree, then it bespeaks an appalling ignorance of American political realities on Castro’s part. 139 Aragonés, however, maintains that Castro’s five conditions

137. MCT; and Alekseev interview.
138. Castro’s five conditions for complying with the U.S.-Soviet agreement were: that the United States (1) lift the naval quarantine; (2) lift its economic blockade of Cuba; (3) discontinue “subversive activities and piratical attacks”; (4) cease violating Cuban airspace and territorial waters; and (5) shut down its naval base at Guantánamo.
139. Dobrynin reported at the Moscow conference that in a confidential letter to President Kennedy on October 29 or 30, the Soviet Union did raise the issue of Guantánamo, but he added that he doubted that any hopes of American concessions on the base were realistic. Andrei Gromyko further remarked that the agreement concluding the crisis included the crucial concession from the United States: a commitment not to invade Cuba. MCT. Alekseev reports
represented merely a statement of principles, not an attempt to stake out a negotiating position, and that they were intended primarily to serve domestic political purposes. Cuba had been badly treated by both superpowers, and its national honor required a public articulation of Cuban dissent.\footnote{Garthoff, \textit{Reflections on the Cuban Missile Crisis} (first ed.), pp. 63–64.}

Raymond Garthoff has reported that Cuban troops surrounded the missile sites on October 28, and only stood down after the arrival in Havana of Soviet First Deputy Premier Anastas Mikoyan, whose task was to persuade Castro to go along with the U.S.-Soviet agreement.\footnote{MCT.} The Moscow conference and subsequent discussions have shed light on the issue and have raised interesting new questions in the process. Ambassador Alekseev believes, for example, that the troops that took up positions around the missile sites were in fact Soviet soldiers in Cuban uniforms, and insists that there was no danger of a Soviet-Cuban clash at that time.\footnote{MCT.} Both Sergio del Valle and Emilio Aragones insist that the troops were Cuban anti-aircraft units deployed to protect the missile sites from low-level attack.\footnote{MCT.}

Anastas Mikoyan’s success in persuading Castro to accept the U.S. demand for a November withdrawal of the Il-28 light bombers, in addition to the withdrawal of the missiles, was a remarkable achievement. The American demand that Cuba relinquish weapons intended for the Cuban Air Force, wholly independently of the Soviet missile deployment, only added insult to injury. Mikoyan’s success was aided by one of those curious interventions of fate: Castro’s initial attitude toward the Soviet representative was softened by the sudden death of Mikoyan’s wife at the very moment he arrived in Havana.\footnote{MCT.} But according to Cuban testimony, the published American views of the negotiations involving the bombers are mistaken in a variety of ways. First, American intelligence believed in 1962 that forty-two Il-28s had been

\footnote{Alekseev, “Karibskii krizis: kak eto bylo,” p. 36; Aragones interview.}
delivered to Cuba, of which only seven had been assembled; Sergio del Valle, however, maintains that twelve Il-28s had been delivered, of which only three were to be transferred to the Cuban Air Force. None of the three Cuban bombers had been uncrated during the crisis, and the Soviets simply withdrew them at the same time they withdrew their own bombers, an operation facilitated by the fact that the aircraft were all located at the same bases. It may be, therefore, that none of the bombers had yet been formally transferred to Cuba, and that Mikoyan did not have to persuade Castro to relinquish something he had already been given. Second, some American analysts have believed that Mikoyan’s task was abetted by President Kennedy’s message to the NATO allies of November 19, warning that if the bombers were not promptly withdrawn, air strikes might be necessary to destroy them. The president reportedly intended the message to leak to the Soviets. However, Emilio Aragonés, who was present throughout the negotiations between Castro and Mikoyan, does not recall any discussion of the American threat and does not believe that it was communicated to Castro. Aragonés recalls that Mikoyan represented the withdrawal of the bombers merely as a request from the Soviet and American negotiators in New York, and persuaded him to go along by appealing to the necessity for a quick solution.

The fact that the Il-28 bombers were a subject of debate at all, according to Sergio Mikoyan, was largely the fault of the Soviet Union itself. Khrushchev, by his letter to the president of October 28 stating that he had given an order “to dismantle the arms which you described as offensive,” was attempting to deny that the nuclear missiles in Cuba were, in fact, “offensive,” and was indeed attempting to avoid using the word “missiles” pub-

146. Del Valle interview. According to del Valle, the Cubans planned to use their Il-28s in a coastal defense role, primarily against mother ships from which smaller craft would carry subversives and counterrevolutionaries attempting to infiltrate the Cuban coast.
147. Garthoff, Reflections on the Cuban Missile Crisis (first ed.), p. 73; HCT, p. 150.
148. Aragonés interview. Aragonés recalls the scene with some amusement. Mikoyan, he claims, “related the discussions in New York he had had with Kuznetsov and McCloy; Fidel told him that he had committed the serious mistake of showing weakness to the Americans. Fidel said, ‘What will happen if the U.S. wants the bombers out, too?’ Mikoyan launched into this long, confusing exposition on Soviet-Cuban friendship, on the overthrow of the Tsars, and all kinds of things that had nothing to do with the problem at hand. It was very confusing and surreal. And then at the end, he said that the Americans had requested the withdrawal of the Il-28s. Well, Fidel exploded. He leaned back, waved his hand, and shouted, ‘Oh, to Hell with the airplanes!’”
licitly. But the effect was to give the United States carte blanche to specify which weapon systems were to be withdrawn, and the Kennedy administration chose to insist upon the removal of the Il-28s—obsolete, short-range bombers believed to have a nuclear capability, but for which no nuclear weapons had been supplied. The withdrawal of the Il-28s was a blow to Cuba’s national pride, and it further strained Soviet-Cuban relations. As Sergo Mikoyan put it, the Soviets fell victim to their own “propagandistic tendencies.”

Conclusion

The new testimony from Soviets and Cubans has considerably enriched the story of the Cuban missile crisis, though it has opened as many questions as it has plausibly answered. All of the new evidence assembled here, however, has been testimonial. To date, Western students of the crisis have not seen a single Soviet or Cuban document against which to check the recollections of Soviet and Cuban participants and scholars. Cuba and the Soviet Union have no history of declassifying diplomatic documents for historical uses, and no procedures for doing so; in any case, the relevant diplomatic archives in both Moscow and Havana are probably sparse by American standards. According to Soviet testimony, no written records of Kremlin decision-making were kept prior to October 22, 1962, precisely to avoid breaches of secrecy. The director of the Institute of Cuban History notes that the Cuban government in 1962 was so young and so disorganized that it had not yet established procedures for handling paperwork; most relevant decisions were made in conversations that were not recorded.

The next major step in the historiography of the Cuban missile crisis will have to await the release of those documents that do exist in Moscow and Havana. In the meantime, we must make what we can of verbal testimonies. The weaknesses of oral history are well known: memories are imperfect and selective; current interests and objectives color recollections of historical events. Perhaps most frustrating is the fact that not all key players have survived to give their testimony, and others, because of advancing age, have little time left in which to do so. But until relatively recently, few historians

150. MCT.
151. Mendoza interview.
and political scientists believed that they would have the chance to hear the Soviet and Cuban stories at all. We believe that the Soviets and Cubans who have spoken out have treated the opportunity to do so with due seriousness; in our opinion, therefore—bearing in mind the inherent limitations of oral history—their contributions have greatly improved the understanding of the causes, conduct, and implications of the Cuban missile crisis.