

WORKING PAPER

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Summary of NPIC's Role in Cuban Crisis

1. The first U-2 reconnaissance mission over Cuba was flown on 27 October 1960. At the time, it was a clandestine operation for the purpose of acquiring intelligence data on the Cuban military buildup, conducted with Soviet assistance, and to provide information of possible use for clandestine operations. By 4 September 1962, when President Kennedy issued a public statement pointing out that Soviet equipment including surface-to-air missile (SAM's), patrol boats with missiles (KOMARs), MIG fighters and 3500 Soviet technicians were known to be in Cuba or on their way there, but that no offensive threat had yet been observed, about 43 high-altitude U-2 missions had been flown and exploited by the National Photographic Interpretation Center. As soon as these missions returned to the U. S. the film was removed from the aircraft and rushed by waiting aircraft to the processing site. Here the film was developed under the most rigid quality and security controls around the clock by the best caliber personnel available. The film was edited by NPIC personnel and then titled according to prescribed procedures. Duplicate positives were produced for immediate shipment to NPIC where the film was exploited as soon as received. (It generally was received during working hours at this time.) Constant contact was

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required by the Operations Officer with the collector and the processing site in order that scheduling information was constantly available to Center components so that exploitation terms could be formed to produce the IPIR. They consisted of PIs, collateral support personnel, editors and graphics personnel. PI teams consisting of Army, Navy, Air Force and CIA PIs were organized. A coordinator for each mission was designated who was responsible for the actual IPIR production. Since the PI readouts were recorded on IBM cards it was possible, by means of the IBM EAM equipment, to produce "Target Briefs", which chronologically recorded the information from all previous coverage for use by the PIs. Target packets were prepared, which contained the target briefs, maps and selected intelligence from other sources. The flight track was plotted on maps and a preliminary list of targets possibly covered were identified. COMOR targets were exploited first, but then all of the film was scanned in detail for any indication of offensive weapons. The PI's interpretation was recorded on target work sheets which were preprinted with the COMOR target number, target location, name, and coordinates. After editing they were turned over to the coordinator for approval. After this, they were passed on to the punch operators who prepared IBM cards and verified them. The IBM cards were then sorted in a predetermined arrangement by subject categories such as missiles, airfields, naval activity, etc. After all work sheets were completed a proof run was produced which was checked by the coordinator, editor and Operations Officer.

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After final approval, corrections were made as required on the applicable IBM cards and the final version of the IPIR was run on the IBM tabulator or multilith mats. These were printed, assembled and bound for dissemination early the next morning. The IBM cards were then processed through a card to tape converter and a 5-channel teletype tape was produced which could be run directly on the communications equipment without retyping. (This avoided time-consuming punching of tape, proofing and errors.) Cable headers had been prepared in advance so that the IPIR could be transmitted to some 40-50 organizations throughout the Western Hemisphere without delay.

Concurrent with the production of the IPIR, as significant information was uncovered, graphics personnel would prepare detailed work orders which were sent to the Photo Lab where enlargements were produced to be used in the production of briefing boards as directed by the coordinator. In addition to these, many prints were made for use by the PIs for study and establishment of chronological evidence files. After the briefing boards were prepared they were photographed and enlarged for simultaneous dissemination to the Army, Navy, Air Force and CIA. (Later when DIA came into being two original copies of all briefing boards were prepared and one was disseminated to the Director, DIA at the same time that one was being taken to CIA Headquarters to brief the DCI. Photo copies were also provided the Military Services but priority was given to the two originals. Vugraphs

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were also made of these briefing boards and about fifteen (15) copies were disseminated. All materials (IPIRs, briefing boards, vugraphs, etc.) had to be disseminated by about 0730 the morning after the film was received by NPIC.

2. Now there were many reports of offensive missiles in Cuba from a variety of sources available to the U. S. intelligence community. Most ~~popular~~ popular of these, of course, was the refugee report. The word had spread among the Cuban refugees (just as it had years earlier in Europe among the East German refugees) that information about missiles sold well.

Thousands of these were checked out, analyzed and evaluated and the majority either were proven false (through various means) or were related to a SA-2 Surface-to-Air Missile (SAM), publicly known to be in Cuba. In the period just preceding the October 14 "hard evidence" photograph, many of the reports of truck convoys and missile trailers were being given higher and higher evaluations. But for the intelligence community to be skeptical about a refugee's estimate of the length of a trailer (the key in determining the type of missile) seen at night under difficult and probably nerve-wracking circumstances, is not unreasonable particularly against the background of a mass of reports that had been proved false.

3. So despite the fact that unconfirmed intelligence reports and weather-delayed U-2 flights precluded the U. S. government from having

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earlier "hard evidence," this evidence in the form of an aerial photograph was obtained on October 14, 1962 by a U-2 reconnaissance aircraft operated by the Strategic Air Command (SAC).

This flight, authorized by the President on the 9th of October, but delayed by bad weather flew over the Western end of the island in the Pinar Del Rio Province. When the photographic materials were returned to Washington for processing and analysis by photo interpreters, the beginning of a Soviet medium-range missile base was spotted in the San Cristobal area.

Thus the first evidence was in hand and it confirmed the fact that the Soviet Union had made a decision earlier in the year to install an offensive nuclear missile capability on the island of Cuba.

4. Up until about 14 October 1962, all U-2 flights had been flown clandestinely. Well justified missions, weather predictions and top level approval were key factors in the frequency of missions. On 14 October 1962, SAC started to fly the U-2 missions but generally speaking the same provisions prevailed. After the MRBM site at San Cristobal was spotted the frequency of missions was increased.

5. The DDI was advised of the MRBM site at San Cristobal on the evening of 15 October 1962. A restricted dissemination memorandum was prepared for the DCI and DIA. The Director, NPIC briefed senior CIA officials

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at 0730 on 16 October 1962 and immediately thereafter accompanied the DDI to the White House where Mr. McGeorge Bundy and selected top officials were briefed. Later the DDCI and the Director, NPIC briefed the President and the EXCOM (selected cabinet members and others). It was decided to put Cuba under virtually constant aerial surveillance.

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A special security caveat on all information was imposed in order to restrict the dissemination of information to only those that had a strict need-to-know. Thereafter, the number of missions increased dramatically and the workload imposed on the Center increased so that there was around the clock activity. All ports were covered and a constant search was conducted for cargos on ships including shipping crates. This commenced an entirely new problem of attempting to identifying the contents of those crates. With the imposition of the quarantine on October 22nd of all offensive military equipment under shipment to Cuba, Navy reconnaissance imagery of deck cargos on Soviet ships was received by the Navy and copies provided to NPIC. In the President's speech he indicated that a series of offensive missile sites are now in preparation in Cuba.

"The characteristics of these new missile sites indicate two distinct types of installations. Several of them include medium-range ballistic missiles capable of carrying a nuclear warhead for a distance of more than 1,000 nautical miles."

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"Additional sites not yet completed appear to be designed for intermediate-range ballistic missiles capable of traveling more than twice as far--and thus capable of striking most of the major cities in the Western Hemisphere, ranging as far north as Hudson Bay, Canada, and as far south as Lima, Peru. In addition, jet bombers, capable of carrying nuclear weapons, are now being uncrated and assembled in Cuba, while the necessary air bases are being prepared."

All of this information was acquired from aerial reconnaissance.

6. The step up in surveillance (a continuation of high-level and commencement ~~as~~ low-level) required that personnel be on duty 24 hours a day to process the constant flow of information. Daily production scheduling meetings were held by the Operations Officer and a constant shuttle of couriers between NPIC, Andrews Air Force Base and the alternate processing site at the NRTSC was instituted. The pace increased considerably in that during the period 14 October to 19 November 1962, 73 high-altitude missions were flown and 152 low-level missions. Overlapping PI and Support Teams were organized and functioned on a shift basis. Two PI missile specialists devoted full-time, on a shift basis, to the support of GMAIC. Nearly daily GMAIC reports were produced.

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7. At the same time briefing aids were prepared for the specific purpose of clearly demonstrating that the President had evidence to back his position at the United Nations. Special projects were undertaken to produce data and briefing aids to support the DCI and Director, DIA at Congressional hearings. At the same time, many questionable reports of new missile deployment had to be checked out to verify their validity.

8. Even after the Russians started to dismantle their offensive weapons (missiles, IL-28s, etc.) on about 1 November 1962, continuing aerial reconnaissance vigilance was maintained to ensure that all such equipment had in fact been removed and to ascertain if the Soviet technicians were leaving Cuba. Facilities destruction and the movement of equipment to ports was monitored so as to account for all offensive weapons systems. Deck cargos were photographed and ships had to be identified. Emphasis was also placed on trying to determine what equipment actually was put into the holds of ships. When the United Nations Observer Team was established, special books containing photographs of all facilities with offensive weapons, were prepared for their use and sent to United Nations Headquarters. A large number of photographs were prepared for release to the press which were later published in LIFE, TIME, and various newspapers. Such release photography had to conclusively prove that these facilities were being dismantled. Considerable coordination was

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required to obtain approval via appropriate channels, e. g., the DDI and Mr. Salinger in the White House.

9. After all offensive weapons were actually dismantled, removed and accounted for on Soviet vessels from photography, surveillance was continued at a high-level through November 1964.

Many reports were now received that missiles were being stored in caves. A complete survey of all caves was conducted by NPIC and detailed reports were prepared. In addition, NPIC commenced preparing film evaluation reports on all Cuban missions in order to report on camera operations, malfunctions, processing adequacy, etc.

After November 1964, the requirement for reconnaissance was reduced, but the USIB requires about 90% coverage of the island with interpretable photography every 28 days. The COMOR reports monthly to the USIB the level of coverage achieved. Currently about 100 U-2 missions are flown annually to achieve such coverage.

To date, a total of 901 high-level missions and 156 low-level missions have been flown. There is no evidence that the current pace will be relaxed by the USIB.

In essence, the photo interpreter discovered the offensive weapons, continually monitored their operational status, and verified dismantling and removal from Cuba. This has required many thousands of hours of overtime in the continuous review of more than 6.3 million feet of film since October 1960.

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