

**THE DEVISEMENT OF FOREIGN
POLICY DURING THE CUBAN MISSILE
CRISIS OF 1962**

by

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G. & P. 206
**Seminar in American Foreign Policy
University of Maryland**

January 17, 1966

U.S.A.

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BACKGROUND

The devisement of foreign policy during the Cuban missile crisis actually took place in a very short, but critical period of our history -- October 16 to October 22, 1962. During this short period, a handful of men, operating for the most part in secret, held our destinies in their hands.

A brief mention of a few of the events of the preceding ten months is necessary in order to get a view and understanding of the diplomatic climate concerning Cuba prior to the confirmation of evidence of offensive missile installations.

On January 22, 1962, the Foreign Ministers of Latin America met in Punta del Este, Uruguay. U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk denounced Cuba as a Communist "bridgehead" in the Americas. On January 25, 1962, he proposed the expulsion of the Cuban Government from all Organization of American States bodies, termination of all trade with Cuba and the setting up of a "special security committee" for protection against "Sino-Soviet Intervention." The final resolution adopted by the conference on January 31 achieved the U.S. aim insofar as it proclaimed the isolation of Cuba. Fourteen Foreign Ministers voted to exclude the Cuban Government from "participation in the inter-American system"; however, six countries abstained from voting and these included the most

Ecuador, and Mexico. According to Walt Rostow, Chairman of the State Department's Policy Planning Council, this action "served as a base for hemispheric solidarity in the missile crisis later in the year."¹

On February 14, 1962, when the OAS Council put the Punta del Este decisions into effect, the Cuban delegate was denied the right to speak, and walked out of the meeting.

In addition to its efforts to isolate Cuba diplomatically, the U.S. attempted trade embargoes. The Punta del Este Conference adopted a resolution "to suspend trade with Cuba in arms" and consider extension of this "to other items of strategic importance."

On February 7, 1962, the U.S. itself decreed a total embargo on trade with Cuba except for medicines and good supplies. Our attempts to get others to impose economic sanctions on Cuba were not limited to Latin America. We also requested NATO members to reduce or cut off their trade with Cuba. Only Turkey, West Germany and Belgium gave token support to this request.

On July 2, 1962, Raul Castro, the Cuban Minister of the Armed Forces, arrived in Moscow. Either before his arrival or very soon thereafter, the Soviet and Cuban governments arrived at a startling decision: that Soviet nuclear missiles were to be secretly installed in Cuba in the fall. At the end

¹Walt W. Rostow, View From The Seventh Floor (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), p. 9.

of August, he was followed by Ernesto "Che" Guevara, Cuba's Minister of Finance, who concluded a treaty almost unique in Soviet history.

In the ensuing six months, the USSR doubled her exports to Cuba and armaments and "Russian technicians" began to flow to the Island in increasing numbers. According to the New York Times² this volume of shipments totalled almost 1.2 billion dollars for 1962.

The reason that the USSR-Cuba treaty was called unique is that usually the Soviet Union is paid twice for its hand-me-down weapons, once in money and once in political concessions. It appears, however, from the information available, that Russia not only "wrote off" past Cuban debts for arms supplies but that the only return expected for the expensive missiles, equipment, and nuclear warheads that was to be sent later was the right to build a Russian fishing harbor in Cuba.

There is still considerable debate as to whether the missiles would have ever been turned over to the Cubans. Many experts feel that they would have always remained under Russian control even long after they were operational if other events had not prevented this. At any rate Guevara concluded a treaty which on the surface was intended to appear to be just a further extension of Russian arms assistance to Cuba.

AMERICAN WARNING AGAINST OFFENSIVE WEAPONS

In the summer of 1962 as Soviet build-up of arms, equipment, and "technical" personnel in Cuba was accelerated the U.S.

²The New York Times, New York, N.Y., September 5, 1962.

ingence machinery had gathered. On September 4, 1962, President Kennedy, in a public statement issued from the White House pointed to the fact that Soviet equipment including surface-to-air missiles (SAM's), patrol boats with missiles, MIG fighters, and 3500 technicians were known to be in Cuba or on their way there. He stated, however, that the U.S. had no evidence of a "significant offensive capability". "Were it to be otherwise", he added, "the gravest issues would arise". He warned that the U.S. would prevent "by whatever means may be necessary" any Cuban attempt "to export its aggressive purposes by force or threat of force."³

This distinction as to "offensive capability" versus "defensive capability" of weapons was later to be a prime factor in policy decisions. It is my belief that it was a distinction that President Kennedy later regretted making. (The Russians picked up this point quickly and began to refer to their weapons assistance to Cuba as strictly an objective of increasing the defensive capability of the Cubans to prevent an imperialist invasion).

On September 7, 1962, President Kennedy requested and received from Congress the authority to call up 150,000 reservists.

Following this call up, the Soviet Union responded with a warning against U.S. intervention and stated that "one cannot now attack Cuba and expect that the aggressor

³The New York Times, New York, N.Y., September 5, 1962.

again reiterated that it was supplying Cuba only with "defensive weapons" because its own weapons "are so powerful ... that there is no need to search for sites for them beyond the boundaries of the Soviet Union."⁵

U.S. INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY'S
APPRAISAL OF CONTINUING BUILD-UP

Now there were many reports of offensive missiles in Cuba from a variety of sources available to the U.S. intelligence community. Most 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-racking circumstances, is not unreasonable particularly against the background of a mass of reports that had been proved false.

⁴
A. G. Mezerik (ed.), Cuba And The United States,
(New York: International Review Service, 1963), p. 24

⁵
Ibid., p. 24

6- Roger Hillsman, "The Cuban Crisis: How Close We Were to War," Look, Vol 28, (August 25, 1964), p. 18.

Senator Kenneth B. Keating of New York was making public pronouncements about this time that he had information that the Soviets were constructing intermediate-range-missile bases in Cuba. He made these pronouncements on October 10, 1962. He was invited to make this information available to the U.S. intelligence community but refused to cooperate.

As Roger Hillsman, Director of Intelligence and Research at the State Department (during this period) later wrote, "The charge that Keating was more interested in personal publicity than in his country's welfare may be extreme. But until the Senator comes forward with a better explanation than he has so far supplied, one of two possible conclusions is inescapable: Either Senator Keating was peddling someone's rumors for some purpose of his own, despite the highly dangerous international situation; or, alternatively, he had information the United States Government did not have that could have guided a U-2 to the missile sites before October 14, and at less risk to the pilot."⁶

So it is obvious that there have been reams of material written and many hours of debate over the subject as to whether we should have known of the missiles sooner. The majority of key officials that have expressed themselves on the subject agree that for the U.S. to establish the policy and to take the action that it did in fact take -- much "harder" information was required than agent reports, and this kind of information could only be acquired in the third

ROGER HILLSMAN, "THE CUBAN CRISIS: HOW CLOSE WE WERE TO WAR," LOOK, VOL. 28, (AUGUST 25, 1964), P. 18.

after missiles and supporting equipment had arrived
at the sites, and the installations were recognizable in
areial photographs.

U-2 PHOTOGRAPH CONFIRMS
OFFENSIVE MISSILES

So despite the fact ^{that}/unconfirmed intelligence reports and weather-delayed U-2 flights precluded the U.S. government from having 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 (believed to be during either the Raul Castro or "Che" Guevara visit) to install an offensive nuclear missile capability on the island of Cuba.

SCHLESINGER/ROSTOW COMMENTS ON
THE RUSSIAN MANEUVER

In a general sense, that decision obviously represented the supreme Soviet probe of American intentions. No doubt a total victory faction in Moscow had long been denouncing the government's "no-win policy" and arguing that the Soviet Union could safely use the utmost nuclear pressure against the

liberal to fight. Now Krushchev was prepared to give this

argument its crucial test. Arthur M. Schlesinger in his book A Thousand Days analyzed the situation this way:

A successful nuclearization of Cuba would make about sixty-four medium-range (around 1000 miles) and intermediate-range (1500-2000 miles) nuclear missiles effective against the United States and thereby come near to doubling Soviet striking capacity against American targets.

Since this would still leave the United States with at least a 2 to 1 superiority in nuclear power targeted against the Soviet Union, the shift in the military balance of power would be less crucial than that in the political balance. Every country in the world, watching so audacious an action ninety miles from the United States, would wonder whether it could every thereafter trust Washington's resolution and protection. More particularly, the change in the nuclear equilibrium would permit Khrushchev, who had been dragging out the Berlin negotiation all year, to reopen that question -- perhaps in a personal appearance before the United Nations General Assembly in November -- with half the United States lying within range of nuclear missiles poised for delivery across the small stretch of water from Florida. It was a staggering project -- staggering in its recklessness, staggering in its misconception of the American response, staggering in its rejection of the ground rules for coexistence among the superpowers which Kennedy had offered in Vienna.

The decision having been made, the next problem was the development of a plan. Moscow evidently saw the operation in two stages -- first, the augmentation of Cuban defensive capabilities by bringing in surface-to-air anti-aircraft (SAM) missiles and MIG-21 fighters; then, as soon as the SAMs were in place to protect the bases and deter photographic reconnaissance (a SAM had brought down the Francis Gary Powers U-2 over Russia in 1960), sending in offensive weapons, both ballistic missiles and Ilyushin-28 jet aircraft able to deliver nuclear bombs. The first stage, involving only defensive weapons, required no special concealment. The second stage called for the most careful and complex program of deception. One can only imagine the provisions made in Moscow and Havana throughout the summer to ship the weapons, to receive them, unload them, assemble them, erect bases for them, install them on launching pads -- all with a stealth and

Cubb.7

Walt Rostow in a post-mortem observation on the crisis in his 1964 book, A View From The Seventh Floor made this observation:

It was our assessment in the Policy Planning Council, as of late August 1962, that the mfn in Moscow would have judged that the post-Sputnik offensive was failing. It was further assessed that Moscow was unlikely to accept this failure passively; and we worked during September on the assumption that we were about to see perhaps the greatest act of risk-taking since the war, in an attempt to retrieve a waning Communist position. We estimated that there would be three points of danger: Berlin; Cuba; and an effort by Moscow to produce what would be -- or would appear to be -- a favorable shift in the nuclear balance. We considered the installation of offensive missiles in Cuba, although we did not predict it because we judged it would be a most unwise and risky act -- which, indeed, it was.⁸

Rostow also wrote:

From the Soviet point of view, this was a limited thrust whose success depended on these three elements: first, the shadow over the West of Soviet nuclear power; second, the likelihood of a political split within the West as to whether the issue in Cuba was worth the risk of nuclear war; and third, the likelihood that the United States, in the face of these dangers and schisms, would not be prepared to initiate -- I repeat, to initiate -- military action.⁹

PRESIDENT KENNEDY'S BRIEFING
AND HIS REACTION

So the hard, cold facts were in and it was with this background of tenuous international climate regarding Cuba

⁷ Arthur M. Schlesinger, A Thousand Days (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1965), p. 794.

⁸ Rostow, op. cit., p. 9.

⁹ Ibid., p. 10.

and his young administration began to face the problem and to attempt to devise policy decisions knowing that time was a critical factor.

President Kennedy first received the word on the morning of the 16th through his Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, McGeorge Bundy. Bundy, as well as the primary Defense and State Department officials had been briefed by Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officers in the afternoon and late evening of the 15th. Bundy for several valid reasons, chose to wait until Tuesday to inform the President.

Theodore Sorenson's account of the President's reaction to this news was that although he was "angry at Krushchev's efforts to deceive him -- he took the news calmly but with an expression of surprise."¹⁰ His surprise stemmed from the fact that (1) The Soviets would actually attempt so reckless and risky an action in a place like Cuba and (2) on the assumption that missiles would be moved in, that they would not be installed until the SAM Air Defense network was completed to deter or prevent aerial reconnaissance and make their detection more difficult. (The Soviets failure to coordinate this timing of what would appear to be very basic is still a mystery). I consider this to be Russia's biggest "goof" of the whole attempt.

¹⁰

Theodore C. Sorenson, Kennedy (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 673.

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

The President requested that a meeting be arranged for 11:45 A.M. in the Cabinet room. The people he chose to attend "had little in common except the President's desire for their judgement."¹¹ This group, later to be tagged by journalists as the Executive Committee (EXCOM) of the National Security Council, was comprised of (1) the President's most trusted advisers, (2) experts on Soviet and Latin American Affairs and (3) two elder statesmen. They were in addition to the President as follows:

- * (1) Dean Rusk, Secretary of State
- * (2) Robert S. McNamara, Secretary of Defense
- (3) Robert F. Kennedy, Attorney-General
- (4) Douglas Dillon, Secretary of Treasury
- (5) John McCone, Director of Central Intelligence
- (6) General Maxwell D. Taylor, Chairman, JCS
- (7) McGeorge Bundy, Spec. Ass't for National Security Affairs
- (8) Theodore Sorenson, Special Counsel to the President

* Statutory members of NSC besides the President and Vice-President (who attended some meetings).

-- Statutory advisers to NSC

The eight members listed above plus the President formed the primary EXCOM decision-making group.

Others who participated:

State: Undersecretary George Ball, Latin America

U. Alexis Johnson and the Soviet expert, former Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson... labeled by all as "very influential -- a strong persuader." (Also participating until departing for his new post as Ambassador to France - the following night October 17, was Charles "Chip" Bohlen, another former Ambassador to Russia ... often termed, like Thompson, as a "demonologist" or "kremlinologist.")

Defense: Deputy Secretary of Defense, Roswell Gilpatric and Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, Paul Nitze.

CIA: Deputy Director General Marshall Carter (Until the Director, John McCone returned to Washington from his stepson's funeral.)

Others: Vice President Johnson, Kenneth O'Donnell, Dean Acheson, Ambassador Adlai Stevenson, Robert Lovett, and United States Information Agency Deputy Director Donald Wilson.

The first meeting of EXCOM opened with a briefing on the photographs by analysts and presentation of estimates as to the magnitude of the effort in terms of numbers of missile complexes and also estimates as to the earliest date that operational readiness could be achieved. Operational readiness was considered to be possible in ten days to two weeks. The evidence was somewhat skimpy at that time for an estimate as to the total number of complexes to be installed.

The first decision was to immediately put Cuba under virtually constant aerial surveillance. It was also decided

that EXCOM's work must be carried on with most exacting secrecy. All agreed that nothing could be worse than to alert the Russians before the United States had decided its own course. For this reason the members of the group had to attend their regular meetings, keep as many appointments as possible and preserve the normalities of life. Fortunately, the press corps, absorbed in the Congressional Campaign, was hardly disposed or situated to notice odd comings and goings. And so the President himself went off that night to dinner at Joseph Alsop's as if nothing had happened. Schlesinger recalls: "After dinner the talk turned to the contingencies of history, the odds for or against any particular event taking place. The President was silent for a time, Then he said, "Of course, if you simply consider mathematical chances, the odds are even on an H-bomb war within ten years." Perhaps he added to himself, "or within ten days."¹²

The EXCOM group seemed to have three questions that first had to be answered. First -- What does the Russian maneuver mean? Second -- and this was implied in the answer to the first question: What would result from any American reaction, or failure to react? Third -- What were the choices? The first two questions did not cause nearly so much debate or take as much of the group's time as did the third. The consensus of their feelings on the matter of the first two questions seemed to be closely akin to the summations by Arthur Schlesinger and Walt Rostow, which were previously discussed in this paper.

¹²

Schlesinger, op. cit., p. 796

As to the third question, they seemed to have six alternative courses before them. These were:

- (1) Do nothing.
- (2) Protest to Russia.
- (3) Carry the case to the UN.
- (4) Blockade Cuba and demand that Russia dismantle its missile bases.
- (5) Wreck the bases with a surprise air strike.
- (6) Invade the island with "Operation X" -- under the war plan -- and rip out the missile installations with American hands.

There were, of course, possible combinations. An air strike could be dovetailed with a blockage. An invasion could be undertaken after an ultimatum to Russia, with the U.N. used as a sounding board. Sorenson is one of the few sources that reports consideration of other related moves. Among these were: declaring a national emergency, sending a special envoy to Krushchev, or asking Congress for a declaration of war against Cuba.¹³ However, Sorenson admits the six courses above were the main considerations.

The first course listed above -- doing nothing was dismissed promptly. The President wanted effective action. He asked those present to set aside all other tasks to make a prompt and intensive survey of the dangers and all possible courses of action -- because action was imperative. The first meeting broke up with a consensus that action had to be taken within a few days and with a reiteration that a

¹³

Sorenson, op. cit., p. 682.

The five days that intervened between Bundy's bedroom report to the President and the President's television speech to the nation and the world were most harried for the EXCOM members. Numerous accounts of the deliberations from various sources seem to indicate that the group at first divided into "hawks" and "doves". One member later reported "but by the end a rolling consensus had developed, and except for Adlai, we had all ended up as "dawks" and "hoves." --assumed to be somewhere in between. There is disagreement in retrospect about what Adlai Stevenson really wanted. Alsop and Bartlett writing in the Saturday Evening Post in December following the crisis quoted one unnamed critic of Stevenson as saying, "Adlai wanted a Munich. He wanted to trade the Turkish, Italian, and British missile bases for the Cuban bases. His backers said he was only willing to discuss Guantanamo^a and the European bases with the Communists after a neutralization of the Cuban missiles.¹⁴ Diminishing Stevenson's appeasement notion, if it can be called that was the fact that the Joint Congressional Committee on Atomic Energy as well as the Secretary of Defense had declared the Jupiter missile bases in Turkey and Italy as obsolete and recommended their removal in 1961. Stevenson had also suggested giving up Guantanamo^{ANAMO} and this inclination toward appeasement bothered some of the EXCOM group. (They had pre-delivery fears that his presentation of the U.S. position later in the UN might not be strong enough.) It was obvious that Stevenson preferred

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Stewart Alsop and Charles Bartlett, "In Time of Crisis," The Saturday Evening Post, Vol. 235 (December 8, 1962), p. 20.

political negotiation to the alternative of military action.

The hawks favored an air strike to eliminate the Cuban missile bases, either with or without warning. At first they were in the majority and included Acheson, McCone, Dillon, Taylor, and eventually Bundy. The doves opposed the air strike and favored a blockade. Their number included Robert Kennedy, McNamara, Robert Lovett and Llewellyn Thompson.

There was much discussion of air strikes, invasion and a combination of the two. The Pentagon officials were working feverishly responding to requests from the group for estimates on (1) Numbers of men, (2) Equipment and time involved for both the strike, the invasion and the combination. Also provided was an estimate of casualties. The estimated time for success of such operations as well as the casualties hinged to a considerable extent on an unknown -- whether or not Castro's forces would remain loyal to him once they realized a full-scale U.S. invasion was taking place.

Strengthening the hawks argument was the oft-repeated point that this was a heaven-sent opportunity to get rid of the Castro regime forever and re-establish the security of the hemisphere.

As Schlesinger later wrote concerning the points advanced by the "hawks":

It was a strong argument, urged by strong men. But there were arguments on the other side. The Soviet experts pointed out that even a limited strike would kill the Russians manning the missile

nuclear war. The Latin American experts added that a massive strike would kill thousands of innocent Cubans and damage the United States permanently in the hemisphere. The Europeanists said the world would regard a surprise strike as an excessive response. Even if it did not produce Soviet retaliation against the United States, it would invite the Russians to move against Berlin in circumstances where the blame would fall, not on them, but on us. It would thereby give Moscow a chance to shift the venue to a place where the stake was greater than Cuba and our position weaker. In the Caribbean, we had overwhelming superiority in conventional superiority, it was the United States which would have to flourish nuclear bombs.

All these considerations encouraged the search for alternatives. When the Executive Committee met on Wednesday, Secretary McNamara advanced an idea which had been briefly mentioned the day before and from which he did not thereafter deviate -- the conception of a naval blockade designed to stop the further entry of offensive weapons into Cuba and hopefully to force the removal of the missiles already there. Here was a middle course between inaction and battle, a course which exploited our superiority in local conventional power and would permit subsequent movement either toward war or toward peace.

As the discussion proceeded Thursday, (October 18, 1962) the supporters of the air strike marshalled their arguments against the blockade. They said that it would not neutralize the weapons already within Cuba, that it could not possibly bring enough pressure on Khrushchev to remove these weapons, that it would permit work to go ahead on the bases and that it would mean another Munich. The act of stopping and searching ships would engage us with Russians instead of Cubans. The obvious retort to our blockade of Cuba would be a Soviet blockade of Berlin. Despite such arguments, however, the majority of the Executive Committee by the end of the day was tending toward a blockade.¹⁵

THE MEETING WITH GROMYKO

In the afternoon of Thursday, October the 18th, the President received the Soviet Foreign Minister, Andrei Gromyko. This meeting had been arranged earlier and in

¹⁵

Schlesinger, op. cit., p. 804.

the government in a normal manner, it was decided that a postponement or cancellation would be awkward. Those close to the scene such as Sorenson and Schlesinger termed it a most unusual meeting.

Gromyko, of course, knew of the missiles but did not know that President Kennedy knew. Gromyko talked earlier of Berlin. When the subject of Cuba came up, Gromyko stressed the Cuban fears of an American invasion and said that the Soviet aid was solely for defensive purposes. He also added that if it were otherwise (meaning offensive purposes) that the Soviet Government would never become involved in rendering such assistance. He was probably confident that he had successfully added another rung on the ladder of the great Soviet deception plan.

The President read Gromyko key sentences of warning from his statement of September 13. He did not elaborate because he did not want to tip his hand before he had decided his own course. Much has been written on this matter and some critics would have had the President enter diplomatic negotiations on the missile matter at that time in the face to face meeting -- believing that some solution could have possibly been worked out.

I believe Charles Burton Marshall's comments on that situation were most appropriate. He said:

On a basis of cold words contained in snippets from the key conversation, no outsider can competently judge the state of understanding between the President and the Soviet Regime. It was a matter for intuitive judgement -- not a matter susceptible of being tested under the rigors of judicial evidence.

AS Commander-in-Chief, as primary agent of our foreign policy, and as the specific executor of the Congressional resolution of intent regarding Cuba, only the President was in constitutional position to make the judgement. Only he, as our chief participant in the interchanges, was able to take into account all nuances.

For the President to have taken further pains to notify and to warn the adversary regarding our knowledge of what the adversary must have known we knew could have gained nothing. To have made the prospect and thrust of our counter initiatives a topic of diplomatic interchange would in high probability have lost much. It would have deprived the contemplated actions of whatever congency they might have, dulled the impressions of resolution we wanted to convey, and afforded the adversary opportunity to forestall or to nullify our initiatives with some more of his own.

In a match of one-upmanship, the adversary saw himself as one-up. This had to be redressed. Should our man in the White House have given warning and disclosure of our next move -- have told the opposing fellows that in fairness we owed them advance word of plans to get one-up on them in turn? Absurd is the word for the idea.¹⁶

Later that same evening the President met with the Executive Committee and again discussed the alternatives that had been developed earlier. Most reports of this meeting reveal that the President showed early in the meeting a particular attraction to the blockade.

POINTS IN FAVOR OF THE BLOCKADE

Some of the important points concerning the blockade which were highlighted by its supporters and apparently won favor with the President were:

- (1) It avoided war, preserved flexibility and offered Khrushchev time to reconsider his actions.
- (2) It could be carried out within the framework of the Organization of American States and the Rio Treaty.

16

Charles Burton Marshall, Cuba: Thoughts Prompted By The Crisis (Washington, D.C.: Washington Center of Foreign Policy Research, 1962), p. 6-7.

(2) Since it could be extended to non-militarism.
items as occasion required, it could become an instrument of steadily intensifying pressure.

(4) It would avoid the shock effect of a surprise attack, which would hurt us politically throughout the world and might provoke Moscow to a foolish response against Berlin or the United States itself. (Ambassador Llewelyn Thompson feared something like this and he expressed it as a possible "spasm reaction".)

(5) If it worked, the Russians could retreat with dignity.

(6) If it did not work, the Americans retained the option of military action. ("Retaining the option" is a favorite term of Secretary of Defense McNamara.)

(7) In short, the blockade, by enabling us to proceed one step at a time, gave us control over the future.

It was at this point (late evening of Thursday, the 18th of October) that President Kennedy directed that initial preparations be made to put the blockade into effect. He left Washington the next morning (Friday, October 19) for political barnstorming in the midwest and the EXCOM group met at the State Department. Reports of this meeting seem to indicate that the group was not convinced that the President had reached a firm decision on the blockade the night before and some began to re-argue the inadequacy of it. Schlesinger reports that Ted Sorenson protested this and tried to convince the group that a decision had been reached and should not be re-opened.¹⁷ Some support seemed to be generated again for an

¹⁷
Schlesinger, op. cit., p. 806.

Secretary McNamara, however, reaffirmed his "opposition to a strike and his support for a blockade. Robert Kennedy, the leader of the "doves" spoke next and delivered an eloquent and persuasive speech against the surprise air strike. He pointed out that he did not believe that with all the memory of Pearl Harbor and all the responsibility we would have to bear in the world afterward, the President of the United States could possibly order such an operation. Sunday morning surprise blows to small nations were not in our tradition. He argued that a sneak attack would constitute a betrayal of our heritage. He concluded that the blockade would demonstrate the seriousness of our determination to get the missiles out of Cuba and at the same time allow Moscow time and room to pull back from its position of peril.

This meeting broke up with an agreement to divide into working groups and write up the alternative courses for the President -- one group to analyze the blockade policy and the other to analyze the strike.

It is interesting at this point to note Secretary of State's Rusk absence from the so-called "working group" meetings. It appears he attended the main EXCOM meetings with the President but felt that as an adviser to the President he should not commit himself until all the facts were in. So he apparently withdrew from the arguments for several days and instructed Undersecretary George Ball to present the State position.¹⁸

opinion apparently swung back to the blockade. However, since a blockade is technically an act of war, they decided to call it a quarantine.

Charles Burton Marshall later made some interesting observations regarding the blockade. He said, "a blockade pertains to general interdiction of commerce as distinguished from the highly selected restraint, termed a quarantine, applied against offensive missiles. Blockade is a belligerent prerogative. If parties affected choose not to acknowledge its belligerent character, it gets by as a peaceable act."¹⁹

There was much discussion on the legal aspects of the blockade, its violation of the UN Charter and international law, and the complications of maritime insurance and claims in an illegal blockade. (There was to be much more detailed and serious discussion of this legal aspect by Defense, State, and Justice Department lawyers later after the decision had been made and the terms of the quarantine were being drawn up.)

President Kennedy in the midst of scheduled Saturday political speeches in the midwest, decided that the policy decision waiting to be made in Washington was much more important and using a slight cadd for an excuse, flew home.

THE DECISION

That afternoon (Saturday, the 20th of October) he presided over the Executive Committee and its final debate.

¹⁹

Marshall, op. cit., p. 10.

General Taylor, with some civilian support, argued for the strike. Stevenson spoke with force about the importance of a political program, the President agreeing in principle but disagreeing with his specific proposals. A straw vote indicated eleven for the quarantine, six for the strike. (The seventeen "straw" votes are presumed to have been the eight primary members: Rusk, McNamara, McCone, Taylor, Robert Kennedy, Dillon, Bundy, and Sorenson plus Bale, Alexis Johnson, Martin, Thompson, Gilpatric, Vice-President Johnson, Acheson, Stevenson, and Lovett.) The President observed that very one should hope his plan was not adopted; there was just no clear-cut answer. When someone proposed that each participant write down his recommendation, Kennedy said he did not want people, if things went wrong, claiming that their plans would have worked. Then he issued orders to get everything ready for the quarantine. On Sunday morning a final conference with the military leaders satisfied him that the strike would be a mistake. His course was now firmly set.

THE TWIN PUNCH OF DIPLOMACY PLUS
THE EVIDENT WILL TO USE MILITARY FORCE

Luckily, long-planned amphibious war games off Puerto Rico, called Phibriglex-62, provided a mask for the growing movements of troops and ships. More than 6,000 marines moved east from California; forty warships converged on the Caribbean; and a special air strike force flew into ready position. Florida and other parts of the Southeastern United States began to bristle with arms. The U.S. had

determination.

Rostow later commented on the aspect: "In a preliminary assessment of the lessons of the Cuban crisis, the inextricable connection between military force and diplomacy is plain. On the one hand, the whole exercise hinged on the existence of a full range of appropriate United States military capabilities and the evident will to use them if necessary. On the other hand, our use of force, or threat to use it, was related to a limited, legal, and lucidly defined objective: the unacceptability in the hemisphere of Soviet offensive weapons. In this crisis, there was no diplomatic move which did not have a military component, and there was no military move which was not related intimately to our diplomatic and political requirements and purposes." 20

THE PREPARATIONS FOR ANNOUNCEMENT
AND IMPLEMENTATION

So throughout Sunday (21 Oct) and Monday (22 Oct) preparations were made for the announcement to the nation and for implementation. Sorenson was to make the first draft of the television speech to the nation on Monday evening, October the 22nd. Schlesinger (who claims the secret was superbly kept since he knew nothing of all this until Friday, the 19th 21) was directed to go to New York and help Stevenson with his UN speech. I get the feeling that there were still some EXCOM people who had some pre-delivery jitters

²⁰
Rostow, op. cit., p. 12.

²¹
Schlesinger, op. cit., p. 808.

that the Attorney General drew him aside and said, "We're counting on you to watch things in New York"²². However, Ambassador Stevenson's dynamic presentation of the U.S. position was brilliant and no doubt left the EXCOM group, as well as other Americans knowledgeable of the gravity of the situation, justly proud.

The White House confidentially asked top network officials for radio and TV time Monday night. Don Wilson, deputy director of the U.S. Information Agency, and Salinger prevailed on telephone company officials to make secret connections with eleven radio stations in nine cities, so the stations could beam Spanish translations of the President's speech to Cuba and South America. The United States Information Agency also re-broadcast the speech immediately in thirty-eight languages and had it printed and sent to many more.

Some newspaper reporters were beginning to speculate pretty close as to the "crisis" and officials called top newspaper editors and asked that they check with the White House before printing any "hard news." They still felt it imperative to keep the crisis and their policy decision secret until the right moment.

THE BRIEFING OF CONGRESSIONAL LEADERS

Arrangements were made to brief key members of Congress, both Republican and Democrat. Air Force planes flew them in from points throughout the nation for a Monday afternoon briefing on the situation and the policy.

²²

Ibid., p. 811.

decision as to the initial course of action. After these briefings, Senator Russell of Georgia and Senator Fullbright of Arkansas both spoke out against the decision and argued for an invasion. Schlesinger said that Fullbright's position surprised the President, especially since he had opposed invasion so eloquently eighteen months before. Schlesinger said Kennedy told him later: "The trouble is that, when you get a group of senators together, they are always dominated by the man who takes the boldest and strongest line. That is what happened the other day. After Russell spoke, no one wanted to take issue with him. When you can talk to them individually, they are reasonable."²³

Blunt Charlie Halleck broke up the Conference and the argument concerning the policy by saying that he was "standing with the President."

THE SPEECH - ANNOUNCEMENT TO THE WORLD

Then at 7 o'clock, the President made the speech to the nation and the world revealing the crisis and delineating the policy decision regarding the U.S. plan to cope with the crisis. As the President spoke, Strategic Air Command and North American Air Defense Command units went on alert.

Sorenson had carefully weighed many aspects in preparing the speech. The President made the decision on many of the important points in the Sunday afternoon (October 21) formal meeting of the National Security Council. Some of these were:

- (1) To avoid panic, he decided to speak of their

²³

Schlesinger, op. cit., p. 812.

certain cities.

(2) To admit our surveillance of the island since 1960.

(3) He decided to obscure the question of instituting the quarantine even if the OAS did not grant approval. (He gave every indication that it would be instituted regardless of the vote.)

(4) As to Berlin, he wanted to warn against hostile moves elsewhere -- in particular against Berlin. He also wanted to emphasize that we were not "denying the necessities of life as the Soviets attempted to do in their Berlin blockade of 1948."

(5) He wanted to avoid tying our hands to diplomatic action and decided to say we were prepared to present our case in the UN or in any other meeting.

(6) He attempted to show that Article 51 of the UN Charter concerning self-defense against armed attack is obsolete under the present age of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles.

He made many other changes to (1) emphasize the previous Soviet deceptions, (2) to gain hemispheric solidarity, and (3) to show that the removal of the offensive weapons and not Castro was the true aim.

The President dwelled at some length on the Soviet's deception and the many assurances to the contrary. After delineating each of these assurances he said "that statement was false". Our "unswerving objective". he continued,

emphasized initial steps: (1) a quarantine on all offensive military equipment under shipment to Cuba; (2) an intensified surveillance of Cuba itself; (3) a declaration that any missile launched from Cuba against any nation in the Western Hemisphere would be regarded as an attack by the Soviet Union on the United States, requiring full retaliatory response upon the Soviet Union; (4) reinforcement of Guantanamo; (5) an immediate convening of the Organization of American States to consider the threat to world peace; (6) a request for an emergency meeting of the Security Council to take action against this Soviet threat to world peace; and (7) an appeal to Chairman Khrushchev "to abandon this course of world domination, and to join in an historic effort to end the perilous arms race and to transform the history of man".

He concluded with quiet solemnity. "My fellow citizens: let no one doubt that this is a difficult and dangerous effort ... No one can foresee precisely what course it will take or what costs or casualties will be incurred ... But the greatest danger of all would be to do nothing ... Our goal is not the victory of might, but the vindication of right - not peace at the expense of freedom, but both peace and freedom, here in this hemisphere, and, we hope, around the world. God willing, that goal will be achieved."²⁴

And so the policy decision, worked out under the pressures of a unique crisis, had been made and revealed to

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Vital Speeches of the Day, Vol. XXIX, (New York: November 15, 1962) p.1.

implementation of the quarantine, the offensive missiles were removed. One could say the quarantine achieved its objective. I believe it more practical to say that the quarantine was really only a catalyst to cause the removal of the missiles and that our evident will to use a superior military force was actually the primary reason for the Soviet retreat. Sorenson quotes from young Jack Kennedy's book, Why England Slept, which was written twenty-two years earlier, in which he said, "We cannot tell anyone to keep out of our hemisphere unless our armaments and the people behind these armaments are prepared to back up the command, even to the ultimate point of going to war."²⁵ On Tuesday, October 23, 1962, the American people appeared prepared and so did the armaments.

Many people still argue that our objective should have been larger --- and the Russian/Cuban menace in the Caribbean eliminated. To have attempted a different course would have evoked a much different and possibly a tragic response, and arguments on this point can be endless. Most Americans and other citizens of the world were greatly relieved over the peaceful results of the United States actions. Many students of diplomacy and military science regard it as a "classic" application of the two. As a military officer involved in the heart of the problem at the Pentagon during the crisis, I subscribe to this evaluation.

25

Sorenson, op. cit., p. 707.

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FEDERAL 7-8000

October 15, 1966

Mr. Arthur Lundahl



STAT

Dear Art,

I am taking you at your word, my friend, and requesting a number of those pictures from the big book on the Cuban business which you lent me. If possible I would like to have the prints numbered ~~7~~, ~~8~~, ~~12~~, ~~15~~, ~~17~~, ~~20~~, ~~21~~, ~~26~~, ~~36~~, ~~37~~, 39, ~~41~~, ~~46~~, ~~48~~, ~~53~~, ~~56~~, ~~57~~, ~~63~~, 65, ~~70~~, ~~83~~, ~~86~~.

I will be out of the country with the President for the next couple of weeks, and will be in touch with you when I return. There are a couple of points that I would like to clear up.

Incidentally, I spent a morning last week with Gomer McNeil; he was extremely cordial and helpful. He even took my picture inexpertly swinging a golf club with that Graph-Chek camera. Arnold Palmer is in no jeopardy.

Otherwise I'm winding up the research on the article, and will have to start writing seriously when I return. That's always the hard part.

Best regards,

Richard B. Stolley
Washington Bureau Chief

RBS/mm

P.S. I have all the books and material you lent me safely in my office. I thought I would rather return it in person when I'm back in this country than entrust it to a messenger. If you need some of it, however, please give my secretary, Margot North, a call and she'll get it to you. Thanks again very much.