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SUBJECT The Cuban Missile Crisis

MAN: It was eyeball-to-eyeball. And I went to bed several times during that week wondering whether the next morning we were going to have a nuclear exchange.

TED KOPPEL: Tonight, the Cuban Missile Crisis, as recalled by the men who dealt with it. Those 13 days in October which began 20 years ago today are described for Nightline by former Secretary of State Dean Rusk, by President Kennedy's National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy, his special assistant Theodore Sorensen, his press secretary Pierre Salinger, by the U-2 pilot who flew photo reconnaissance over Cuba, by the CIA's photo interpreter who analyzed those pictures. We'll here from the man who was then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and from ABC's John Scali, who acted as secret intermediary between the U.S. and Soviet governments. And analyzing the aftereffect of the Cuban Missile Crisis, former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.

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KOPPEL: This was the time just 20 years ago when the world quite literally seemed to tremble on the brink of nuclear war. It was a time, difficult to remember now, when roughly a quarter of a million American troops were assembled in Florida for the possible invasion of Cuba. It was the first time in the nuclear age that the United States and the Soviet Union came into direct military confrontation. Those 13 days which have come to be known as the Cuban Missile Crisis changed the way that the U.S. and the Soviet Union perceived one another and the reality of nuclear confrontation.

It's a small point, but symbolic, that as a result of

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the Cuban Missile Crisis, the White House and the Kremlin set up a hot line. As a result of the events which began to unfold 20 years ago, Moscow and Washington came to understand that between nuclear adversaries instant communication might be the only defense against total disaster.

Those you are about to hear lived this crisis.

MAN: The Soviet Union has such powerful means of delivery for these nuclear weapons that there is no need to seek any further sites for them anywhere outside the borders of the Soviet Union.

AMBASSADOR ADLAI STEVENSON: You, the Soviet Union, have sent these weapons to Cuba. You, the Soviet Union, has upset the balance of power in the world. You, the Soviet Union, has created this new danger. Not the United States.

PRESIDENT JOHN KENNEDY: It shall be the policy of this nation to regard any nuclear missile launched from Cuba against any nation in the Western Hemisphere as an attack by the Soviet Union on the United States requiring a full retaliatory response upon the Soviet Union.

MAN: It was eyeball-to-eyeball. And I went to bed several times during that week wondering whether the next morning we were going to have a nuclear exchange.

MAN: Throughout the summer of '62, the Russians were sending materials to Cuba. And we did track the shipments at sea. And then, of course, we looked for that same materiel in the countryside.

MAN: And our interest began to peak around August the 29th, '62, when the aerial photography from the U-2 began to reveal surface-to-air missile sites coming in.

RAY CLINE: I must give credit to my boss, the Director of Central Intelligence, John McCone, who always had a hunch that the reason the Soviet Union was moving all this equipment to Cuba was that they intended to put the longer-range offensive missiles there, because he was the person who insisted that we take a look, even if there was a danger.

MAN: The approval was given on the 5th. But this was the hurricane season, the bad-weather season in Cuba. And it wasn't until the 14th that the weather cleared and we could fly the mission. And Mission G3101, code named Victor, had as its specific objective to take a look at a trapezoidal-shaped area in Cuba in which an agent had reported that the Cubans were being moved out and the Russians were being moved in. That mission was

flown by Major Richard Heiser of the Strategic Air Command.

MAN: The flight was reasonably uneventful. The navigation was always difficult. We sort of had the feeling every time we flew down there that we could be shot at. And there was always that wonder as we were flying up and down the island, whether or not someone would decide on that given day to push a button.

Just as soon as they could get the film out of the airplane, they immediately flew it to Washington, where it was processed and the photo interpreters went to work on it.

MAN: The things that are seen in this photograph are alien to that environment. In this particular photograph, you can see seven missile transporters and two missile ready tents, and you can also see the missile erectors.

In the second photograph, we were very fortunate to catch the convoy arriving at the site. And by midafternoon we had come to the conclusion that these were indeed medium-range ballistic missiles. And as we looked especially at the ground photographs taken in the streets of Moscow, they helped immensely in aiding us to come to that conclusion.

MAN: We were now instructed to proceed quickly to the White House, and arrived over there about 8:30. And the President of the United States, John F. Kennedy, wanted to see for himself the evidences. And gathered around him at that time was the Kitchen Cabinet, I guess it became known as. It consisted of Bobby Kennedy, C. Douglas Dillon, Dean Rusk, Mr. McNamara, and several others.

And I then went through my story as quickly as I could, pointing out the salient features of Soviet medium-range ballistic missile launching sites and confirming those characteristics and the location and the identity on the photography. And I would say they were thunderstruck, incredulous and thunderstruck, particularly Bobby Kennedy, who walked around the room very, very bitter about the whole thing, uttering bitter epithets, which we all could sympathize with. It was a bitter moment in history for this thing to be coming to pass.

The President was slightly unbelieving, incredulous. And at this moment in the briefing, the President turned in his chair and he looked me straight in the eye and he said to me, "Are you sure about all this?"

And I gulped and I said, "Mr. President, I am as sure of this as a photo interpreter can be sure of anything. And I think

you might agree we have not misled you on any of the myriad subjects we have reported to you to date."

He said, "That's right."

He quickly turned from me and ordered that all of Cuba be covered with multiple U-2 missions within the next seven days. And that's how the crisis began.

MAN: On Thursday, October 18, Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko came to call upon the President, an appointment which had been long scheduled. We speculated in advance that this is likely to be the big personal confrontation, and he was going to break the news to the President that missiles were in Cuba pointed at the United States, and demand some kind of action or statement from the President in response. At that time, the Soviets did not know what we knew.

In fact, Mr. Gromyko had nothing whatsoever to say about missiles in Cuba. And it required the President to bring up the subject about Soviet activities in Cuba, which elicited the same response that Soviet officials had been giving -- namely, that there were no offensive weapons in Cuba.

The President escorted Mr. Gromyko to the door, closed the door, and was both amused and angered by the extent to which Mr. Gromyko had attempted to deceive him.

FOREIGN MINISTER ANDREI GROMYKO: I think that the exchange of views, exchange of opinion between the President and myself is useful.

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KOPPEL: Continuing now our look back at the Cuban Missile Crisis. The crisis was still a secret, still a confrontation between governments. The people of the United States and of the Soviet Union did not yet know that their governments were moving swiftly toward actions that could well bring war.

The week of discovery was over. Now it was time for direct talk and action. McGeorge Bundy knew the choices.

MCGEORGE BUNDY: Well, there was a wide range of possibilities as to what we might do, all the way from doing nothing, which was discarded pretty early, to using the occasion for forcing a showdown and removing Castro, which was the preference, certainly, of some, perhaps especially in the Pentagon. But fairly quickly, from the point of view of the President and his closest advisers, it narrowed down to a choice

between an air strike with conventional weapons, iron bombs, on the missile sites, or a naval blockade, which for political and legal reasons came to be called a quarantine.

SORENSEN: I remember very well the advice which former Secretary of State Dean Acheson gave to our group one afternoon. He said the step, the only step that the United States could logically take was an air strike against the missile installations in Cuba.

"Mr. Secretary," someone said, "you know the Soviets very well. What will they do?"

He said, "I think they will undoubtedly feel they have to respond, and they will launch an air strike against our missiles in Turkey or in Italy."

"And then what will we do?"

"Well," he said, "under the Atlantic Alliance, we would then be compelled to knock out the Soviet installations inside the Soviet Union."

"And what will they do then?"

"Well, then," he said, "we hope by that time cooler heads will prevail and people can talk."

A shudder went through the room. No one felt that by the time there had been that kind of exchange cooler heads would prevail at all.

DEAN RUSK: Fortunately, President Kennedy had ice water in his veins during that week. He took the time to look at all the factors, to box the compass of all possibilities, to hear from the points of view from all those in this group. And, of course, he undoubtedly thought a lot about it just on his own, because this was one of those crises where when all the advice is in, the President is in a lonely position. He has to make the ultimate decision as to what we do.

MAN: The President took one last look at the air strike proposal on Sunday morning, the day before his speech. And on that Sunday he talked with General Sweeney, who was one of the Air Force commanders on the tactical air side, and found that the kind of air strike that the Air Force was recommending was neither all that surgical, quite a large-scale event, and they did not give assurance that all the missiles or missile sites would be put out of operation.

So he went with quarantine, which had a number of

advantages. The most important, certainly to Bob Kenedy, was that it did not require that we begin with a kind of small-scale version of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, a sudden surprise air attack with inevitable destruction and loss of life.

PIERRE SALINGER: There were two newspapers that had gotten wind of the situation, that it involved Cuba. They may not have known about the existence of missiles in Cuba, but they knew there was some confrontation underway with Cuba. One was the New York Times, the other was the Washington Post. They were going to publish Monday morning that information. In both cases, they were kept from publishing, or decided not to publish it after personal phone calls were made by President Kennedy.

We had held the thing a secret up till that time. But President Kennedy wanted to speak to the nation as soon as the American ships that were going to conduct the quarantine or the blockade of Cuba were on station. And it was determined that he could go on the air at 7:00 P.M. on October 22nd.

PRESIDENT KENNEDY: I call upon Chairman Khrushchev to halt and eliminate this clandestine, reckless and provocative threat to world peace and the stable relations between our two nations. I call upon him, further, 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 has an opportunity now to move the world back from the abyss of destruction.

TRANSLATOR: But what of our weapons is for offensive use? It never has been, because we have never had aggressive intentions against anyone.

SOVIET NEWSMAN: Persons responsible for the policy of the United States have got to think what their foolhardy actions could lead to if a thermonuclear war was let loose. If the road is not barred to the aggressive policy of the American government, then the people of the United States, like other peoples, will have to pay the price of millions of lives for such a policy.

RUSK: There were some tense moments there over a period of some hours when Soviet vessels that we were prepared to stop were getting up to the quarantine line. On one occasion President Kennedy pulled that quarantine line somewhat further south to give a little more time for longer thoughts to prevail.

You know, the Chinese have an ancient military doctrine that you should not completely surround your enemy. If you do that, that makes him fight too hard. You must always leave him a route of escape.

SORENSEN: President Kennedy knew that the peace of the world, and perhaps the survival of the world, were at stake in this confrontation. And he was going to make certain that no accident, no miscalculation, no inept or hot-headed move on the part of some local commander precipitated a war that could otherwise be avoided.

There was tension because the blockade went into effect and there was no sign whatsoever that the Soviet ships were slowing down, much less stopping.

MAN: And along about Wednesday, the first Soviet ship stopped in the water and did not dodge the blockade line. And that was the point that I recollected where Dean Rusk said, "We're eyeball-to-eyeball, and I think the other side just blinked."

RUSK: Actually, that came from a children's game that we used to play here in Georgia when I was a very small boy. You'd put yourself about a foot apart and stare into each other's eyes, and the first fellow who blinked lost the game.

I might add that that was almost the only leak during my eight years in London that truly angered me. Because here we were in the middle of a very tense crisis where any consideration of face or prestige might have made a difference. And for some stupid colleague to leak that remark under those circumstances I thought was unforgivable.

MAN: The Soviet tanker which was intercepted shortly after 8:00 o'clock Thursday morning by a U.S. naval vessel was the Bucharest, en route from Russia to Cuba with petroleum. This is the first and only intercept to date in the Cuban quarantine. The Bucharest was not boarded because the Navy was satisfied it carried nothing but oil.

Meanwhile, our continuing surveillance reveals that the work by the Soviet technicians on missile sites in Cuba is proceeding at the same rapid rate.

MAN: When the Soviets arrived in Cuba, they lived in tents. And at the MRBM launch site, we could see indications that they were planning to stay awhile, because here we see permanent quarters under construction. Here we see the stacks of lumber and building material.

This is the nuclear warhead bunker under construction. And over here we can see the launch site.

AMBASSADOR STEVENSON: All right, sir. Let me ask you one simple question. Do you, Ambassador Zorin, deny that the

USSR has placed and is placing medium- and intermediate-range missiles and sites in Cuba? Yes or no? Don't wait for the translation. Yes or no?

AMBASSADOR ZORIN [translated]: I am not -- I am not in an American courtroom, sir. And therefore I do not wish to answer a question that is put to me in the fashion in which a prosecutor does. In due course, sir, you will have your reply.

AMBASSADOR STEVENSON: I'm prepared to wait for my answer until hell freezes over, if that's your decision.

MAN: We all were saying we must -- regardless of what we do now, we must prepare to invade. We had about around 250,000 men, mostly in Florida, but in -- I'd say in the Southeastern states. Most of those were Army because of the invasion problem. And the Army had two airborne divisions and one armored division ready to go for D-Day.

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KOPPEL: The Cuban Missile Crisis had entered its most dangerous stage, a quarter million fighting men ready to invade Cuba. In the air, America's strategic bomber force dispersed over Canada, armed with nuclear bombs, hours away from targets in Cuba and the Soviet Union. War, big or small, we were ready. Then the first clear break.

Ted Sorensen remembers the night.

SORENSEN: On Friday night, October 26th, a new message had come in from Khrushchev. It appeared to be personally written by the Chairman. It had that certain emotional rambling nature which we had found in his confidential messages over the past year. But it had in it what appeared to be the elements of a solution.

RUSK: John Scali played a very useful role. He was in touch with a member of the Soviet Embassy whom we had judged to be a member of the KGB.

JOHN SCALI: We had lunch at the Occidental restaurant, which is a historic eating place only a few blocks from the White House. He came immediately to the point and said, "Could you find out from your high Administration sources what they would think of a proposal for settling the crisis which would include the withdrawal of all Soviet missiles sent to Cuba, inspection by the United Nations as this was being done, and a public pledge by Moscow never to reintroduce such offensive weapons into the Cuba area or the Western Hemisphere again? Would President Kennedy, in turn," he asked, "be willing to pledge publicly on behalf of

the United States that he would not invade Cuba?"

I recognized this as an amazing Soviet backdown, but I said nothing except that I didn't know, but I thought that perhaps this is a proposition that could be discussed. He urged me to do this immediately.

RUSK: And John Scali's private talks with that particular individual seemed to confirm, through that back channel, through that under-the-cover channel, what was being said to us officially.

SORENSEN: Saturday, October 27th, was the tensest and ultimately the most decisive day of the entire crisis. Another message came in from Khrushchev, this time by public communication, in order to speed its delivery, he said. And this was a totally different deal that he was proposing, requiring that the United States pull its missiles out of Turkey in response to the Soviet Union pulling its missiles out of Cuba. And the fact is that the missiles in Turkey were outmoded, unreliable, and due for replacement by Polaris submarines in the Mediterranean. In fact, the President thought he had ordered that some time earlier.

SALINGER: Several conflicting and inconsistent proposals have been made by the USSR within the last 24 hours, including the one just made public in Moscow. As an urgent preliminary to consideration of any proposals, work on the Cuban bases must stop, offensive weapons must be rendered inoperable, shipment of offensive weapons to Cuba must cease.

SORENSEN: Then bad news began to come in droves. One of our U-2 planes flying over Cuba was shot down by a Soviet ground-to-air missile. And we had previously determined that such an event would require a response, an attack by the United States upon the Soviet missile downing our U-2 plane.

Then we heard that the Soviet ships had once again started to steam toward Cuba, instead of lying idle out in the Atlantic.

MAN: That afternoon we start receiving reports from the low-altitude pilots that they were being fired upon by antiaircraft and small-arms weapons. We immediately looked at the photographs as soon as they were received, and we could confirm that, indeed, men were running to the antiaircraft guns, as seen in this photograph. We could also confirm that the MRBM sites were being covered over. But the third thing, which was the most astonishing of all, is that the Soviets had surged the construction of the MRBM sites, and now we had 24 medium-range ballistic missile sites that were operational.

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MAN: On the final Saturday, the 27th of October, a U.S. U-2 is discovered to be flying over the Soviet Union, over an area in which there are important Soviet targets, and in an unauthorized fashion. Khrushchev becomes alarmed, thinking that this is a last-minute observation of Soviet targets before the U.S. strikes. Soviet fighter planes are scrambled. They may -- perhaps to shoot down or perhaps to escort out of the Soviet Union this U-2. Someone comes in and informs President Kennedy in the Oval Office of this. And first there's a look of shock on his face. But then he rocks back in his chair and says, "Well, there's always some son of a bitch who doesn't get the word."

SORENSEN: By this time, those who later would be called hawks were in the ascendancy once again. They were disappointed that the President had not immediately ordered an air strike against the missile, the Soviet ground-to-air missile which had knocked out our U-2. They were impatient to move ahead with the air strike and invasion of Cuba because they were certain that the quarantine was a failure.

Ultimately, the President ended the debate on how to respond to the two letters by asking Robert Kennedy and me to prepare a draft to letter number one, adopting the tactic which we had urged -- namely, ignoring letter number two.

JOHN ROLFSON: Here is a special bulletin. This is John Rolfson at the White House in Washington.

President Kennedy and Premier Khrushchev, in an exchange of letters, have apparently reached an agreement on some principles for the settlement of the Cuban crisis. The first thing that needs to be done, however, says President Kennedy, is for work to cease on offensive missile bases in Cuba. The continuation of this threat, says President Kennedy, would surely lead to an intensification of the Cuban crisis and a grave risk to the peace of the world.

SALINGER: It was decided that those of us, many of the people who had been working around the clock at the White House for five-six days, hadn't even gone home, should go home, at least, have dinner with their families, and that we would all convene the next morning. And the decision was made at that evening meeting on Saturday that if no stop had come in the work to make these things operational -- they were very close to operational -- at the Sunday morning meeting we would decide on the next step that we would take in the missile crisis, which was definitely an escalation of the crisis, either an air strike against Cuba or an invasion against Cuba. And, of course, that would have brought us closer yet to the possibility of nuclear confrontation.

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SORENSEN: After the meeting of the EXCOM had recessed for the evening, the President asked a few of us to come into his office to instruct Robert Kennedy about his forthcoming meeting with Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin, in which Robert Kennedy was to deliver to Dobrynin a copy of the President's reply to Chairman Khrushchev that Robert Kennedy and I had drafted that afternoon.

MAN: Robert Kennedy went to visit Dobrynin, and he said, "Let me communicate to you clearly the following things. In effect, there's the stick and there's carrot. The stick is to communicate clearly to the Soviet Union that early next week we will conduct an air strike which will destroy the Soviet missiles in Cuba. The carrot is that we will withdraw our Jupiter missiles from Turkey, but privately and after the missile crisis is successfully withdrawn."

SORENSEN: We could not publicly announce our intentions to withdraw those missiles from Turkey because that would seem to be undermining the alliance, it would require the consent of all members of the alliance, it was likely to create a storm both in Europe and at home, and that therefore that would simply be a private understanding which the President was fully prepared and able to implement, but which he would have to deny and indeed cancel the whole deal if the Soviets ever referred to it publicly.

MAN: Saturday night was not a happy night. But it was quite the other way around on the Sunday morning, when I was able to call the President and tell him about Khrushchev's message.

SOVIET NEWSMAN: I respect and trust the statement made in your message of October 27th, 1962 that no attack will be made on Cuba, that there will be no invasion, either by the United States or other countries in the Western Hemisphere, as was pointed out in your message.

Then, the motives which prompted us to render Cuba assistance of this kind no longer exist. Therefore we have instructed our officers to take proper measures to stop the construction of installations, dismantle them, and bring them back to the Soviet Union.

SORENSEN: We lived in 1962, as I'm sorry to say we live in 1982, under the terrible paradox that the only way to prevent nuclear war is to risk nuclear war. A President who is going to prevent Soviet missiles from being launched against the United States must be prepared to launch missiles against the Soviet Union. That is, and was then, the most fragile basis for a peace imaginable.

RUSK: Whatever one thinks of the Soviet Union -- and I

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abhor so many of their policies in this postwar period -- at the end of the day, we and they have still got to find a way to inhabit this speck of dust in the universe. So we have to be a little careful. And that's what the Cuban Missile Crisis means to me.

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KOPPEL: Joining us now to discuss the aftershock of those 13 days in October some 20 years ago is former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.

Dr. Kissinger, the revisionist thinking these days, or the revisionist history of those events is that it had less to do with the nuclear strategic superiority of the United States 20 years ago -- that is, the Soviet backing down -- than the overall conventional superiority in this region. Your response.

HENRY KISSINGER: My view is it had to do with both. We had a tremendous conventional superiority in this region. But the Soviet Union had a tremendous conventional superiority in Europe. They had Berlin surrounded. They had the great capacity against Iran and in many other places around the world. The Soviet Union could not compensate for our threat against Cuba by mounting a similar threat, for example, against Berlin, for fear of triggering an American nuclear attack under circumstances where the Soviet Union had about 50 delivery vehicles and we had 4000, and the Soviet delivery vehicles would take ten hours to fuel.

So I think it was our nuclear superiority and our conventional superiority that accounted for the victory.

KOPPEL: How close did the world come to a nuclear war at that point? Again, the conventional wisdom is that we were that close.

KISSINGER: First of all, let me say I think that the actual technical handling of the crisis was extraordinarily well done. Within the terms that -- within the objectives that the Administration then in office had for itself.

I do not believe we came that close to a confront -- to an ultimate showdown, because the balance of power was overwhelmingly in our favor. The Soviet Union had made a horrendous mistake. It had misjudged President Kennedy on the basis of previous crises in which they thought he had backed down from threats he had made. He restored that psychological balance and handled the crisis during that week very effectively. But I do not believe that the Soviet Union ever seriously considered going to nuclear war when the balance of forces was so horrendously against it.

KOPPEL: What would have happened, do you think, if the Soviets had been successful in keeping those intermediate-range missiles in Cuba? One of the questions that's always, I must confess, puzzled me is what advantage would it have been to them, what difference is it whether the United States is attacked by ICBMs from the Soviet Union or by intermediate-range missiles from Cuba?

KISSINGER: Well, at that time the Soviet Union had, at most, 50 intercontinental ballistic missiles. They were liquid-fueled. It took them ten hours to get ready. They had something like 75 or 90 missiles in Cuba. So they would have more than doubled their capability against the United States.

Secondly, the symbolic effect, after a series of threats that had been made over Laos, over Berlin, the building the Berlin Wall, of them installing Soviet missiles in the Western Hemisphere would have been quite catastrophic. So that I believe that the political impact would have been greater than the military impact.

The risks the Soviets were running were out of proportion to the purely military objectives to be gained. But the political gains would have been enormous.

KOPPEL: Another piece of conventional wisdom, and that is that in the wake of being forced to back down by President Kennedy in 1962, the Soviets then decided, "This will never happen to us again." And indeed, the enormous strategic nuclear buildup in which the Soviet Union has engaged was the direct outgrowth of that particular event.

KISSINGER: I think this is substantially true. I think that the Soviet Union learned quite the opposite lesson from the one with which you started your questioning -- namely, that they would never again be in such a position of strategic inferiority that they could not use their local forces at some other point to counter an American threat, say, in the Western Hemisphere. And I believe that the Soviet missile buildup was vastly accelerated after the Cuban crisis.

KOPPEL: So, in that sense, it may have been one of the most disastrous events in recent memory.

KISSINGER: Well, the Soviets always had the capability to engage in such a missile buildup. And after any confrontation in which they became conscious of their inferiority, they were likely to engage in it.

I think the mistake that we made in that period was that it took us nearly ten years after they started their buildup to

believe that they were really engaged in a massive buildup. As late as 1965, Secretary McNamara was saying that he did not believe, in his public statement, he did not believe that the Soviet Union would ever attempt to match us in numbers. When I came into office in 1969, the intelligence briefings were still highly ambiguous on the question of whether the Soviet Union was attempting to match us in numbers.

But in any event, over a period of 20 years, the evolution of technology would have tended towards some form of parity. We could not maintain the advantage we had in 1962 indefinitely. And even without the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Soviet Union would certainly have engaged in a buildup, maybe over a longer period of time.

KOPPEL: We're going to take a break now. But when we come back I'd like to talk to you about some of the lessons, indeed, that have been learned and some of the aftershock that may still be reverberating from the Cuban Missile Crisis of 20 years ago.

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KOPPEL: Back once again with former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.

Dr. Kissinger, what was learned from the Cuban Missile Crisis in terms of crisis management? To what degree did you, for example, and the Presidents you served go back to the minutes of those fateful days in 1962 and say, "This is something from which we can learn"?

KISSINGER: I was always very impressed, and I'm sure the Presidents I served were impressed, by the careful preparation prior to the unfolding of the crisis. One doesn't always have that leisure. One doesn't always have that possibility. But I think that the meetings of that group before President Kennedy's speech were very careful, very instrumental in the skillful handling of it. And I think that had an impact which we, at least in the crises in which I was involved, attempted to emulate.

The outcome of the crisis, I always thought, even from the very beginning, I did not think we achieved what the military situation would have warranted. I believe we should have achieved a clearer definition of what was prohibited in Cuba. There was a vast hole left about what kind of airplanes, with what kind of weapons could be based in Cuba. There was...

KOPPEL: You're talking about the so-called deal that came out of it.

KISSINGER: The so-called deal that emerged from it.

KOPPEL: There is some -- and again, this may be just one of the legends that's grown up about this whole event. There is some suggestion that the Soviets were prepared to do everything that they finally did without the withdrawal of those missiles from Turkey and Italy, but then they read an article that I believe Walter Lippmann wrote in which he proposed that as a solution to the crisis, and they then came back and said, "Ah-ha. Not a bad idea."

KISSINGER: I believe that the Soviets were prepared to do everything that they ultimately did, and probably go a little further in giving guarantees about the reintroduction of any nuclear-capable weapons without our having offered this.

But I also must say it's easy to say this after the event, when you are not in the hotseat, as the President and his advisers were.

KOPPEL: To what degree was that the point in history, if it's possible, indeed, even to pinpoint something at which we say -- at least the notion of military parity between the United States and the Soviet Union came into being?

KISSINGER: Well, I think that the two sides drew entirely opposite conclusions, and that from this point of view, it may be [unintelligible]. The United States drew the conclusion that the Soviet Union had learned that nuclear confrontations were too dangerous and that an era of peace could begin. And when it was followed by the nuclear test ban, we thought that the Soviet Union had learned our lesson of equality.

The Soviet Union, on the other hand, drew the conclusion that you have quoted, that never again must it be in the same position, and frantically built up its strategic forces, which had the objective consequence not so much of being able to threaten our strategic forces, but of liberating its local forces for the kinds of pressures that they were not able to engage in previously.

So that the '70s saw a period of Soviet political-military expansion that may have been made in part possible by some of the complacency that was engendered by the Cuban Missile Crisis.

The second aspect was that under the particular conditions of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the slow escalation, the careful communication, the manipulation of all aspects of policy was very effective; and, I repeat, very brilliantly done. But we drew from it the conclusion that this was a general rule that

could be applied to all circumstances. And I have the impression that when the same people, more or less, got involved in the Vietnam War and attempted to apply the same methods of gradual escalation, careful communication, indirect messages, that when they were up against somebody determined to prevail, that they slid into a morass that became more and more unmanageable, because they overlooked that there was a time pressure on the Soviets in Cuba, there was not the same time pressure on the Vietnamese. And the methods that were appropriate in the Caribbean was not appropriate in Vietnam and other crises.

KOPPEL: Also because of a difference in geography.

KISSINGER: A difference in geography. And much more was at stake for the other side in Vietnam than was in Cuba. We were not facing a superpower that defer the showdown to another day.

For all of these [unintelligible], I have the impression that some of the lessons learned were contributing to some of our difficulties later on.

KOPPEL: So, in summary, then, perhaps a tactical victory, but not an undiluted triumph over the long haul.

KISSINGER: I think a brilliantly-handled tactical victory, but with major flaws in its conclusion and with major penalties when we tried to apply the lessons as general principles.

KOPPEL: Dr. Kissinger, thank you.