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Article in *Journal of Latin American Studies* · March 1990

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Journal of Latin American Studies, Vol. 22, No. 1. (Feb., 1990), pp. 115-142.

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Cuba and the Missile Crisis*

PHILIP BRENNER

On 16 October 1962, President John F. Kennedy learned that the Soviet Union was building bases in Cuba for ballistic missiles that could destroy major US cities. In the days that followed, US officials focused nearly all their attention on strategies for removing the Soviet missiles, on Soviet motives, and on the Soviet Union's reaction to the naval quarantine. Cuba was the locus of this most dramatic superpower confrontation, but Cuban perceptions, motives, and reactions were largely ignored.

Analyses of the missile crisis have also tended to frame it as a US-Soviet standoff, in which each of these two nuclear powers had to calculate its strategy principally in terms of the other.¹ Cuba has been accorded little regard as a meaningful actor in the crisis.² It is considered to have

* An earlier version of this article was presented at the 1989 Annual Meeting of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations. I appreciate the assistance and comments of Scott Armstrong, James G. Blight, Laurence Chang, Elizabeth Cohn, C. Douglas Dillon, Humphrey Johnson and James A. Nathan, and the anonymous referees of the *Journal of Latin American Studies*. Invaluable assistance was provided by the National Security Archive. The ARCA Foundation provided support for travel.

¹ The perspective articulated by G. T. Allison. *Essence of Decision* (Boston, 1971), p. 39, characterises most approaches: 'For thirteen days in October 1962, the United States and the Soviet Union stood "eyeball to eyeball"...The United States was firm but forbearing. The Soviet Union looked hard, blinked twice, and then withdrew without humiliation.' This paralleled the early analyses of the crisis. See, for example, A. M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston, 1965), ch. 30-1; R. Hilsman, *To Move a Nation* (New York, 1967), chs. 13-16.

² However, most analysts do give some credence to the claim that both the Soviet Union and Cuba viewed the missiles as a deterrent against a US invasion of Cuba. References to this motive can be found, for example, in Allison, *Essence of Decision*, pp. 47-50, 239; L. H. Brune, *The Missile Crisis of October 1962* (Claremont, CA, 1985), p. 28; H. S. Dinerstein, *The Making of a Missile Crisis: October 1962* (Baltimore, 1976), pp. 176-7; J. I. Dominguez, *To Make the World Safe for Revolution: Cuba's Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 35-6; R. L. Garthoff, *Reflections on the Cuban Missile Crisis*, Revised Edition (Washington, D. C., 1989), pp. 21-2; H. L. Matthews, *Revolution in Cuba* (New York, 1975), p. 208; T. G. Paterson, 'Fixation with Cuba: The Bay of Pigs, Missile Crisis, and Covert War Against Castro', in Thomas G. Paterson (ed.), *Kennedy's Quest for Victory* (New York, 1989), pp. 136-41; T. Szulc, *Fidel: A Critical Portrait* (New York, 1986), pp. 578-9. For a good discussion of the possible Soviet

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been a country with negligible power to affect the crisis, because it did not control the missiles. More frequently, it is seen as an outpost of the Soviet Union with little autonomy. As a consequence, Cuba's behaviour and perspective during the missile crisis generally have been treated as only peripheral to an understanding of any important issues.

New information about the missile crisis has come to light now which challenges the prevailing view about Cuba's importance.³ It indicates that Cuba was very much a part of the Cuban missile crisis, and it suggests that our ability to learn from the crisis is fundamentally impaired without a full appreciation of the way Cuba affected the history of this unprecedented confrontation. This may be seen most readily by examining Cuba's perceptions, motives and behaviour during the three periods of the crisis: before 22 October, when President Kennedy confronted Cuba and the Soviet Union; from 22 October to 28 October, when Premier Nikita Khrushchev agreed to remove the ballistic missiles from Cuba; and from 28 October to 20 November, when implementation of the Kennedy–Khrushchev agreement remained problematic and military forces remained on alert.

Before 22 October 1962

If the United States had not been bent on liquidating the Cuban revolution there would not have been an October crisis. This was first demonstrated with economic aggression and then with the organization of subversive forces against Cuba, the Bay of Pigs invasion. Were we right or wrong to fear direct invasion? Didn't the United States invade the Dominican Republic? Didn't the United States bomb North Vietnam? Didn't they carry on an exhausting war for years in South Vietnam? How could we be sure that we would not be invaded? And this thought determined the setting up of strategic missiles in Cuba. (Fidel Castro)⁴

motives for placing missiles, see J. G. Blight and D. A. Welch, *On the Brink* (New York, 1989), pp. 116–17, 294–6. An alternate list is provided by Brune, *Missile Crisis*, pp. 15–32.

³ Much new data have become available because of three major conferences on the missile crisis. Edited transcripts and analyses of the first two conferences can be found in Blight and Welch, *On the Brink*. The first included nearly all the living members of the ExComm (Executive Committee of the National Security Council, formed by President Kennedy on 16 Oct. 1962) and the second included many of these men and three Soviet experts. Transcripts of the third conference – held in Moscow in Jan. 1989, with participation by US, Soviet and Cuban delegates – will be available in D. A. Welch and B. J. Allyn (eds.), *Proceedings of the Moscow Conference on the Cuban Missile Crisis, January 27–28, 1989*, Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard University (forthcoming). See also Bruce J. Allyn et al., 'Moscow, Havana, and the Cuban Missile Crisis,' *International Security* (Dec. 1989).

⁴ F. Mankiewicz and K. Jones, *With Fidel* (New York, 1975), pp. 150–1. Castro has held

Cuban leaders believed in 1962 that the Kennedy Administration had reacted to the 1961 Bay of Pigs débâcle by preparing for a much larger invasion of Cuba, one that would have the full intent of overthrowing the Cuban government and would rely on US military forces. Soviet leaders seem to have shared the Cuban judgement, though it is not clear if the Soviets arrived at this view independently or largely as a result of Cuban intelligence and analyses.⁵ This belief framed the Cuban interpretation of each hostile US action during the eighteen months after the Bay of Pigs, and led inexorably to the conclusion that an invasion was coming.

One major action that fuelled Cuban suspicions was the January 1962 suspension of Cuba's membership in the Organisation of American States (OAS). Sergo Mikoyan, son of the late Soviet First Deputy Premier Anastas Mikoyan, explained that this was seen in Havana as 'a preparatory diplomatic action taken for the invasion'.⁶ Shortly thereafter, Castro received a report from Aleksei I. Adzhubei, the editor of *Izvestia* and Premier Nikita Khrushchev's son-in-law, about an interview Adzhubei had had with President Kennedy. The Soviet editor reportedly derived a strong impression from the interview that an invasion was being planned.⁷ A few weeks later, in April, Miro Cardona, head of the Cuban Revolutionary Council (the would-be government-in-exile), told journalists that President Kennedy had indicated to him in a White House meeting that the Administration wanted to invade Cuba with an exile army headed by Cardona.⁸ At about the same time, the United States

several positions in Cuba. During the missile crisis he was Prime Minister of Cuba. In 1974, at the time of the Mankiewicz-Jones interview, he was First Secretary of the Communist Party and President of Cuba.

⁵ Allison, *Essence of Decision*, p. 239; Blight and Welch, *On the Brink*, pp. 249-50, 294-5; Garthoff, *Reflections* (1989), pp. 6-10; H. L. Matthews, *Fidel Castro* (New York, 1970), p. 227; Szulc, *Fidel*, pp. 578-9.

⁶ Sergo Mikoyan, 'La Crisis del Caribe, en retrospectiva', *América Latina*, no. 4 (April 1988), p. 45; also comments made by Jorge Risquet, head of the Cuban delegation at the Moscow conference, 27 Jan. 1989 (during the conference). Certainly, Soviet leaders relied on several sources of intelligence to develop their analysis of an impending US invasion. While the Soviet conclusion seems to have coincided with the Cuban assessment, it is not clear how much influence the Cuban view had. See Soviet comments in Blight and Welch, *On the Brink*, pp. 238, 249, 258. On the expulsion, see W. Smith, *The Closest of Enemies* (New York, 1987), p. 80; M. H. Morley, *Imperial State and Revolution: The United States and Cuba, 1952-1986* (New York, 1987), pp. 155-8.

⁷ Carlos Franqui, *Family Portrait With Fidel*, trans. Alfred MacAdam (New York, 1984), p. 185, claims that Adzhubei gave Castro the report in person. Matthews, *Revolution in Cuba*, p. 208, writes that Castro received Adzhubei's information from a copy of a report submitted to Khrushchev that was sent to Havana.

⁸ H. Thomas, *The Cuban Revolution* (New York, 1977), p. 607; Matthews, *Revolution in Cuba*, p. 208. For a report of earlier comments by Cardona see Dinerstein, *Making of a Missile Crisis*, p. 141.

undertook two large military exercises in the Caribbean near Cuba. The first, Lantphibex 1-62, involved a marine assault using the island of Vieques off the coast of Puerto Rico. The second, called QUICK KICK, was a massive set of naval manoeuvres – with 79 ships and more than 40,000 troops – off the southeastern US coast. Cuban leaders watched these events with growing concern.⁹

Meanwhile, the United States attempted to extend its economic embargo by threatening to cut off aid to countries that traded with Cuba, by refusing to purchase goods that had the possibility of containing any Cuban materials and by pressuring US allies to end commercial ties with Cuba.¹⁰ A recently declassified progress report about the economic campaign against Cuba confirmed that ‘diplomatic means were used to frustrate Cuban trade negotiations in Israel, Jordan, Iran, Greece, and possibly Japan’.¹¹ These activities were interpreted by Cuban officials as part of a well developed plan to destabilise and destroy their government. In fact, the efforts were coordinated by an interagency working group chaired by a State Department representative.¹²

Cuban unease was reinforced by the campaign that may have been the most threatening portent of an invasion. The Kennedy Administration was engaged in a well orchestrated, multifaceted plan – named Operation Mongoose – to ‘bring about the revolt of the Cuban people...[which] will overthrow the Communist regime and institute a new government with which the United States can live in peace’.¹³ Recently declassified documents about Operation Mongoose reveal that the planners recognised that the ultimate success of destabilising the Cuban government would

⁹ Garthoff, *Reflections* (1989), p. 6; L. Chang (ed.), *Chronology of the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Washington, D.C., Jan. 1989) p. 42; interviews with Cuban officials; ‘Moscow Missile Crisis Conference, 27–9 January 1989: Official Cuban Transcription,’ pp. 35–6. (Hereafter cited as ‘Cuban Transcript.’)

¹⁰ Morley, *Imperial State and Revolution*, pp. 191–202; D. Rich, *The US Embargo Against Cuba: Its Evolution and Enforcement*, A Study Prepared for the Commonwealth Countries (Washington, D.C., July 1988), pp. 24–37.

¹¹ Brig. Gen. Lansdale, ‘Memorandum for the Special Group (Augmented) – Review of Operation Mongoose,’ 25 July 1962, p. 5; classified Top Secret; partially declassified 5 Jan. 1989; available at the National Security Archive (Washington, D.C.) which obtained it through the Freedom of Information Act. (Hereafter cited as ‘25 July 1962 Memorandum’.)

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹³ Brig. Gen. E. G. Lansdale, ‘The Cuba Project’, 18 Jan. 1962 (Program Review for The President and ten others: hereafter cited as ‘The Cuba Project’), p. 1; classified Top Secret; partially declassified 5 Jan. 1989; available at the National Security Archive (Washington, D.C.), which obtained it through the Freedom of Information Act. Also see: Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, *Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders*, An Interim Report, No. 94–465, US Senate, 94th Cong., 1st Sess., 20 Nov. 1975 (hereafter cited as *Assassination Report*), p. 139.

probably have required the use of US military forces.¹⁴ In an incredible historical irony, the target date for the revolt was set as October 1962, when the missile crisis did occur. Notably, though, planning for the revolt began before either the Cubans or Soviets ever discussed missiles.

Operation Mongoose was the largest operation that the CIA had ever undertaken. Four hundred agents, and many more 'assets' and operatives, were assigned the task of destroying the Cuban government. Run out of headquarters in Miami, it deployed paid Cuban exiles on raids into Cuba from South Florida, Puerto Rico and Central America. General Edward Lansdale, chief of operations for Mongoose, reported that their actions included 'blowing up bridges to stop communications and blowing up certain production plants.'¹⁵ It also involved the destruction of sugar mills and fields, oil facilities and transportation equipment; the sabotage of machinery and replacement parts; damage to sugar and tobacco exports; and the supplying of anti-government guerrillas. By the end of July 1962 the CIA claimed to have infiltrated 11 teams into Cuba to support 'guerrilla forces', and that 'guerrilla warfare could be activated with a good chance of success, if assisted properly'.¹⁶ Their efforts were supported by clandestine radio broadcasts to Cuba on a station called Radio Americas, the successor to Radio Swan which had supported exiles in the Bay of Pigs invasion. The Cubans seem to have viewed the exile attacks as integrally coupled to the several attempts that were made during this period to assassinate Castro.¹⁷

Sergo Mikoyan explained the logical link in 1988, by arguing that there would have been no reason to assassinate Castro only to have him replaced by Che Guevara. The logic was that Castro's death would be followed by an invasion of US troops.¹⁸ Cuban officials did not believe that the exiles themselves would overthrow the Cuban government, because Cuba was far better armed in 1962 than it had been in April 1961.¹⁹ If the United States were unaware of this fact, and there is little evidence that Cuba believed US planners were so badly informed, Castro underlined it with an interview in *Pravda* in January 1962.²⁰

There is some indication from recent interviews with Cuban officials that Cuban agents had infiltrated the Mongoose sabotage teams, and that

¹⁴ 'The Cuba Project,' p. 2.

¹⁵ Quoted in *Assassination Report*, p. 146; also see pp. 139-47.

¹⁶ '25 July 1962 Memorandum', p. 5. Also see Morley, *Imperial State and Revolution*, pp. 149-50; A. M. Schlesinger, Jr., *Robert Kennedy and His Times* (New York, 1978), pp. 512-17, 575; N. Fuentes, *Nos Impusieron La Violencia* (Havana, 1986); Paterson, 'Fixation with Cuba', pp. 137-8.

¹⁷ *Assassination Report*, pp. 71-135. Also see Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy*, pp. 517-37.

¹⁸ Mikoyan, 'La Crisis del Caribe', p. 45. ¹⁹ 'Cuban Transcript', pp. 33-5.

²⁰ Dinerstein, *Making of a Missile Crisis*, p. 161.

Cuba was aware of the common talk among the exile groups about plans for an invasion. However, there is no information yet available about Cuban knowledge of the overall Mongoose plan itself, or about the precise bases for Cuban assessments that the United States was involved in pre-invasion activities. Similarly, it is not known how they assessed each aspect of Operation Mongoose: the sabotage, the psychological operations, the radio transmissions, the diplomatic offensive, and the various military manoeuvres, some of which may have been intended only as psychological ploys. What we know is that Cuban leaders generally anticipated an invasion, that Mongoose activities were a significant factor in shaping this assessment and that events in early 1962 almost certainly stimulated the Cuban decision in May to accept Soviet ballistic missiles on the island.

Cuban fears of a US invasion in the weeks just before the United States discovered the missiles may have been related to what now appear to be real threats posed by the United States. The recently declassified *CINCLANT Historical Account of Cuban Crisis 1962* describes a series of actions taken by the US Atlantic Command beginning on 1 October that ‘accelerated planning and preparations to increase force readiness posture for the execution of CINCLANT OPLAN 312-62’.²¹ OPLAN 312-62 was one of three contingency plans to attack Cuba. It ‘provided for a variety of requirements ranging from strikes against a single target to wide spread [*sic*] air attacks throughout Cuba’. By 3 October, prior to the discovery of the missiles, orders had been given to implement OPLAN 312-62 fully and to have a blockade of Cuba in place by 20 October.²²

We do not know how aware Cuban leaders were of the preparations for OPLAN 312-62 that were undertaken before Cuba decided to accept ballistic missiles. There is no evidence that they knew about any of the contingency plans, two of which – OPLAN 314 and 316 – described an invasion by US forces that ‘would lead to the overthrow of the Castro Government’.²³ Presumably, the accelerated activity contributed to Cuban statements between 1 October and 22 October that invasion preparations were under way. Indeed, on 6 October US forces were directed to increase ‘readiness to execute the 314 and 316 Plans as well as 312’.²⁴ This may

²¹ R. L. Dennison, *CINCLANT Historical Account of Cuban Crisis 1962*, Serial: 000119/J09H, 29 April 1963, The Atlantic Command, Norfolk, Virginia, p. 153. (Hereafter cited as *CINCLANT Account*.) This document is available at the National Security Archive.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 17, 39–40. For an insightful article about the significance of the *CINCLANT Account*, see James G. Hershberg, ‘Before the “Missiles of October”: Did Kennedy Plan Military Strike Against Cuba?’, *Diplomatic History* (forthcoming). Also see his ‘Before the Missiles of October’, *The Boston Phoenix*, 8 April 1988.

²³ *CINCLANT Account*, pp. 20–1.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

have prompted the 8 October speech by Cuban President Osvaldo Dorticos at the United Nations, in which he warned the United States that an invasion could have ominous consequences, and he obliquely hinted that there were nuclear weapons on the island.²⁵

However, other factors may have led the Cubans to believe an invasion was imminent before the end of 1962. An important one could have been Defence Department publicity about large scale military exercises off the coast of Puerto Rico planned for October. Named Philbriglex-62, it included an 'invasion' of Vieques in a mock overthrow of a leader named Ortsac, or 'Castro' in reverse.²⁶ On 24 August, the émigré terrorist group, Alpha 66, strafed a hotel near Havana and killed several Soviet technicians and Cubans.²⁷ The attack may have been viewed with greater importance than similar previous actions by the group, because on that day President Kennedy stated in a press conference that 'I am not for invading Cuba at this time'. He thereby left the impression that he would be for it in the near future. At about the same time, Hugh Thomas notes, the Defence Department 'announced that Cubans enrolled in the US army could be used against Cuba'.²⁸ Cuban officials were probably sensitive to the announcement, because they had been troubled when the United States began drafting Cuban exiles in late 1961.²⁹

Clearly Cuban leaders knew about the strident calls throughout September and early October, in the media and by members of Congress, for an attack against Cuba.³⁰ The weekly magazine *Bohemia* declared in an editorial on 9 September:

Never has the international situation been so full of danger for Cuba. The Yankee *metrópoli*, that has lost in the island the most precious jewel of its empire, has designed very precise schemes for the great assault...It has reproduced, after 18 months, the outward conditions that preceded the Bay of Pigs invasion.³¹

Castro said in 1974 that before 22 October

²⁵ 'Dorticos en la ONU: En Defensa de Cuba', *Bohemia*, 12 Oct. 1962, pp. 48ff; 'Excerpts From Cuban President's Speech in the UN', *New York Times*, 9 Oct. 1962, p. 14.

²⁶ Allison, *Essence of Decision*, p. 47; E. Abel, *The Missile Crisis* (Philadelphia, 1966), pp. 102-3; N. L. Cotayo, *El Bloqueo a Cuba* (Havana, 1983), pp. 314-15. The exercises began on 21 October, at which point they were in reality no longer exercises but repositioning for a possible invasion.

²⁷ Garthoff, *Reflections* (1989), pp. 30-1. ²⁸ Thomas, *Cuban Revolution*, p. 621.

²⁹ 'Cuban Transcript,' p. 35.

³⁰ Cotayo, *El Bloqueo*, pp. 308-13. For a description of some of the press and congressional demands see Thomas G. Paterson and William J. Brophy, 'October Missiles and November Elections: The Cuban Missile Crisis and American Politics, 1962', *Journal of American History*, vol. 72 (June 1986); Thomas, *Cuban Revolution*, pp. 621-2; Abel, *Missile Crisis*, pp. 12-13; Allison, *Essence of Decision*, p. 188; A. Chayes, *The Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York, 1974), pp. 8-10.

³¹ 'Cuba Está Lista Para La Batalla Decisiva', *Bohemia*, 9 Sept. 1962, pp. 58-9.

we saw certain movements in Washington...which we understood not only by instinct and smell, but by our experience with the way in which Kennedy had imposed the blockade [economic embargo]. We declared a state of alarm and mobilized our anti-aircraft weapons.³²

There are now many versions of why and how Cuba came to have Soviet missiles. But a consensus has emerged that the idea originated with the Soviets, and that it was accepted by the Cubans as an act of 'socialist solidarity' and as a means of deterring a US invasion. There are also varying accounts that describe some of the key actions taken by Cuba before 22 October, and the decisions made by the Cuban leadership.

However, there is little information about Cuban perceptions of the way in which the US officials viewed Cuba's behaviour. It may be that Cuban leaders did not care about what the United States perceived; nevertheless, even allowing for this sensitivity on the question of sovereignty, they would have needed to familiarise themselves with the attitudes of US leaders, because of the potential threat posed by the United States. We do not know, for example, how Cuban officials imagined the United States would react to the Second Declaration of Havana. In that 4 February 1962 speech Castro asserted, 'The duty of every revolutionary is to make the revolution', and he provided the basis for a policy of supporting armed struggle in Latin America.³³

It may have been that the Cuban leaders surmised that their particular behaviour did not matter to the United States anymore, that US policy was fixed on a course of overthrowing the Cuban government regardless of what it did. They seem not to have considered that US policy might be accelerated by their actions and declarations. What interpretation would be placed on the obviously increased military ties to the Soviet Union in 1962, and the stationing of IL-28 (Beagle/Mascot) light jet bombers and Komar patrol boats? The Cubans may have calculated that the United States would accept their presence in Cuba with equanimity, because the Soviets had sent them elsewhere without much reaction.³⁴

What of the missiles themselves? Presumably Cuban leaders believed that these new weapons would deter a US invasion.³⁵ But what precisely did they expect the US reaction would be? Castro told Szulc that he

³² Mankiewicz and Jones, *With Fidel*, p. 148. Exile writer Carlos Franqui, then editor of *Revolucion*, recounted that Cuba had reports on 20 October that 'all US troops in Florida were on full alert, and there was a general mobilization'. Franqui, *Family Portrait*, p. 189.

³³ F. Castro, 'The Duty of a Revolutionary is to Make the Revolution: The Second Declaration of Havana', in Martin Kenner and James Petras (eds.), *Fidel Castro Speaks* (New York, 1969), pp. 85–106 (esp. p. 104); Dominguez, *To Make the World Safe for Revolution*, pp. 115–16; H. M. Erisman, *Cuba's International Relations* (Boulder, Colo., 1985), pp. 20–1.

³⁴ Garthoff, *Reflections* (1989), pp. 111.

³⁵ Thomas, *Cuban Revolution*, p. 617; Dinerstein, *Making of a Missile Crisis*, p. 152.

expected 'a very tense situation would be created, and that there would be a crisis'.³⁶ But there is no other evidence that the Cubans anticipated such a response. The prevailing view is that neither the Cubans nor Soviets gave much thought to the US reaction, and had no contingency plan for it.³⁷ The Cubans do seem to have been surprised by President Kennedy's 22 October revelation about the missiles, although apparently they were not as complacent about the secret as the Soviets.

Indeed, Castro's 26 July speech, in which he said that Cuban weapons would be able to cause untold casualties in the United States, and Dorticos's 8 October UN speech suggest that they assumed the United States would or did know about the missiles, and that they were offering a warning to the United States. Yet military preparations appear to have been made only to counter the feared US invasion that Cuban leaders had seen coming many months earlier. There is no evidence that they connected the seeming invasion plans to their own introduction of ballistic missiles. Cuban leaders may have assumed, then, that the United States would accept the presence of missiles once they were operational, as the Soviets had accepted US missiles in Turkey.³⁸ Yet if this were the case, it would be important to know why they misinterpreted President Kennedy's two September warnings against the introduction of offensive capabilities in Cuba.³⁹

While we have an obscure picture of Cuban perceptions of US views about Cuban behaviour, our portrait of Cuba's perception about Soviet views is even fainter. We do know that relations between the two countries were strained in the early part of 1962 and that Soviet military aid was provided at a reduced level until June.⁴⁰ The Cuban leadership may have surmised that acceptance of the missiles would strengthen the

³⁶ Szulc, *Fidel*, p. 582.

³⁷ Blight and Welch, *On the Brink*, pp. 238, 251, 252, 297-9; Dinerstein, *Making of a Missile Crisis*, p. 152; Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 820.

³⁸ Castro told Tad Szulc that 'in the same way that the United States had missiles in Italy and Turkey...we had the absolutely legal right to make use of such measures in our own country'. Szulc, *Fidel*, p. 582.

³⁹ In a statement on 4 September he cautioned against the introduction of 'offensive ground-to-ground missiles in Cuba'. On the 13th he warned against Cuba becoming 'an offensive military base of significant capacity for the Soviet Union'. See: Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 171; 'The President's News Conference of September 13', *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy 1962* (Washington, D.C., 1963), pp. 674-5. One authoritative Soviet view of President Kennedy's statements - by Anatoly Gromyko, the son of the Soviet foreign minister at the time - focused only on the aspects of bellicosity in what Kennedy said, and ignored any mention of the implicit warning against placing ballistic missiles or combat troops in Cuba. See, Anatoly Gromyko, 'The Caribbean Crisis, Part 1', in Ronald R. Pope (ed.), *Soviet Views on the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Lanham, Md., 1982), pp. 165-7.

⁴⁰ R. L. Garthoff, *Reflections on the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Washington, D.C., 1987), p. 8 (fn. 9); Dominguez, *To Make the World Safe for Revolution*, p. 36.

relationship. On the other hand, they may have viewed the missiles as an offer they could not refuse on pain of straining the relationship even further. We know that the Cubans wanted to be included under the Soviet nuclear umbrella in 1962, and were seeking a way to sharpen Khrushchev's vague 1960 threat to let missiles fly if the United States were to attack Cuba.⁴¹ They may have seen emplacement of the missiles as an acceptable alternative to joining the Warsaw Pact.

Castro's explanation of Cuban motives has varied since 1963. In a speech towards the end of a six-week visit in the Soviet Union, the Cuban leader said that 'Cuba saw a danger to its security, and with an absolute right...adopted the measures that would fortify its defence'.⁴² Yet a few months earlier he told Claude Julien that 'because we were receiving important aid from the socialist camp we estimated that we could not slink away [from the offer of missiles]'. He added then, 'It was not to assure our own defence, but first to reinforce socialism at an international scale.'⁴³ This theme has been repeated since. Yet in a 1974 interview he revived the matter of Cuban defence, as he pointed to the missiles as 'an effective guarantee against a direct attack'. Since then the defence of Cuba has been included as a second Cuban motive.⁴⁴

Questions arise, though, as to what 'strengthening the socialist camp' meant. It may have meant that Cuban leaders perceived the missiles in terms of a strategic deterrent that would enable the Soviet Union to counter a potential US first strike. In this sense, the defence of one important country in the socialist camp would thereby keep all socialist countries safer. But we do not know what Cuba's assessment was of the likelihood of a US first strike against the Soviet Union, or whether he even made such an assessment. Franqui reports that Castro 'seemed to have a blind belief in the Soviet military machine'. The Cuban leader himself acknowledged in 1984 that 'it did not occur to me to ask the Soviets how many missiles each of the superpowers possessed'.⁴⁵

Whatever military significance he attached to the notion of strengthening the socialist camp, the Cuban leader undoubtedly meant it in a

⁴¹ Dinerstein, *Making of a Missile Crisis*, pp. 80-1, 166-8; Mankiewicz and Jones, *With Fidel*, p. 152.

⁴² 'Balance del Primer Encuentro con La Realidad Soviética', 23 May 1963; reprinted in F. Castro, *La Revolución de Octubre y La Revolución Cubana: Discursos 1959-1977* (Havana, 1977), p. 91.

⁴³ Claude Julien, 'Sept Heures Avec M. Fidel Castro', *Le Monde*, 22 March 1963, p. 6. Also see, Matthews, *Fidel Castro*, p. 225.

⁴⁴ Mankiewicz and Jones, *With Fidel*, p. 152; Szulc, *Fidel*, p. 580; Carlos Cabrera, 'The October 1962 crisis: "It's Ridiculous to Claim That We Wanted to Provoke a Nuclear War"', (interview with Rafael Hernández), *Granma Weekly Review*, 26 Feb. 1989, p. 9. (Hereafter cited as Hernández interview.)

⁴⁵ Franqui, *Family Portrait*, p. 188; Szulc, *Fidel*, p. 583.

political sense as well. Castro, it is safe to assume, understood the missiles as part of the US–Soviet equation, in which the Cuban-based weapons might have enabled Khrushchev to bargain more effectively for socialist gains elsewhere, such as in Europe.⁴⁶ In addition, for Cuba to stand up to the United States would weaken the US image as an invincible power, and in a zero-sum world the missiles would have strengthened the non-western camp.

Castro is likely to have believed that if an avowedly socialist country were able to resist US attacks, then it would encourage similar resistance elsewhere. This construction would have been consistent with the Second Declaration of Havana.⁴⁷ However, the Soviet Union did not endorse Cuba's enthusiasm for Third World revolution, especially in Latin America.

There is also uncertainty about the way Cuban leaders calculated the missiles would contribute to the defence of Cuba. The weapons sent to Cuba (and those intended for delivery) were a weak second strike deterrent. Liquid propelled and requiring eight hours to fuel and arm with a nuclear warhead, they would have been of little use in responding to a nuclear attack, and of uncertain use in response to a conventional one. As Barton Bernstein observed about the US Jupiter missiles in Turkey, it would be more likely that they 'would draw, not deter, an attack'.⁴⁸

Cuban officials may have understood this because Castro remarked in 1974 that Cuba had an obligation in effect to make itself as much of a target as other socialist countries. 'If we expected them [the socialist camp] to take a chance for us,' he said, 'we had to be willing to do likewise for them.'⁴⁹ Yet it is most likely that the Cuban leaders had a relatively unsophisticated understanding about the missiles. Jorge Risquet Valdés, a member of the Cuban Communist Party's Political Bureau, observed at the Moscow conference that the Cuban leadership felt vulnerable with the few arms available in early 1962, and reasoned simply that Cuba would be better able to repel US aggression with more arms. From their viewpoint, he suggested, missiles were better still, and were a reasonable means of defence.⁵⁰ Whatever use was intended for the missiles, they would have

⁴⁶ Thomas, *Cuban Revolution*, p. 610; Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, pp. 164–5, 201–2; Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, pp. 796–7.

⁴⁷ This was how Aleksandr Alekseev, who was soon to become the Soviet ambassador to Cuba, claims to have understood Castro. See Aleksandr Alekseev, 'Karibskii Krizis: kak eto bylo (The Caribbean Crisis: As It Really Was)', *Ekho Planety*, no. 33 (Moscow, Nov. 1988).

⁴⁸ Barton J. Bernstein, 'The Cuban Missile Crisis: Trading the Jupiters in Turkey?', *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 95 (Spring 1980), p. 99. The estimate of time necessary to prepare a missile for firing was made by Soviet military officials at the 1989 Moscow conference.

⁴⁹ Mankiewicz and Jones, *With Fidel*, p. 152.

⁵⁰ 'Cuban Transcript,' p. 38.

been a deterrent, because their very presence in Cuba would have meant that a conventional US attack would run the risk of escalating into a nuclear confrontation.

Still, there is the possibility that Cuban leaders did expect the missiles might be used. They may have anticipated that a direct invasion by US forces would trigger the missiles. Castro has said that he drew little distinction between a conventional assault on Cuba and a nuclear retaliation, because from the Cuban perspective a conventional attack would cost Cuba millions of lives and would thus affect Cuban society much the way a nuclear attack would ravage the United States.⁵¹ Did the Cubans also anticipate that an air attack against Cuban installations would lead to firing the nuclear missiles, or that such air attacks would escalate into a full scale invasion? The record is unclear about this. Thus, while we know the stated motives for Cuba's decision, we do not have a precise understanding of what the statements mean.

While Castro has been inconsistent in describing who initiated the plan to bring missiles to Cuba, his most recent remarks are consistent with other evidence that indicates the idea was first raised by the Soviets in May 1962.⁵² Emilio Aragonés Navarro reported at the 1989 Moscow conference that six Cuban officials were involved in the decision, and that they unanimously agreed to accept the offer: Fidel Castro, Raúl Castro, Che Guevara, Blas Roca, Osvaldo Dorticos, and Aragonés. The six formed the Secretariat of the Integrated Revolutionary Organisations (ORI), the ruling party at the time.⁵³

A trip to Moscow by Raúl Castro in July served to develop details of the plan and during those two weeks a formal agreement was drafted and initialled.⁵⁴ It appears that the decisions to send IL-28 bombers, MIG-21s, other military equipment, and Soviet troops were made in Havana in May,

⁵¹ Domínguez, *To Make the World Safe for Revolution*, pp. 39–40. Rafael Hernández describes the Cuban intention graphically: 'From our point of view, the crisis signified for Cuba an act of asserting our claim, to the extent that the world was presented a vision of holocaust – precisely the perspective that faced Cuba in its unequal confrontation with the United States.' Rafael Hernández, 'La Crisis de Octubre de 1962: Lección y Parábola', *América Latina*, no. 4 (April 1988), p. 36.

⁵² Matthews, *Revolution in Cuba*, pp. 209–10; Thomas, *Cuban Revolution*, pp. 613–14; Szulc, *Fidel*, pp. 578–80; Blight and Welch, *On the Brink*, pp. 238–9.

⁵³ 'Cuban Transcript,' pp. 45–6. (The ORI was the precursor of the Cuban Communist Party, and was formed out of Castro's 26th of July Movement, the university-based Revolutionary Directorate, and the old Communist Party or Partido Socialista Popular.) Also see, Alekseev, 'Karibskii Krizis'. Franqui (*Family Portrait*, p. 189) recalled that there were only five Cuban officials involved. Four on his list are the same as on Aragonés's, but Franqui's list deletes Aragonés and Blas Roca, and includes Ramiro Valdés.

⁵⁴ Garthoff, *Reflections* (1989), p. 17; Thomas, *Cuban Revolution*, p. 609.

in discussions with Marshal Sergei S. Biryuzov, commander of the Soviet Strategic Missile Forces.⁵⁵ Yet it is uncertain how the July draft agreement refined the initial Soviet–Cuban understanding. For example, we do not know whether Cuba requested that military equipment other than the ballistic missiles be provided in a way that enabled them to be under Cuban control. The best evidence indicates that the Soviets controlled the surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) throughout the crisis, because the Cubans had not been sufficiently trained at the time to use them.⁵⁶ Cuban pilots had been trained to fly the IL-28s, but Cuba never took full possession of the bombers.⁵⁷ The IL-28s were considered to be virtually obsolete as an offensive weapon, but would have been useful in defending Cuba against commando raids or in attacking commando bases.⁵⁸

By the end of October there were more than 40,000 Soviet military personnel on the island, about half of whom were troops. We do not know if the Cubans requested this large number, whether they sought even more, or how they considered the troops would be used. Such a significant Soviet military contingent in itself would likely have prompted a US attack, because it would have made Cuba a major Soviet base.⁵⁹ With such a large contingent, the Soviet stakes in a US attack would also have been enormous. Were the Soviet troops overrun by US forces, Premier Khrushchev might not have survived the ensuing humiliation.

Che Guevara and Aragonés travelled to Moscow on 27 August to

⁵⁵ Garthoff, *Reflections* (1989), p. 18.

⁵⁶ Dominguez, *To Make the World Safe for Revolution*, p. 40; Szulc, *Fidel*, p. 583; interviews with Cuban officials in 1988 and 1989.

⁵⁷ There are discrepancies in reports of how many bombers arrived in Cuba and were operational. According to the *CINCLANT Account* (p. 15), 42 bombers were shipped to Cuba, and 11 were completely assembled and two were partially assembled when Cuba agreed to return them on 20 Nov. But former Cuban Army Chief of Staff Sergio del Valle recalled in an interview on May 18, 1989 with Bruce Allyn, James G. Blight and David A. Welch that there were only twelve bombers in Cuba: 3 unassembled ones in Cuban hands and nine assembled ones controlled by the Soviets.

⁵⁸ ‘Cuban Transcript,’ pp. 79–80; and interviews in January 1989 with Cuban delegates at the Moscow conference. Castro noted on 19 November 1962, that ‘owing to their [the IL-28s] limited speed and low flight ceiling, they are antiquated equipment in relation to modern means of anti-aircraft defence’, Office of Public Information, United Nations, ‘Text of Communication dated 19 November 1962 from Prime Minister Fidel Castro of Cuba to Acting Secretary-General U Thant’, Press Release SG/1379, 20 Nov. 1962, p. 2. Also see Garthoff, *Reflections* (1989), p. 104 (fn. 183). Sergo Mikoyan said in an interview on 30 January 1989 that none of the nuclear warheads on the island could have been refitted as bombs for the IL-28s, and that there were no nuclear bombs delivered to Cuba.

⁵⁹ In his 4 September statement, President Kennedy warned that if there were any evidence of ‘any organized combat force in Cuba from any Soviet bloc country...the gravest issues would arise’. Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 171. Also see Garthoff, *Reflections* (1989), pp. 120–1.

finalise the missile agreement, after Castro had made amendments to the July draft. Aragonés asserted in 1989 that he sought to make the agreement public immediately. The Cubans reasoned that an announcement about the missiles would gain them more security than the secret installation of offensive weapons.⁶⁰ Indeed, former White House official Theodore Sorensen reflected at the 1989 Moscow meeting that it would have been more difficult for the United States to compel withdrawal of the missiles had the agreement been made public, because then the situation would have paralleled US agreements with countries on the Soviet periphery.⁶¹

Cuban officials were eager in August 1962 to secure a public defence link to the Soviet Union. From their perspective, a public agreement in itself would have had a deterrent effect, similar to membership in the Warsaw Pact, by making an attack against Cuba equivalent to an attack against the Soviet Union. Cuba did not take Soviet protection for granted, and it sought to manoeuvre the Soviet Union into an embrace at the same time Cuba sought to protect itself from the United States. Such an alliance was precisely what the Soviets had resisted, because of the difficulties that would be entailed in sustaining a conflict with the United States so far from the Soviet Union. Khrushchev refused to make the agreement public, and proposed to announce the accord in November, once the missiles were operational.⁶² It was never signed formally by the Cuban or Soviet heads of state.

22–8 October

Herbert Matthews has argued that to exclude Cuba from the missile crisis is akin to ‘saying that *Hamlet* can be played without a stage’.⁶³ The metaphor unfortunately suggests Cuba played a passive role, that it was no more than the inanimate stage for the superpower players. While the review of the period before 22 October already has invalidated the metaphor, the notion that Cuba had little impact on events during the height of the crisis may have been the most serious oversight in earlier studies.

The response in Cuba to President Kennedy’s 22 October announcement of the quarantine was apparently, in Matthews phrasing ‘a curious mixture of exhilaration and calm’. As Adolfo Gilly observed, ‘It was as if

⁶⁰ ‘Cuban Transcript,’ pp. 45–6, 56.

⁶¹ On this point also see Garthoff, *Reflections* (1989), pp. 24–5.

⁶² ‘Cuban Transcript,’ pp. 46–8, 55–6, 75. The agreement, which was to be a five-year renewable pact, allegedly stipulated that the Soviets had no right of sovereign immunity over the missile bases. But Franqui contends (*Family Portrait*, p. 187) that the land on which the missiles were based became Soviet property.

⁶³ Matthews, *Revolution in Cuba*, p. 208.

a long-contained tension relaxed, as if the whole country had said as one, “at last”’.⁶⁴ Castro himself was reportedly quite calm, perhaps because he had experienced the possibility of total defeat several times before. ‘For Kennedy and the United States,’ Herbert Dinerstein reasoned, ‘this was the first time.’⁶⁵

The exhilaration undoubtedly came from the full scale mobilisation announced by Castro as President Kennedy spoke on 22 October.⁶⁶ With a seeming certainty that the United States would launch a major invasion of the island, the official government newspaper *Revolución* was emblazoned by the headline on 23 October that read: ‘The Nation on a War Footing.’ Sergio del Valle Jiménez, then Cuban army chief of staff, recalled in 1989 that the Cuban leaders anticipated there would be massive US bombing with an invasion, and they had ordered the erection of ramparts and the digging of trenches. He said that 270,000 people were placed under arms within days.⁶⁷ The *CINCLANT Account* reports that ‘Cuban Army units mobilized and assumed defensive positions quickly and with a minimum of confusion.’⁶⁸ Interestingly, it seems that there was not a round-up of suspected counter-revolutionaries and dissidents, as there had been during the Bay of Pigs invasion.⁶⁹ This may have been due to the sense that the danger to Cuba this time was from a direct US attack, not from subversive forces.

Sergo Mikoyan remarked in an interview after the 1989 conference that he found it ‘incredible that the Cubans and Soviets in Cuba were ready to die to the last man’ during the crisis.⁷⁰ Indeed, there appears to have been an atmosphere of defiance and toughness throughout the country, in part stimulated by the Cuban media. The headlines in *Revolución* on 24 October screamed defiantly: ‘The Blockade: We will Resist It’; ‘Direct Aggression: We Will Repel It’; ‘Those That Unleash Nuclear War Will Be Exterminated.’ The party newspaper *Hoy* on 24 October featured a large drawing of Castro, with his rifle raised high, declaring ‘To the struggle, victory will be complete’. Posters quickly went up throughout the country with the phrase ‘On a War Footing’.⁷¹

Had the United States invaded Cuba – there are indications that an

⁶⁴ A. Gilly, *Inside the Cuban Revolution*, trans. Felix Gutierrez (New York, 1964), p. 48, as quoted in Thomas, *Cuban Revolution*, p. 630.

⁶⁵ Dinerstein, *Making of a Missile Crisis*, p. 217. Also see: Mankiewicz and Jones, *With Fidel*, pp. 149–50; Alekseev, ‘Karibskii krizis’.

⁶⁷ ‘Cuban Transcript’, p. 81.

⁶⁸ *CINCLANT Account*, p. 13.

⁶⁹ Based on interviews with the Cuban delegates to the 1989 Moscow conference. Also see Matthews, *Fidel Castro*, p. 232.

⁷⁰ Interview on 30 January 1989. Also see Mario H. Garrido, ‘General of the Army Dimitri Yazov: I Have My Uniform, Ready to Fight’. *Granma Weekly Review*, 23 April 1989, p. 8.

⁷¹ *Hoy*, 25 Oct. 1962.

invasion was being prepared for 29 or 30 October in order to resolve the crisis⁷² – these preparations by Cuba would have made the ensuing conflict different from the one anticipated by US planners. The US expectation was that the main fighting would have been over in ten days, and that US forces would have sustained 18,484 casualties.⁷³ However, in Moscow in 1989, Cuban Political Bureau member Jorge Risquet argued that major guerilla warfare would have gone on for years, and del Valle estimated that there would have been 100,000 civilian and military casualties in the short term.⁷⁴ If that were the case, it is conceivable that the increasingly bloody and prolonged conventional war against Cuba might have escalated to a nuclear level in response to a range of pressures on both the Kennedy Administration and the Soviet leaders.

One indication of the ferocity of the Cuban position, and the willingness to throw caution to the wind, was Castro's order on 27 October to open fire on any hostile aircraft in Cuban airspace.⁷⁵ That morning a Soviet officer, who may have been responding to Castro's general command instead of following instructions from Moscow to avoid provocations, fired a SAM that downed a U-2 surveillance aircraft.⁷⁶ On the afternoon of the 27th, at the height of the crisis, 37 mm Cuban guns hit a low flying F8U-1P plane that was on a reconnaissance mission.⁷⁷ (Cuban forces controlled the island's anti-aircraft batteries, which apparently became operational between 24 October and 27 October.)

Had the F8U-1P been unable to return to base, it is likely that the threatened US attacks would have commenced. There already was pressure on President Kennedy from several of his advisers and from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to launch an attack, at least against the surface-to-air and ballistic missiles.⁷⁸ With a second reconnaissance plane down on the

⁷² R. F. Kennedy, *Thirteen Days* (New York, 1969), p. 109; Abel, *Missile Crisis*, pp. 194–95.

⁷³ *CINCLANT Account*, pp. 55–6.
⁷⁴ 'Cuban Transcript', pp. 43, 83. Interestingly, at the Moscow conference del Valle's estimate was translated initially as '800,000', and this was readily accepted by US participants as credible once they learned that there were 40,000 Soviet military personnel in Cuba. During the crisis, the US estimate of Soviet military strength on the island ranged from 10,000 to 16,000. See Garthoff, *Reflections* (1989), pp. 35–6.

⁷⁵ Szulc, *Fidel*, p. 584; Garthoff, *Reflections* (1989), p. 84; 'Documentos de la Crisis Mundial', *Bohemia*, 2 Nov. 1962, p. 52.

⁷⁶ The officer seems to have been Lt. General (then Major General) G. A. Voronkov. See Adela Estrada Juárez, 'The General Who Gave the Order to Fire', *Granma Weekly Review*, 23 April 1989, p. 8. Another officer, Major General Igor Statsensko, has also been cited as the local Soviet commander responsible for the shootdown. See Garthoff, *Reflections* (1989), pp. 82–5. Also Blight and Welch, *On the Brink*, pp. 310–11.

⁷⁷ Chang, *Chronology*, p. 226. The *CINCLANT Account* (p. 14) reported that the guns were 57 mm, and that no low level plane had been hit.

⁷⁸ 'October 27, 1962: Transcripts of the Meetings of the ExComm', *International Security*, vol. 12, no. 3 (Winter 1987/88), pp. 63, 65, 68; Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, pp. 107–8.

27th, the pressure would have been irresistible. Attorney General Robert Kennedy reportedly said in a 1964 interview that after the downing of the U-2 on 27 October, Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin was warned that 'If one more plane was destroyed, we would hit all the SAMs immediately, and probably the missiles as well, and we would probably follow that with an invasion.'⁷⁹ Former Treasury Secretary C. Douglas Dillon recalls that

when the U-2 was shot down, it added enormously to the pressure to act. By Saturday the 27th, there was a clear majority in the ExComm in favor of taking military action.⁸⁰

Alekseev recounts that there were daily communications between Castro and Khrushchev from 23 to 27 October. Castro, he recalls, encouraged the Soviets to remain firm in keeping the missiles in Cuba.⁸¹ But it is not clear whether the Cubans were informed fully about Soviet deliberations and intentions, or even whether the Soviets may have misinformed the Cubans intentionally or inadvertently. For example, on 24 October Soviet General Issa A. Pliyev reportedly responded to Castro's inquiry about the state of Soviet forces by telling the Cuban leader that 'everything is ready.' (Pliyev was overall commander of the Soviet forces in Cuba.) Castro seems to have interpreted this answer to mean that all of the missiles were in Cuba, all were operational, and that each missile was configured with a warhead ready to be fired.⁸² It is not clear what he understood by 'all' the missiles to mean at the time. By 22 October, 42 missiles had arrived in Cuba; eighty had been planned for delivery. All 42 were 'medium range' (SS-4) ballistic missiles, with a range of 1,020 miles. Six undelivered missiles were also SS-4s, and 32 were 'intermediate range' (SS-5) missiles, with a range of 2,200 miles.⁸³ Soviet participants at the 1989 Moscow conference said that the 20 warheads allegedly on the island were at some distance from the missiles, and that it would have required eight hours to fuel and prepare a missile for firing. Moreover, by 24 October only nine missiles reportedly were in place and fully assembled.

⁷⁹ Daniel Ellsberg, 'The Day Castro Almost Started World War III', *New York Times*, 31 Oct. 1987, p. 27.

⁸⁰ Blight and Welch, *On the Brink*, p. 72. In contrast, McGeorge Bundy and Robert McNamara argued that the likely response to a continued stalemate would have been a 'turning of the screw', an extension of the quarantine to include nonmilitary items. See *Ibid.*, pp. 83-4, 189-90.

⁸² Confirmation of this comes indirectly from Alekseev. In 'Karibskii krizis', he claims that all 42 missiles and warheads for them were in place. In an interview on 28 January 1989 he said that Castro reviewed the manuscript of his article prior to publication, and had corrected any errors of fact. Presumably, then, Castro believed even until recently that all the missiles and warheads were on the island.

⁸³ Garthoff, *Reflections* (1989), pp. 36-7 (fn. 63), 207-9.

The nature of the communications between Castro and Khrushchev – these have not been made public – take on added significance because of the way Khrushchev may have interpreted them, and how that may have influenced his behaviour. An indication of why this is important comes from the controversy surrounding the most publicised (though not yet public) cable, sent on 26 October by Castro. Khrushchev's son, Sergei Khrushchev, allegedly said that Castro had called upon his father in that cable to fire the missiles. But he also has said that this version was a misinterpretation by those to whom he told the story.⁸⁴ It may be that the cable indicated Castro was highly agitated, fearing an imminent invasion, though that would contrast with several reports about his general calmness. He may merely have reported his assessment that an invasion was imminent, and an excited Khrushchev interpreted this in an extreme manner. Whatever the case, the cable seems to have contributed to the Soviet leader's calculation that a speedy termination of the crisis was essential to avoid a major conflagration.

In short, it is certain that Cuba was more than a passive stage during the crisis. However, our knowledge of Cuban behaviour, intentions and assessments during the height of the crisis remain spotty. Cuban leaders understood that President Kennedy was using the press to send signals of US intentions, in effect, to communicate ultimatums indirectly.⁸⁵ But we do not know what the Cubans expected the US reaction would be to the use of anti-aircraft. They may have judged that by 27 October US decisions were firm about invading Cuba. Thus the anti-aircraft would not have precipitated US action, in their view, but would merely have served to protect Cuba.⁸⁶ Low level reconnaissance planes are often used just prior to an invasion for the purpose of establishing precise targets. We also do not know whether Ambassador Alekseev was the only channel of communication between Cuba and the Soviet Union, though Sergo Mikoyan affirms that Alekseev was the principal one.⁸⁷ Similarly, it is not

⁸⁴ Bill Keller, '62 Missile Crisis Yields New Puzzle', *New York Times*, 30 Jan. 1989. At the 1989 conference, Alekseev claimed to have helped draft the cable, and that no such demand was in it.

⁸⁵ William LeoGrande, 'Uneasy Allies: The Press and the Government During the Cuban Missile Crisis', Occasional Paper No. 3, Center for War, Peace and the News Media, New York University, 1987, pp. 21, 42.

⁸⁶ Che Guevara was reportedly preparing for guerrilla war in Pinar del Río. See Matthews, *Revolution in Cuba*, p. 212. Franqui reports (*Family Portrait*, p. 193) that Cuban uncertainty about a US invasion increased tension, and he claims that this led Castro to fire the Soviet SAM missile that brought down the U-2. That claim now is accorded little credence, in part because he locates the firing in western Cuba, hundreds of miles from the actual SAM missile site in Oriente Province. But as an apocryphal story, it may suggest why Castro initiated the use of anti-aircraft guns.

⁸⁷ Mikoyan, 'La Crisis del Caribe', p. 55.

clear if there was coordination in the United Nations between the Soviet and Cuban delegations, or how Cuban and Soviet troops in the field related to each other.⁸⁸

28 October to 20 November

What is called the Cuban missile crisis in the USA and the Soviets call the Caribbean crisis, the Cubans call the October crisis. This nomenclature is used to signify that the period in October, when the United States and Soviet Union were on the brink of nuclear catastrophe, was only one of several crises that took on catastrophic proportions for the Cubans.

In reality, the crisis did not end on 28 October for either the United States or the Soviet Union. The Kennedy–Khrushchev agreements had to be implemented and Cuba became very much a part of that process. Until 20 November, the US Strategic Air Command remained on alert at Defence Condition (DefCon) 2 (the state of full readiness for war), other forces were held at DefCon 3, and the naval quarantine was maintained in place. Just as any of several incidents before 28 October might have led to an escalating exchange, so too the situation until 20 November remained very dangerous.

The United States asserted that the Kennedy–Khrushchev agreement required on-sight UN inspection in Cuba to assure that the offensive weapons were being dismantled and returned to the Soviet Union. Included in the list of weapons were all the IL-28 bombers.⁸⁹ Cuba in turn insisted that it would not permit inspection on its soil, and that the IL-28s were Cuban property, given to Cuba by the Soviet Union. Castro asserted that the Soviet Union had no authority to negotiate with the United States about inspection or about the return of the bombers. Instead, he announced, Cuba would be willing to negotiate on the basis of five demands: that the United States end the economic embargo, cease subversive activities against Cuba, end the ‘pirate’ attacks from bases in the United States and Puerto Rico, cease violations of Cuban airspace, and return Guantánamo Naval Base.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ There are still unresolved conflicting accounts of an alleged firefight between Cuban and Soviet troops. See Seymour M. Hersh, ‘Was Castro Out of Control in 1962?’, *Washington Post*, 11 Oct. 1987, p. H2; Blight and Welch, *On the Brink*, pp. 310–11.

⁸⁹ ‘Message to Chairman Khrushchev Calling for Removal of Soviet Missiles from Cuba, October 27, 1962’, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy 1962*, pp. 813–14; Garthoff, *Reflections* (1989), pp. 106–14.

⁹⁰ ‘Fija Fidel Las Cinco Garantías Contra La Agresión a Cuba’, *Revolución*, 29 Oct. 1962. Also see, U Thant, ‘Summary of my meeting with President Dorticos, Premier Castro of Cuba and Foreign Minister Roa in [Havana] 10:00 A.M., October 31, 1962’, UN Archives, DAG-1/5.2.2.6.2:1, unpaginated.

Cuba maintained this position until 20 November, in the face of appeals by UN General Secretary U Thant and Anastas Mikoyan, both of whom travelled to Cuba. U Thant found that Castro was insistent that ‘any formula adopted by the Security Council must guarantee the full sovereignty of Cuba’. On-sight inspection violated Cuba’s sovereignty and insulted Cuba, because the crisis was not rooted in Cuba’s efforts to defend itself but in US ‘provocations’ and ‘threats to peace’. Yet there was no equivalent demand, Castro told U Thant, that the US pledge not to invade Cuba be verified. Indeed, he reported Castro declaring, ‘the United States would not give up their intention of launching another aggression. He [Castro] said that high officials in Washington publicly declared...that they would invade Cuba again’.⁹¹ To assuage Cuba’s concern, U Thant offered a ‘UN presence’ in Cuba for three weeks, ‘to eliminate the danger of aggression’. But Dorticos rejected the offer. He declared that ‘the danger of war would renew itself, because the conditions that propitiated North American [US] aggression against Cuba would endure’.⁹²

Cuban negotiations with Mikoyan led the Soviets to back down on their initial willingness to remove all 40,000 troops. Apparently at Cuban insistence, the Soviets agreed to maintain 3,000 troops in Cuba. Sergo Mikoyan said that in a sense these were an offering to Castro, ‘to show that we were still supporting him’. He added that they also provided a continued measure of deterrence against a US invasion – in effect, a kind of ‘trip-wire’.⁹³ However, apparently to the displeasure of the Cubans, the 3,000 troops were designated as an ‘automecánico’ brigade, i.e. as ‘motor mechanics.’

There is no question that Castro was furious about the Kennedy–Khrushchev agreements. Early in November, at a University of Havana meeting, the Cuban prime minister described the Soviet premier as lacking ‘cojones’ and encouraged public chanting of a song: ‘Nikita, Nikita, Indian giver, You don’t take back what you once deliver.’⁹⁴ For the week after the agreement, *Revolución* printed stories that glorified Cuban patriotism and suggested the Soviets were traitors. Castro refused

⁹¹ U Thant, ‘Summary of my meeting, October 31, 1962’.

⁹² ‘Nuestro Derecho a la Paz se Está Abriendo Paso en El Mundo’, *Verde Olivo*, 11 Nov. 1962, pp. 14, 15. This speech by Castro included a transcription of the 30 October meeting with U Thant. In his notes of that meeting, U Thant said that the remarks were those of Castro, not Dorticos. See, U Thant, ‘Summary of my meeting with President Dorticos, Premier Castro and Foreign Minister Roa in Havana, October 30, 1962’, UN Archives, DAG-1/5.2.2.6.2:1, unpaginated.

⁹³ Interview, 30 Jan. 1989.

⁹⁴ Thomas, *Cuban Revolution*, p. 636; Abel, *Missile Crisis*, p. 213; Franqui, *Family Portrait*, p. 196.

to meet with Ambassador Alekseev for several days after 28 October, despite Alekseev's repeated attempts to see him. There is also the possibility that Cuban troops surrounded the ballistic missile sites from 28 October to 3 November, which would suggest that they were prepared to fight to prevent the removal of missiles.⁹⁵

When Anastas Mikoyan arrived in Havana on 2 November, Castro grudgingly met him at the airport, but then did not meet with him again for nearly a week. During their negotiations, Castro 'disappeared' for days at a time, or allegedly came to an agreement one evening only to renege on it the next day.⁹⁶ Even in January 1963 his fury was such that he told journalist Claude Julien that Khrushchev

should not have returned the missiles without consulting us...I cannot accept that Khrushchev promised Kennedy to return the missiles without making the least reference to the indispensable agreement by the Cuban government...Had Khrushchev come himself [to Cuba, instead of Mikoyan], I would have boxed him.⁹⁷

The graphic stories of Castro's anger have tended to enshrine a conventional wisdom that his response to the Kennedy–Khrushchev agreements was rooted primarily in personal pique. His fury is said to have been the result, in the first instance, of learning about the agreement over the radio – not through a direct communication from Moscow and without being consulted by Khrushchev – and that such disregard was a 'blow to the Cuban leader's pride'.⁹⁸ In the second instance, the agreement was seen as an insult to Cuban sovereignty and dignity, as if Cuba were 'a pawn' in a great power chess game, because the Soviet leader had acquiesced in a demand for inspection on Cuban territory 'without relying on Cuba'.⁹⁹

Beyond such psychological explanations are those that relate to Cuba's

⁹⁵ There is some doubt about this report, because Soviet delegates at the 1989 Moscow conference asserted that the troops were Soviet, dressed in Cuban uniforms. For a discussion of this controversy, see Garthoff, *Reflections* (1989), pp. 100–01 (fn. 175).

⁹⁶ Alekseev, 'Karibskii krizis'; Mikoyan, 'La Crisis del Caribe', p. 55; interview with Mikoyan, 30 Jan. 1989; Blight and Welch, *On the Brink*, pp. 267–8.

⁹⁷ Julien, 'Sept Heures Avec M. Fidel Castro', pp. 1, 6.

⁹⁸ Matthews, *Fidel Castro*, p. 232; C. A. Robbins, *The Cuban Threat* (New York, 1983), p. 211. Also see, Franqui, *Family Portrait*, pp. 194–5. Castro himself suggested this interpretation in 1974 by saying: 'We felt very passionate...We were annoyed by matters of form, by certain formalities in the conduct of the negotiations.' See, Mankiewicz and Jones, *With Fidel*, p. 152. At the 1989 Moscow conference, Cuban participants acknowledged that the necessity 'of time' made the lack of consultation understandable. But they argued that even then Khrushchev should have qualified his acceptance of Kennedy's proposal with a requirement that Cuba's security demands be satisfied; 'Cuban Transcript', pp. 25, 56–7.

⁹⁹ 'Cuban Transcript', p. 26; Szulc, *Fidel*, pp. 585–8; Thomas, *Cuban Revolution*, p. 636; Julien, 'Sept Heures Avec M. Fidel Castro', p. 6.

vulnerability. Castro asserted in a letter to U Thant on 15 November that despite the removal of the missiles, US officials 'do not consider themselves bound by any promise'.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, as early as November 1962, the United States began to back away from the 27 October pledge contained in President Kennedy's letter to Premier Khrushchev. Raymond Garthoff reports that the US leader would not give the Soviets firm assurances of no invasion, because on-sight inspection in Cuba and safeguards with respect to future military ties had not been met.¹⁰¹ However, it is unclear whether Cuban officials based their distrust of the United States on specific statements by US policy makers, or even whether the Soviets reported to the Cubans how weak the US assurances were.

Castro's sense at the time was that the bargain was struck too readily, without adequate assurances, and that the United States would take advantage of loopholes to undermine Cuban security. This apparently was confirmed for him when the United States included the IL-28s in the demand for removal of offensive weapons, and later when Komar patrol boats were on the list Ambassador Adlai Stevenson presented to Anastas Mikoyan.¹⁰²

Similarly, on 8 November a Mongoose terrorist squad bombed a Cuban factory. Its action was supposedly unauthorised, because Mongoose activities had been suspended on 30 October.¹⁰³ Apparently the group had been dispatched to Cuba before the official suspension of activities, and could not be recalled. The attack undoubtedly reinforced the Cuban belief that the United States could not be trusted. Their first inclination would have been to conclude that the US destabilisation campaign was still at work. It is also possible that they viewed the attack as a ploy in the US-Soviet negotiations about the removal of the IL-28s and on-sight inspection. However, since Cuba was not party to the negotiations, Cuban officials would have been unlikely to interpret the Mongoose bombing merely as a negotiating tactic.

In part it was concern over Mongoose raids that led Cuba to be adamant about the violation of airspace, because US surveillance planes had been used to support sabotage operations. In his 15 November letter to U Thant, Castro observed that 'photographs take by the [US] spying planes serve for guidance in sabotage'.¹⁰⁴ He also asserted that low level flights

¹⁰⁰ Letter from Prime Minister Fidel Castro to UN Secretary General U Thant, 15 Nov. 1962; unofficial UN translation; US Department of State Incoming Telegram, no. 1802, 15 Nov. 1962, 7:00 p.m., p. 2; classified Secret; now declassified.

¹⁰¹ Garthoff, *Reflections* (1989), pp. 126-7. Also see Smith, *Closest of Enemies*, pp. 83-4.

¹⁰² Mikoyan, 'La Crisis del Caribe', p. 55; Blight and Welch, *On the Brink*, pp. 267-8.

¹⁰³ Garthoff, *Reflections* (1989), p. 122; Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy*, pp. 574-5; *Assassination Report*, pp. 147-8.

¹⁰⁴ Castro letter to U Thant, 15 Nov. 1962, p. 3.

went over 'our military defences and photograph not only the dismantled strategic missile installations but in fact our entire territory'. Clearly, Cuba saw the flights as continued preparation for an invasion and Castro warned that surveillance craft would be destroyed.¹⁰⁵

Notably, Cuba did make an offer – on 25 November, after the crisis ended – to allow UN inspection on its soil. But it was based on the pointed condition of a reciprocal inspection of emigré training camps in the United States and Puerto Rico, to assure that they were being dismantled.¹⁰⁶

The agreement with Kennedy left no room for Cuban participation and offered Cuba no opportunity to bring the United States to the bargaining table over matters of vital Cuban interest. A simple demand that the United States talk to Cuba – at the moment when the world stood at the brink – would have been difficult for Kennedy to reject. Castro no doubt found it difficult to fathom why Khrushchev would not include such a demand in his deal.¹⁰⁷ This probably contributed to Castro's anger as much as the fact that Khrushchev did not notify him before announcing that the missiles would be removed.

Had Castro been involved in negotiations, there is little doubt that a resolution of the crisis would have been more difficult. Some argue that his 'adventurism' led to the very placement of the missiles in Cuba,¹⁰⁸ and from this point of view he would have been an irascible negotiator. Personality aside, though, had Cuba been included in negotiations, its interests would need to have been taken into account. The Kennedy–Khrushchev agreements left Cuba feeling quite vulnerable. Not only were the missiles to be removed, non-offensive weapons, such as the IL-28s and Komar patrol boats, as well as all Soviet troops, were also to be withdrawn. Cuba viewed the bombers and patrol boats as key weapons in the fight against terrorist attacks. In this light, Cuban resistance to the accords must be seen as rather more than mere obstinacy or pique.

Still, we do not have much more than impressions about Cuban perceptions during this period. We have come to appreciate that perception and misperception play important roles in shaping international relations, and that misperception was especially critical during the

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 4.

¹⁰⁶ Garthoff, *Reflections* (1989), p. 122.

¹⁰⁷ These ideas were expressed by Jorge Risquet and Emilio Aragonés at the 1989 Moscow conference. Also see, Hernández interview. Notably, the Soviet Union did propose direct US–Cuban negotiations 'regarding the removal of the Guantanamo naval base', in a joint Cuban–Soviet protocol offered on 15 November to settle the November crisis. See US Department of State Incoming Telegram, no. 1798, 15 Nov. 1962, 6 p.m., p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ For example, Theodore Draper, 'Castro and Communism', *The Reporter*, 17 Jan. 1963; Matthews, *Fidel Castro*, pp. 230–2.

Cuban missile crisis.¹⁰⁹ The Cuban factor in this equation, though, is largely missing, particularly during the period from 28 October to 20 November, when Cuba acted most independently and had the greatest potential to generate a major conflict.

For example, we have little information about the Cuban analysis of why the United States sought the removal of the IL-28s and Komars, or about Cuban expectations of a US attack before 20 November. We do not know much about the negotiations between Anastas Mikoyan and the Cuban leaders, whether the Soviet leader provided details on Soviet negotiations with the United States,¹¹⁰ or how Cuba assessed the alleged Soviet commitment to continue defending Cuba. The extent of Cuba's attentiveness to Latin America during the crisis is also unknown. Castro was contemptuous of the OAS's unanimous endorsement of the US position on 24 October, but Cuba must have been aware of the rumours that the Latin Americans' support was coerced.¹¹¹ Cuba also sought at the time to maintain good relations with several countries in the hemisphere, such as Brazil and Mexico, which had publicly opposed a US attack against Cuba.¹¹² But it is unclear what advice the Latin American countries offered Cuba, and how the advice was received.

Tentative conclusions

'The final lesson of the Cuban missile crisis', Robert Kennedy observed in his memoir, 'is the importance of placing ourselves in the other country's shoes.' He went on to note that President Kennedy wisely 'instructed all members of the ExComm and government that no interview should be given, no statement made, which would claim any kind of victory'.¹¹³ Yet at the same time there seems to have been, if not delight taken over Cuba's sense of vulnerability, at least an enormous blind spot about it. Indeed, though there were CIA analyses that pointed to Cuba's fear of a US invasion, there is no evidence that the ExComm considered offering a no invasion pledge to Cuba during the legendary thirteen days as a way of defusing the crisis. The only negotiating ploy contemplated was vis-à-vis Soviet concerns, namely the missiles in Turkey.¹¹⁴ Perhaps this orientation was due to the assumption which

¹⁰⁹ For insightful discussions of this point, see Blight and Welch, *On the Brink*, ch. 6; Richard Ned Lebow, 'The Cuban Missile Crisis: Reading the Lessons Correctly', *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 98 (Fall 1983).

¹¹⁰ It appears that Cuba was unaware until 1963 of the implicit agreement between the Soviet Union and United States over removal of the Jupiters in Turkey. See Szulc, *Fidel*, pp. 586–7.

¹¹¹ *Verde Olivo*, 11 Nov. 1962, p. 14; Bernstein, 'Trading the Jupiters in Turkey', pp. 116–17.

¹¹² LeoGrande, 'Uneasy Allies', p. 31.

¹¹³ Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, pp. 124, 127–8.

¹¹⁴ On the awareness of Cuba's fears, see Paterson, 'Fixation with Cuba', p. 141. On the

dominated thinking about Cuba, that it was no more than a pawn of the Soviet Union.¹¹⁵ One conclusion from this investigation is that, on the contrary, Cuba had its own interests and acted on them. Cuban decisions and assessments had a bearing on the way in which the crisis developed, evolved and ended, and on how close it brought the world to oblivion.

This new perspective on the missile crisis also forces us to reassess the consequences that flowed from the crisis. There has been considerable analysis about the consequences for the superpowers,¹¹⁶ but little detailed analysis about Cuba and the crisis aftermath. The general view is that the crisis led to significant strains between Cuba and the Soviet Union.¹¹⁷ Even during Castro's 1963 trip to the Soviet Union – which followed on the heels of a favourable trade agreement that signified that the Soviet Union recognised that Cuba was fully in the socialist camp¹¹⁸ – the Cuban prime minister implicitly chided the Soviets for abandoning armed struggle. He mixed his gracious appreciation for Soviet willingness to risk nuclear war in defence of 'a small nation' with references to the necessity for the socialist camp to struggle 'against the colonial yoke of imperialism'.¹¹⁹ Sergo Mikoyan related in an interview how he felt the tension between the two countries as late as 1971, three years after Cuba endorsed the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and relations supposedly had improved. One consequence of the strain may have been that Cuba chose to emphasise support for Third World insurgency as a way of maintaining its 'own version of influence against the Soviets'.¹²⁰

discussion about Turkish missiles, see: Bernstein, 'Trading the Jupiters in Turkey', pp. 104–11; 'October 27, 1962: Transcripts of the Meetings of the ExComm'. Notably, the ExComm was sensitive to Turkish and NATO concerns about a withdrawal of missiles without consultation, but US officials did not extrapolate this sensitivity to the parallel circumstance of the Soviet Union and Cuba.

¹¹⁵ This view of Cuba was most evident in President Kennedy's 22 October address to the nation, in which he said: 'Finally, I want to say a few words to the captive people of Cuba... Now your leaders are no longer Cuban leaders inspired by Cuban ideals. They are puppets and agents of an international conspiracy which has turned Cuba against your friends and neighbours in the Americas...' See 'Radio and Television Report to the American People on the Soviet Arms Buildup in Cuba, October 22, 1962', *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy 1962*, p. 809. An alternative explanation, of course, is that the Kennedy Administration did not want to abandon its hope of destroying the Cuban revolution.

¹¹⁶ For a good discussion of these see James A. Nathan, 'The Missile Crisis: His Finest Hour Now', *World Politics*, Jan. 1975, pp. 272–6. Also see Blight and Welch, *On the Brink*, pp. 93–111.

¹¹⁷ P. Bonsal, *Cuba, Castro, and the United States* (Pittsburgh, 1971), p. 187; C. Blasier, *The Giant's Rival: The USSR and Latin America* (Pittsburgh, 1983), pp. 104–7; Garthoff, *Reflections* (1989), p. 138; Matthews, *Fidel Castro*, p. 199; Szulc, *Fidel*, pp. 585–6.

¹¹⁸ W. R. Duncan, *The Soviet Union and Cuba* (New York, 1985), p. 44.

¹¹⁹ 'Balance del Primer Encuentro con La Realidad Soviética', pp. 92, 93.

¹²⁰ Duncan, *The Soviet Union and Cuba*, p. 43.

Cuba did step up its revolutionary activity after the missile crisis, but the rationale may not have been to thumb its nose at or compete with the Soviets. After all, Cuba still relied heavily on the Eastern bloc for economic support. It may have been more closely related to Cuba's sense of national security. Cuban officials seem to have concluded that the Soviet Union would not risk its own security 'for the sake of Cuba', as Anastas Mikoyan reportedly admitted to Warsaw Pact ambassadors on 30 November 1962.¹²¹ If Cuba could no longer count on the Soviet Union for its defence, and it still feared a hostile United States, then the development of an allied bloc of third world countries, especially in Latin America, might have been one way to provide for its defence.¹²²

On the surface, Cuba had good reason to fear the United States. When President Kennedy met with the recently freed Bay of Pigs veterans in December 1962, he promised to return the brigade's flag to them in a 'free Havana'.¹²³ While Operation Mongoose was discontinued early in 1963, terrorist actions were reauthorised by the President. In October 1963, 13 CIA major actions against Cuba were approved for the next two months alone, including the sabotage of an electric power plant, a sugar mill and an oil refinery. Authorised CIA raids continued at least until 1965, as did CIA attempts on Castro's life.¹²⁴ The Cuban leader pointed to these menacing signs in 1963 when he first made his often repeated comment that 'war was avoided, but peace was not gained'.¹²⁵ From the Cuban perspective, the October crisis was just one of many.

For several years after the Cuban missile crisis there was a conventional wisdom, articulated by Arthur Schlesinger, that the crisis was resolved through a 'combination of toughness and restraint, of will, nerve and wisdom, so brilliantly controlled, so matchlessly calibrated'.¹²⁶ Yet we have come to realise now that luck may have been just as important, because so much was uncontrolled and so many incidents may have precipitated a clash inadvertently. By adding a Cuban perspective to the picture of missile crisis decision-making, it becomes even clearer that the potential for miscalculation was great.

Cuban leaders were new to 'high' politics, as one Cuban delegate to the Moscow conference said in a 1989 interview. They did not have experience in dealing with matters that had global implications. None of the leaders involved in the crisis wanted a nuclear war. But none were able

¹²¹ Quoted in Garthoff, *Reflection* (1989), p. 23. Also see, Nathan, 'The Missile Crisis', pp. 279-80. ¹²² Erisman, *Cuba's International Relations*, p. 18.

¹²³ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 839.

¹²⁴ *Assassination Report*, pp. 170-7. Also see Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy*, pp. 590-602; Paterson, 'Fixation with Cuba', pp. 152-3.

¹²⁵ *Revolución*, 16 Jan. 1963, p. 9. ¹²⁶ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 841.

to be the fully rational actors that some would believe they could have been,¹²⁷ because they lacked considerable information necessary for rational action. Cuban officials were probably the worst informed.

The emerging view about how the missile crisis was managed has led to a new dictum. As Robert McNamara said in 1987, 'crisis management is a very uncertain and very difficult thing to do, and therefore, you've got to avoid the crises in the first place'.¹²⁸ The first step in such an effort is the improvement in communications between adversaries, to reduce misperceptions. Even in 1962 this was appreciated, and the so-called 'hot line' was installed soon after the crisis.

However, when we add Cuba to the crisis equation, this prescription does not seem as potent. What could the United States have communicated honestly to Cuba about Operation Mongoose and the attempted assassinations of Prime Minister Castro that would have assuaged Cuba's fears? Improved communications can reduce misunderstanding, but Cuba seems to have understood US intentions quite well. This suggests a lesson from the crisis that has been overlooked, because prior analyses have focused only on the two superpowers. For a small power, conventional warfare may be as threatening as nuclear warfare is to the United States, and a small power is likely to take whatever steps are necessary to reduce the threat. Thus when the United States deals with small countries, the use of force or the threat of force to achieve political ends can have destabilising consequences for all the parties involved.

To be sure, this may be overstating the lesson that we can derive by including the Cuban perspective in the analysis of missile crisis. At each point, improved communications might have reduced the potential for unintended conflict and even the hostility between the countries. With the limited information we have about Cuban motives, calculations and decisions, however, we are handicapped in assessing how improved communications might have affected the crisis.

In reviewing recent scholarship about the missile crisis, Davis Bobrow aptly concluded that

Incompleteness or downright error in capturing these elements [of the precedents and analogies conducive to a wise use of history] may well degrade rather than enhance subsequent policy.

He recommended that 'narratives should include...all those actors with latitude to act', as well as 'the context of the story as construed by each

¹²⁷ For example, see Ray S. Cline, 'Commentary: The Cuban Missile Crisis', *Foreign Affairs* (Fall 1989).

¹²⁸ Blight and Welch, *On the Brink*, p. 281. Also see Davis B. Bobrow, 'Stories Remembered and Forgotten', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 33, no. 2 (June 1989), pp. 197-201.

of those actors'.¹²⁹ The validity of his recommendation is clear from the analysis here. Despite the gaps in our knowledge about Cuban perceptions, motives and behaviour during the missile crisis, it is not too early to conclude that only by reintroducing Cuba into the Cuban missile crisis, can we hope to develop a picture of the full significance of the crisis itself.

¹²⁹ Bobrow, 'Stories Remembered and Forgotten', p. 203.