THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

ORIGINS, COURSE AND AFTERMATH

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Any limitations of the book are entirely my own responsibility. It is dedicated to my students, past, present and future.

Jonathan Colman
Burnley, England, 2015

Abbreviations

ABM	anti-ballistic missile
CAB	Cabinet records (TNA)
CC	Central Committee of CPSU
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CPCz	Communist Party of Czechoslovakia
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
DCI	Director of Central Intelligence (CIA)
DEFCON	defence condition (US)
EEC	European Economic Community
ExComm	Executive Committee of the NSC
FKR	Soviet tactical cruise missile
FO	Foreign Office (Britain)
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany)
FRUS	*Foreign Relations of the United States* series
GDR	German Democratic Republic (East Germany)
GRU	Soviet military intelligence
ICBM	intercontinental ballistic missile
JCS	US Joint Chiefs of Staff
JFK	John Fitzgerald Kennedy
KGB	Soviet political intelligence
MAD	mutual assured destruction
MLF	Multilateral Force
MRBM	medium-range ballistic missile
NAC	North Atlantic Council of NATO
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NPG	Nuclear Planning Group in NATO
NSAM	National Security Action Memorandum (NSC)
NSC	US National Security Council

POL	petrol, oil, lubricants
PREM	Prime Minister's Office (Britain)
RFK	Robert Francis Kennedy
SAC	US Supreme Air Command
SALT	Strategic Arms Limitation Talks
SAM	surface-to-air-missile
SED	Socialist Unity Party of Germany
SLBM	submarine-launched ballistic missile
SNIE	CIA Special National Intelligence Estimate
TASS	Russian news agency
TNA	The UK National Archives, Kew, Surrey
UN	United Nations
USAF	United States Air Force
USGPO	US Government Printing Office
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Contents

Introduction

The Cuban Missile Crisis was a six-day public confrontation in October 1962 between the United States and the Soviet Union over the presence of Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba. It ended when the Soviets agreed to remove the weapons in return for a US agreement not to invade Cuba and a secret assurance that American missiles in Turkey would be withdrawn. The confrontation stemmed from the ideological rivalries of the Cold War, which had begun soon after the Second World War and involved each side jostling to secure military and political advantage. Along with the 'eyeball-to-eyeball' antagonism between the respective US and Soviet leaders John F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev, and alongside a real threat of nuclear war, the crisis was a turning point given that, in its wake, American and Soviet leaders adopted more sober attitudes to East–West relations. At the same time, the Soviets pursued a nuclear build-up out of a desire never to find themselves compromised again by American power, and to negotiate arms limitation from a position of strength. The crisis accelerated the development of a more complicated, polycentric world, with some of Washington and Moscow's respective allies charting a more independent path after 1962 – partly because of a lack of consultation during the missile confrontation.

One writer suggested that the missile crisis was 'an event whose significance in international affairs almost defies hyperbole'.[1] Its undoubted importance has meant that practically every minute of the stand-off has been scrutinised intensely in a vast number of publications.[2] Crisis participants and journalists dominated the literature in the first few years after the missile crisis, and tended to laud Kennedy's response to the Soviet challenge. Famously,

presidential aide Arthur Schlesinger described Kennedy's leadership as a 'combination of toughness and restraint, of will, nerve and wisdom, so brilliantly controlled, so matchlessly calibrated, that dazzled the world'.[3] Thus, the cool, heroic Kennedy, exhibiting immaculate judgement, forced the blustering Khrushchev to concede. Other works in this period often made for engaging reading but ranked less well as accurate historical accounts of the missile crisis, given the lack of primary sources, the Kennedy administration's tendency to 'spin' what went on, and the reverence accorded to the President after his murder in 1963. In particular, there was little awareness at this stage that he had agreed to remove US missiles from Turkey.

The 1970s and the 1980s saw a growing number of scholarly publications. Graham Allison presented a narrative of events and outlined three models of bureaucratic politics for understanding American policy. Some of the literature criticised the US administration; James Nathan noted in 1975 that 'the Kennedy administration's shimmering hour – the Cuban Missile Crisis – has just begun to have its luster tarnished by critics'.[4] Critics included Thomas Paterson, who wrote in 1978 that

> The president's desire to score a victory, to recapture previous losses, to flex his muscle accentuated the crisis and obstructed diplomacy . . . Kennedy gave Khrushchev no chance to withdraw his mistake or to save face . . . He left little room for bargaining but instead issued a public ultimatum and seemed willing to destroy . . . millions in the process.[5]

The greater openness that accompanied the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s expanded our knowledge of the missile crisis. In particular, there were several conferences involving crisis participants from the United States, the Soviet Union and Cuba, who were willing to share information and perspectives.[6] The new knowledge led to a growing acceptance that Khrushchev placed missiles in Cuba to defend the island from American aggression, which had been demonstrated by the US-sponsored attack by Cuban émigrés at the Bay of Pigs in April 1961. The conferences brought the long-overlooked Cuban perspective more to the fore.

This included explaining why Cuba's radical leader, Fidel Castro, chose to accept Soviet missiles – he wanted to protect the island and to strengthen the international socialist camp.[7] Furthermore, suspicions about the reason for the removal of the US Jupiter missiles in Turkey were confirmed.

The 1990s saw increased pace in the declassification of material from the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, the US National Archives and the Central Intelligence Agency. The Kennedy Library released twenty-two hours of secret recordings of missile crisis conversations between the President and his 'ExComm' colleagues. Why Kennedy made the recordings, which began in July 1962, is uncertain, but they provide important insight into White House policymaking and into the views of individual advisers. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, for instance, emerged as a 'hawk' in the ExComm deliberations, in contrast to how he appeared in his posthumously published (1969) memoir *Thirteen Days*. In 1996 the US Department of State published around 900 pages of US documentation, including transcripts of the ExComm recordings, in a volume in the long-running *Foreign Relations of the United States* series.[8]

While there is a great deal of American documentation available, the picture is far from complete. Declassification often proceeds at a glacial pace because of political sensitivities, security concerns and limited resources. Most records of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Defense Department, the Strategic Air Command and the US Air Force remain classified. The withheld material includes information about the U-2 reconnaissance aircraft that drifted into Soviet territory while on a routine air monitoring mission over the Arctic on the night of 26–7 October.[9] Some Soviet documents have been released since the end of the Cold War, with many being disseminated online through the Cold War International History Project and the National Security Archive.[10] These have illuminated, for example, differences of opinion between the Soviet Union and Cuba over the settlement of the missile crisis. However, the quantity of Soviet material available remains relatively modest. This means that there is limited knowledge of, for instance, how Soviet officials estimated the impact of nuclear weapons in Cuba on the balance of power,

or how changing threat perceptions during the crisis might have influenced Khrushchev's conduct. Policy formation in Havana is still more obscure, as the Cuban government has proved especially parsimonious about releasing documents. To understand Cuban attitudes, thinking and initiatives, historians have to rely in large part on public speeches and statements – often decades after the event – from Fidel Castro and others, and on the records of other countries. Although the broad contours of Cuba's role are apparent, we cannot yet do full justice to Cuban concerns and contributions.

Whatever the limitations of the documentary record, there are no signs of the literature drying up. In recent years there has been a comprehensive general account of the missile crisis;[11] a growing focus on the perspectives of countries beyond the United States, the Soviet Union and Cuba;[12] and, since the fiftieth anniversary of the crisis, a crop of mainly specialised works.[13] This book conveys the latest interpretations of the origins, course and aftermath of the missile crisis, drawing on the secondary literature alongside documents from the United States, the Soviet Union, Cuba, Britain (the US partner in the vaunted 'special relationship') and other countries. Memoirs, including those of Robert F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev, are used. Such sources are not to be treated uncritically because, as we have noted with the example of the former, they are often written with a view to publication and so tend to be self-serving.[14] Nonetheless, they can provide data and personal perspectives not otherwise available.

The book explores the culpability of the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations for causing the crisis because of their hostility to the Castro regime, which had gained power in the Cuban Revolution of 1959. US policies ended up strengthening Castro by providing him with a powerful external enemy, and by encouraging ties between Cuba and the Soviet Union. Although the United States and the Soviet Union were the prime movers in the missile crisis, Cuba was a proud, independent and influential actor and not merely a superpower pawn. Early in 1962, for example, Castro exploited Soviet insecurities about losing their partner in the Caribbean to secure greater support from Moscow. Various longstanding myths about the crisis are

dismissed, including the notion that on 24 October Soviet and American vessels were 'eyeball-to-eyeball' along the quarantine line that the US had established around Cuba when Khrushchev suddenly ordered a retreat. The account emphasises the danger of the confrontation. Kennedy estimated that the odds of nuclear war were 'somewhere between one out of three and even', while Khrushchev reflected that 'we were on the edge of nuclear war'.[15] Both leaders had their own reasons for emphasising the risks – Kennedy to assert the magnitude of his success in facing down the Soviet threat; Khrushchev to justify his decision to retreat. Other participants played down the threat of war,[16] but post-Cold War revelations have indicated that the two leaders had only a tenuous grip (and sometimes no grip at all) on operational matters, which could easily have spiralled out of control with devastating consequences.

Despite the extensive literature about the Cuban Missile Crisis, the global ramifications of what went on remain invisible other than in some of the more specialised texts. While placing American, Soviet and Cuban contributions at the centre of the discussion, this book stresses that the missile crisis was a world event. There was the threat of global cataclysm, and numerous countries were involved politically or militarily. The aftermath of the crisis is also poorly explored in many of the general accounts. It is argued in this book that the settlement of the confrontation during November was complex and messy, confounding the idea that President Kennedy had secured a firm victory, and that the crisis left a number of international legacies that would play themselves out over the next few years. These legacies included intra-bloc tensions and escalating conflict in Vietnam. It is emphasised, too, that the confrontation over Soviet weapons in Cuba ended formally only in 1970, when the terms of the settlement were clarified after Soviet efforts to construct a submarine base on the island.

Chapter 1 examines the US response to the emergence of Fidel Castro in Cuba, and covers Soviet–American relations under Kennedy. The second chapter considers Khrushchev's decision to place nuclear missiles in Cuba, and his efforts to deceive the US government about his actions. Chapter 3 explores the discovery

of the missiles, and the Kennedy administration's initial deliberations about how to respond. Chapter 4 examines the first part of the confrontation, from Monday 22 to Thursday 25 October, including military preparations and the implementation of the quarantine. The subsequent chapter addresses the impact of the crisis in the United Nations, Latin America, Europe and Asia. Chapter 6 explores the most dangerous phase of the confrontation, from Friday 26 to Sunday 28 October. The final two chapters cover the aftermath of the crisis, with Chapter 7 addressing the settlement until the end of 1962, and Chapter 8 exploring the after-effects up to 1970. The Conclusion sums up the arguments and suggests further avenues for research. The appendices provide a chronology, a list of persons, biographies and a selection of documents with commentaries. The documents have been selected to illuminate aspects of the origins, course and aftermath of the missile crisis, and include US, Soviet, Cuban, British and Chinese material.

It is appropriate to make a few points concerning terminology. In the United States the confrontation of October 1962 was known as the 'Cuban Missile Crisis', in the Soviet Union as the 'Caribbean Crisis' or the 'Cuba Crisis', and in Cuba as the 'October Crisis'. Each term has a slightly different emphasis and meaning. The American label implies that the Soviet Union caused the crisis by placing nuclear missiles in Cuba. For Moscow, though, the event was a superpower confrontation that happened to be in the Caribbean; the absence of a reference to the missiles avoided the question of Soviet culpability. The term 'Caribbean Crisis' also played down the Cuban role. The Cubans referred to the 'October Crisis' because in the early Castro years they had to contend with a number of US invasion alarms. In the light of how the Soviets negotiated an end to the crisis over Cuban heads, the use of a home-grown term was also a matter of national pride.[17] This work uses the term 'Cuban Missile Crisis' not to privilege or endorse the American perspective, but simply because it is the most widely recognised label.

Notes

1. Frank C. Zagare, 'A Game-Theoretic History of the Cuban Missile Crisis', *Economies*, 2: 1, January 2014, p. 20.
2. For accounts of the literature, see Robert A. Divine, 'Alive and Well: The Continuing Missile Crisis', *Diplomatic History*, 18: 4, Fall 1994, pp. 551–60; Burton Kaufman, 'John F. Kennedy as World Leader', in Michael J. Hogan (ed.), *America in the World: The Historiography of American Foreign Relations since 1941* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 342–9; William J. Medland, 'The Cuban Missile Crisis: Evolving Historical Perspectives', *The History Teacher*, 23: 4, August 1990, pp. 433–47; Don Munton and David Welch, *The Cuban Missile Crisis: A Concise History*, 2nd edn (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 107–16 (Munton and Welch provide a valuable account of film and documentary representations of the missile crisis as well as books and articles); Len Scott, 'Should We Stop Studying the Cuban Missile Crisis?', *International Relations*, 26: 3, September 2012, pp. 255–66; Randall B. Woods, 'Beyond Vietnam: The Foreign Policies of the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations', in Robert D. Schulzinger (ed.), *A Companion to American Foreign Relations* (Malden: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 341–8. For Russian perspectives, see Sergey Radchenko, 'The Cuban Missile Crisis: Assessment of New, and Old, Russian Sources', *International Relations*, 26: 3, September 2012, pp. 327–43.
3. Roger Hilsman, *To Move a Nation: The Politics of Foreign Policy in the Administration of John F. Kennedy* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967); Robert F. Kennedy, *Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: Norton, 1999); Pierre Salinger, *With Kennedy* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966); Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1965) (quotation p. 716); Theodore Sorensen, *Kennedy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965). Other accounts from the period include Elie Abel, *The Missiles of October* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1969); and Henry M. Pachter, *Collision Course: The Cuban Missile Crisis and Coexistence* (New York: Praeger, 1963).
4. James A. Nathan, 'The Missile Crisis: His Final Hour Now', *World Politics*, 27: 2, January 1975, p. 256.

5. Graham Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971); Barton J. Bernstein, 'The Cuban Missile Crisis: Trading the Jupiters in Turkey?', *Political Science Quarterly*, 95: 1, Spring 1980, pp. 97–125; Herbert S. Dinerstein, *The Making of a Missile Crisis, October 1962* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1976); Thomas G. Paterson, 'Bearing the Burden: A Critical Look at JFK's Foreign Policy', *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, 54: 2, Spring 1978, pp. 193–212 (quotation p. 206).
6. For the conferences, see Bruce J. Allyn, James G. Blight and David A. Welch (eds), *Back to the Brink: Proceedings of the Moscow Conference on the Cuban Missile Crisis, January 27–28 1989* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1992); James G. Blight, Bruce J. Allyn and David A. Welch (eds), *Cuba on the Brink: Castro, the Missile Crisis and the Soviet Collapse*, revised edn (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002); James G. Blight and David A. Welch (eds), with foreword by McGeorge Bundy, *On the Brink: Americans and Soviets Reexamine the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: Noonday Press, 1990). Other post-Cold War works include Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *'One Hell of a Gamble': Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958–64* (New York: Norton, 1997); Anatoli I. Gribkov and William Y. Smith, *Operation Anadyr: US and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Chicago: Edition Q, 1994); Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein, *We All Lost the Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); Carlos Lechuga, *In the Eye of the Storm: Castro, Kennedy, Khrushchev and the Missile Crisis*, translated by Mary Todd (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1995); Jutta Weldes, *Constructing National Interests: The United States and the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Mark J. White, *Missiles in Cuba: Kennedy, Khrushchev, Castro and the 1962 Crisis* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1998).
7. See Mark Laffey and Jutta Weldes, 'Decolonizing the Cuban Missile Crisis', *International Studies Quarterly*, 52, 2008, pp. 555–77, for the neglect of Cuba in the literature.
8. Available at US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States Series* (Washington: USGPO), <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments> (last accessed 25 July 2015). Revised transcripts of the ExComm tapes, with commentary and analysis, are available in Ernest R. May and Philip D. Zelikow (eds), *The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House During the Cuban Missile*

Crisis (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1997). The recordings can be heard online at the Miller Centre, University of Virginia, John F. Kennedy Presidential Recordings, <http://millercenter.org/presidentialrecordings/kennedy> (last accessed 25 July 2015).

9. Michael Dobbs, 'Why We Should Still Study the Cuban Missile Crisis', *United States Institute of Peace* Special Report, 1 June 2008, p. 5, <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/sr205.pdf> (last accessed 25 July 2015).
10. Available at the Cold War International History Project, Wilson Center, <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/program/cold-war-international-history-project> (last accessed 25 July 2015) and the National Security Archive, George Washington University, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/> (last accessed 25 July 2015).
11. Michael M. Dobbs, *One Minute to Midnight: Kennedy, Khrushchev and Castro on the Brink of Nuclear War* (New York: Knopf, 2008).
12. For example, Leonardo Campus, *I sei giorni che sconvolsero il mondo: La crisi dei missili di Cuba e le sue percezioni internazionali* (Milan: Mondadori, 2014); David Gioe, Len Scott and Christopher Andrew (eds), *An International History of the Cuban Missile Crisis: A 50-Year Retrospective* (London: Routledge, 2014); L. V. Scott, *Macmillan, Kennedy and the Cuban Missile Crisis: Political, Military and Intelligence Aspects* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1999); Maurice Vaisse (ed.), *L'Europe et la Crise de Cuba* (Paris: Armand Collin, 1993).
13. For example, David M. Barrett and Max Holland, *Blind over Cuba: The Photo Gap and the Missile Crisis* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2012); David Coleman, *The Fourteenth Day: JFK and the Aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: Norton, 2012); Alice L. George, *The Cuban Missile Crisis: The Threshold of Nuclear War* (New York and London: Routledge, 2013); David R. Gibson, *Talk at the Brink: Deliberation and Decision during the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012); Sergo Mikoyan, *The Soviet Cuban Missile Crisis: Castro, Mikoyan, Kennedy, Khrushchev and the Missiles of November*, edited by Svetlana Savranskaya (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012).
14. See Irina Paperno, 'What Can Be Done with Diaries?', *Russian Review*, 63: 4, October 2004, pp. 561–73.
15. Lebow and Stein, *We All Lost the Cold War*, p. 5; Sorensen, *Kennedy*, p. 705.