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The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House during the Cuban Crisis

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assigned military counsel. In Herrod's trial, for the first time, there was testimony that enemy machine gun fire had been heard. This was outright perjury. At none of the previous trials had any witness testified to hearing machine gun fire, as they certainly would have if there had been any. Nevertheless, the court believed it, and Herrod was acquitted.

Gary Solis was in the U.S. Marine Corps for twenty-six years. He served in combat for two tours in Vietnam, and then after earning two law degrees he became a military prosecutor and a military judge. His career is unique in that in addition to his degrees in law he received a doctorate from the London School of Economics, where he also taught. He presently teaches law at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. His book *Marines and Military Law in Vietnam: Trial by Fire* (1989) is part of the official history of the Marine Corps in the Vietnam War.

The author has done a superb job of putting the reader on a hill in the combat zone in Vietnam, demonstrating the problems that arise when fairly unskilled military lawyers attempt to prosecute and defend barely trained men—men who have received no training whatsoever in the law of war, including the rights of civilians, friendly or enemy. While legally oriented, this work can still be understood by, and will be of interest to, the layman.

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May, Ernest R., and Philip D. Zelikow.
The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House during the Cuban Crisis. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press (Belknap), 1997. 716pp. \$35

It would be too easy to dismiss this fine book as a mere collection of tapes made thirty five years ago about the Cuban Missile Crisis. In reality it is impossible to review this examination of history without feeling the crackling atmosphere of those very dangerous thirteen days in October 1962 when nuclear war appeared imminent.

The meetings of the National Security Council Executive Committee (ExCom), an ad hoc group created by President John F. Kennedy to consider the crisis and determine what measures were necessary to resolve it, were secretly taped by the president. They were not released to the public until 1996.

The history of the tapes is itself interesting. Presumably, only President Kennedy (who began taping meetings in late July 1962), his secretary Evelyn Lincoln, the two Secret Service agents who installed the recording system, and perhaps Robert Kennedy knew of the system and that these tapes and others were being made. Of course, the number of people who learned about the existence of the tapes grew with the passage of years. Gradually, from 1983 on, portions of the conversations were released by the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library as the material was declassified. A major problem of the recording was that good transcriptions could not be made, because of the poor audio quality that resulted from 1962-era equipment. Only after the Kennedy Library

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acquired the technical means to improve their quality were portions of the recordings released. While the library reviewed the tapes for release, information about the missile crisis was concurrently declassified by various government agencies.

Despite the release of all the tapes by the JFK Library in late 1996 and early 1997, transcripts were not provided, because much of the recorded conversation was unintelligible. It was necessary for May and Zelikow to engage the services of both audio forensic experts and highly skilled court reporters (the latter reviewing the tapes numerous times) to create adequate transcripts.

But even with such technical assistance, the authors had to solve another problem before turning out a meaningful text. Not every ExCom meeting was recorded, and so it was necessary to forge links between the information provided on the tapes with known facts, memoirs of the participants, and minutes of the meetings in order to provide the reader with the required points of reference.

To set the scene for a proper understanding and appreciation of the tapes, the authors, both professors at Harvard University, have provided a forty-three-page introduction. In those pages the reader is given a well organized summary of the history that formed the attitudes of the principal American players during this crisis. Additionally, the Cold War and its connections not only to Cuba but to Berlin, Southeast Asia, South America, and Western Europe are examined, and how they related to Khrushchev's ill-conceived missile adventure. Of equal interest and importance, the authors have written a

concluding section that explores in detail many of the questions surrounding how and why the crisis occurred in the first place.

Readers will find themselves engrossed in a real-life drama in which the future of the world hangs in the balance. Indeed, the book has all the essential elements of a drama: the ships with unknown but suspected cargoes, moving toward a quarantine line; the receipt of the grim news that Major Gary Anderson's U-2 high-altitude surveillance plane had been shot down over Cuba by a Soviet surface-to-air missile; the increasing possibility of a U.S. military mobilization involving substantial numbers of reservists; and the always present specter of Soviet military action against Berlin. In the end, one can experience the relief that everyone felt when, as Secretary of State Dean Rusk said of the climax of the eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation, Khrushchev "blinked."

The many and various human reactions exhibited by ExCom members are also obvious. The personalities of the major participants—each molded by different experiences and training—become evident during discussions, as well as the shifts in their views about how to accommodate different courses of action as the crisis changes.

May and Zelikow have labored long and have overcome many obstacles to give us a book that should be valued by anyone having an interest in history or crisis management. It is also a splendid book for those who simply want to gain an appreciation of how close the world came to what many before the crisis had believed was only

a remote possibility—strategic nuclear war.

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Fursenko, Aleksandr, and Timothy Naftali. *"One Hell of a Gamble": Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958–1964—The Secret History of the Cuban Missile Crisis*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1997. 420pp. \$27.50

No episode of the Cold War has captured more public interest than the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962. With the declassification of many of its documents in the past few years there has been a rush of interpretative work, documentary studies, and special conclaves of those who participated in the crisis. There appears to be a desire to gain perspective on the events of those October days in 1962 when the world stood on the edge of nuclear war. But there is also a desire to develop more sophisticated methods to deal with crises. Crisis management seeks to control the forces of emotion and irrationality within ruling circles. It is hoped that the process will offer political leadership on all sides the opportunity to consider alternatives to solely military means in their list of crisis-response options. This work is an excellent example of how a major crisis was handled without losing control.

"One Hell of a Gamble" is a unique work, because the authors were permitted access to the most secret documents from the highest levels of the Soviet government, such as the KGB (now SVR), GRU (the military intelligence

directorate), the foreign ministry, and the Presidium and Politburo, as well as other government sources. They also made use of the archives in the United States, France, and the Czech Republic. (The only critical materials still prohibited to researchers are the Cuban records.) Fursenko and Naftali have also included interviews of various officials from both the Soviet Union and the United States, such as the highly respected Soviet ambassador to Cuba, Aleksandr Alekseev; the former CIA station chief, William Caldwell; an unnamed GRU officer who was familiar with the affairs of Latin America; a longtime friend of the Cuban revolutionaries, Soviet intelligence officer Nikolai Leonov; special assistant to President John F. Kennedy, Ted Sorensen; and CIA Cuban specialist Samuel Halpern.

The authors have provided a classic intelligence primer on how the intent of one's actions is not always perceived as it was meant to be by those who are most affected. Kennedy had difficulty dealing with Nikita Khrushchev, because he had never dealt with anyone like him before in local, state, or national politics. What had worked for Kennedy in his rise to the presidency did not move Khrushchev, whose political axioms had been developed during the paranoia of Stalinism. This is an excellent presentation of the dynamics between these two leaders.

I admire Fursenko's and Naftali's portraits of Khrushchev and also, surprisingly, of General Issa Pliyev. Previous books had misled me about why Khrushchev selected him as Soviet commander in Cuba. The