

7-31-1975

The United States Military in the Cuban Missile Crisis

Frank Joseph Wikenheiser
Portland State University

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Follow this and additional works at: http://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/open_access_etds

 Part of the [Diplomatic History Commons](#), [Political History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Wikenheiser, Frank Joseph, "The United States Military in the Cuban Missile Crisis" (1975). *Dissertations and Theses*. Paper 2386.

10.15760/etd.2383

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations and Theses by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. For more information, please contact pdxscholar@pdx.edu.

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF Frank Joseph Wikenheiser for the Master of Arts in History presented July 31, 1975.

Title: The United States Military in the Cuban Missile Crisis

APPROVED BY MEMBERS OF THE THESIS COMMITTEE:


Bernard V. Burke, Chairman


Jesse L. Gilmore


Jim E. Heath

One of the most significant events in the Cold War-dominated years of the 1950's and early 1960's was the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. It not only has been reputed by most authorities as a major turning point in the Soviet Union-American struggle, but it dramatically illustrated the critical dimension of thermo-nuclear weapons in international relations. In addition, and of particular interest to one directly involved, it showed that firmness in policy and proper application of military power are key factors in obtaining favorable and peaceful settlements of international disputes.

The proper employment of United States Military forces played a major role in bringing this Crisis to a successful conclusion. At the time of the Crisis this writer was a member of the staff of the Unified Commander, Commander in Chief Atlantic (CINCLANT), Admiral Robert E. Dennison. The major focus of this thesis is on the actions taken by this Commander in carrying out the policies and actions ordered by the President. As the Unified Commander of the area in which Cuba is located CINCLANT was charged with the operational responsibilities of that area.

The problems of research are still complicated by non-availability of certain key documents relative to the Crisis. Many of the military decisions were based on material carried over communications channels so highly classified that many more years of time-sanitization will be required before public release.

Most of the data that has been released became available through the efforts of Elie Abel. His book, The Cuban Missile Crisis, is based on personal interviews with many of the principals of the Executive Committee that was formed by President John F. Kennedy to control the Crisis. This book is the best account of how the decision-making process worked during those critical days of late October, 1962. Other valuable information was obtained from books written by the President's close advisers, cabinet members and his brother, Robert. All of these writings, which came in a flurry right after the Crisis, give an excellent background, but are suspect until more supporting material is declassified. To show how closely some of the data is still guarded a good example comes from a recent book by Abram Chayes. Ironically,

Professor Chayes was not permitted to publish a memorandum on the legal aspects prepared by one of his assistants during the Crisis when he was the Legal Advisor to the State Department. Since this memorandum, as explained by Chayes, was not originally classified, this refusal best illustrates that the secrecy problem still exists.

In all the writings on the subject there is very little focus on the preparations of the military, especially CINCLANT, prior to the Crisis. This thesis will focus on how this staff prepared for and executed the missions assigned. In addition it will assess the military performance during the Crisis. Most of the information relative to the functions of CINCLANT and the military is based on the experiences of this writer and has not been tested by the experts who have written on this subject.

Based on the material that is available and on this writer's experiences the following conclusions on the United States Military role in the Crisis are forwarded:

(1) The Cuban Missile Crisis was not an end to the Cold War, but it was a major turning point and a change of attitude by both parties. The military would be involved in new problems, such as arms limitations.

(2) The Soviet leaders learned the danger of a direct confrontation with the United States. From all that has been written they must know that the military was in full readiness for any action called for by the President.

(3) President Kennedy learned that he must strive for more options in dealing with our Soviet rivals. He was seriously concerned with the "military response" syndrome of his advisers.

(4) The Crisis illustrated that the United States Military must at all times

be ready to apply limited force because the consequences of nuclear power demand that those forces not be used. (5) The military learned that the decision-making process had moved to the White House in actions that could involve nuclear or conventional warfare. (6) The overall performance of the United States Military was excellent and many tactical and technical lessons were learned.

THE UNITED STATES MILITARY IN THE
CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

by

FRANK JOSEPH WIKENHEISER

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS
in
HISTORY

Portland State University
1975

TO THE OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH:

The members of the Committee approve the thesis of
Frank Joseph Wikenheiser presented July 31, 1975.



Bernard V. Burke, Chairman



Jesse L. Gilmore



Jim V. Heath

APPROVED:



Jesse L. Gilmore, Head, Department of History



David T. Clark, Dean of Graduate Studies and Research

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
CHAPTER	
I INTRODUCTION.	1
II PRELIMINARIES	5
III THE DECISION.	19
IV MILITARY OPERATIONS	31
V AFTERMATH	56
BIBLIOGRAPHY.	74

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As a student of the Cold War and the related diplomatic scenario between the United States and the Soviet Union, the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, especially as it relates to the participation of the United States military, has been of paramount interest to this writer. It not only has been reputed as a key turning point towards more understanding relations in the United States-Soviet Union Cold War struggle, but it dramatically illustrates the added significance of thermo-nuclear weapons in international diplomacy.

In late 1962, when Nikita Khrushchev took his stupendous gamble by placing nuclear offensive weapons into Cuba, he not only set the stage for a direct confrontation, and possibly a thermo-nuclear war, by the two super-powers, but he made a basic change in Soviet policy as far as it related to entrusting the location of such weapons in one of her satellites. From the beginning of the resultant diplomatic exchange it was obvious that a new plateau had been reached in the Cold War. More than ever, world power had been polarized on the shoulders of the leaders of the two concerned nations. The stakes were so high for President John F. Kennedy and Premier Khrushchev, that the decision-making process immediately moved to the summit in each government. It was restricted to a few top-level aides and was conducted under the utmost secrecy.

These factors have complicated the problem of research, since some of the key documents have not been de-classified and made available for analysis. The initial efforts of Elie Abel to gain personal

interviews with many of the participants in the American decisions are extremely helpful, and are well reported in his book, The Cuban Missile Crisis, which is still the best account of the events. Until some of the more highly classified documents are made available, this book is a key to any student of this complicated international event.

Books written by President Kennedy's close advisers, his brother Robert, Theodore Sorenson, McGeorge Bundy, Robert McNamara, and others, have good background material but need close scrutiny for self-serving points-of-view and emotions resulting from the presidential assassination and related events. When more classified materials are made available, some of the conflicts contained in these books and articles may be settled, thus making them more valuable, historically.

There was a great amount of reporting on the Crisis, during and immediately after it happened. Most of the writings since then have been repetitive and based on magazine articles that followed the Crisis and Abel's classic work. Most of these works are generally favorable to the American actions and are almost completely lacking in presentation of the Soviet side of the story. As is the case of all the Cold War crises, the Soviet Union has chosen to keep officially silent about her actions. All the scholarly works stress the fact that more real material from the Soviet side is necessary before a balanced story can be told.

Not the least part of my interest in this event comes from my direct participation as a military officer. My military assignment, after the tragedy of the Bay of Pigs, was to the Staff of the Commander in Chief Atlantic, (CINCLANT), Commander in Chief Atlantic Fleet, (CINCLANTFLT). Both these hats of command were worn by Admiral Robert

F. Dennison, who would play the key military command role in the Crisis as the Unified Commander of the area concerned. My specific staff assignment was as Fleet Air Operations Officer, with further duties as CINCLANT Officer-in-Charge of the Joint Reconnaissance Center (CINCLANT JRC). This latter billet involved the duties of planning and supervising the conduct of all aerial reconnaissance and some of the surface surveillance of Cuba, before, during and after the Crisis. The sensitive nature of the operations, relative to Cuba, gave this position on CINCLANT's staff a high level security clearance. This factor made this writer privy to most of the sensitive material relative to operations that has not been released. It is not within the purview of this thesis to expose highly classified material, but rather to use this background to tell the military side of the Cuban Missile Crisis. These operations were not only unique in concept, but were to be a test of the readiness of the new military force diversification policy and crisis management as it related to the performance of the military.

The first part of the thesis summarizes those events which were preliminary to the Crisis. A brief history of United States-Cuban relations prior to the Cuban Revolution, which brought Fidel Castro to power and moved Cuba into the Soviet orbit, is part of this chapter. The involvement in and the effects on the United States Military of the Bay of Pigs tragedy is also included in this chapter as necessary background information. The pre-Crisis Soviet-United States exchanges are covered with a focus on how the presence of the missiles was discovered.

The next chapter examines the decision-making process by the President and the Executive Committee. President Kennedy was presented with a myriad of political, diplomatic, domestic, and military problems when

he was made aware of the installation of Soviet offensive nuclear weapons in Cuba. Emphasis is given on the relationship of the President and his staff to the military and how the controversies connected with this relationship influenced the morale and performance of the United States forces during the Crisis.

Under the direction of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, CINCLANT had prepared a series of military plans to handle any eventuality, relative to Cuba, after the revolution brought Castro to power. These plans were up-dated on a priority basis after the increased Soviet influence and presence, resultant from the Bay of Pigs invasion and other related events. The next chapter covers the execution by CINCLANT, the Unified Commander, of those parts of these plans ordered by the President in relation to the Crisis. Much of the information in this chapter is based on the experience of the writer and has not been examined in detail by the better-known studies.

The conclusion contains this writer's judgments on how well the military was employed and how they performed during the Crisis. In addition, each conclusion that had an eventual effect on the military is appraised. This examination is divided into three broad categories and how each of these effected the military: First, the diplomatic results; second, the internal decisions; and third, the lessons learned by the military in the deployment and design of hardware and other military functions.

CHAPTER II

PRELIMINARIES

Thoughtful Americans very early realized the strategic importance of Cuba. Its close proximity to the United States plus the dominant position of Cuba relative to the main trade routes into the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico, fostered interest in the island throughout the 19th century. By mid-century American aspirations increased as the economic potential of Cuba was developed. Private invasions (filibusters), made up for the most part of Cuban refugees based in the United States, were a continuous source of sensationalism that led to almost continuous American involvement in the Spanish colony with resultant troubles and deteriorating relations.

About this same time increased pressures for expansion by American slave interests and economic adventurers centered on Cuba, and numerous moves were made to acquire the island. These schemes of annexation failed because of the involvement of the sectional slave controversy and direct opposition of France and Great Britain to a change in Cuba's status as a colony of a weak Spanish empire.

After the United States concluded her Civil War, internal revolutionary activity in Cuba brought a campaign of cruelty and terror. In this unrest, Spain was cast into the difficult role of suppressing a popular rebellion aimed at independence for an oppressed people. Direct

1

R. G. Caldwell, *The Lopez Expeditions to Cuba, 1848-1851* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1915), pp. 12-17. It is ironic that the most famous of these expeditions, led by Narciso Lopez ended in dismal failure, a forerunner of the more famous Bay of Pigs of 1961.

United States military intervention was resisted by American leaders until the disaster of the Maine, in Havana Harbor, led to war with Spain in 1898.

After the Spanish-American War, the United States exercised a major influence on the economic and political development of Cuba. This lasted until the suspension of the sugar quota in 1960 and the resultant break in diplomatic relations in 1961. From 1902 to 1934, this influence was exercised according to the Platt Amendment, a statement of the United States view towards relations between the two countries. This Amendment was incorporated into the Cuban constitution. It made Cuba a protectorate and gave the United States the right to intervene when it was thought desirable to protect Cuban independence. Also, the Government of Cuba was required to protect life, property, and the pursuit of individual liberty of its citizens or the United States could interfere. The United States was also ceded a permanent base, for naval protection of the Panama Canal, in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. In 1934, these policies were changed. The United States kept Guantanamo, but in consonance with a generally more enlightened policy toward Latin America, the United States government relaxed its control over Cuba. The American policies in Cuba during the 1930's and up to World War II were rooted in economics, specifically, on the sugar quota. During this war, Cuba made a significant economic advance because sugar demand stabilized prices at a high level, but afterwards dependence on the United States returned as sugar prices fluctuated over a wide and generally lower range.

The Cuban governments in the late 1930's, 40's, and up to 1952 were corrupt and gangster-like but maintained a form of constitution-

ality. In 1952, General Fulgencio Batista took control by a military coup. At first, this was generally well accepted by the politically bankrupt nation. Batista protected American interests, but his sadistic henchmen fostered a tyranny, disdained by most Americans and absolutely abhorred by the majority of Cubans. This set the stage for Fidel Castro's rise to power in 1958.

The Cuban disenchantment with the United States in the late 1950's was patented for the Soviet desires to embarrass the United States and foster the new Soviet theory of National Democracy, based on association of Third World countries, while fully converting to Communist ideology. Cuba was for some time the Soviet Union's greatest Third World achievement. The Castro revolution meant a development of a community of interest with the Soviet Union. It was a foreign policy windfall and has alternated between the extremes of disaster and complete success, since the Soviet Union became involved. For the Soviet Union, the first gain was a great ideological "shot in the arm." Suddenly, there appeared a Latin American country, next to the United States, which had been dominated by the United States for 60 years, ready for deliverance. Cuba had declared against the Capitalist-Imperialists and for Marx and Lenin.

By early 1960, the Soviet Union made Cuba an arena for her renewed aggressiveness. American relations with Cuba had deteriorated, and Castro had moved from his initial non-Communist pronouncements to a more radical approach. In this, the Soviet Union saw Cuba developing as a catalyst that would lead to other anti-American revolutions in the Western Hemisphere.

When troubles between the United States and Cuba led to a break in

diplomatic relations, Khrushchev was irresistibly tempted to play a more active role in Cuban affairs. He was sure that this presented the kind of opportunity to win an international propaganda victory similar to the one that had just eluded him in the Congo. United States economic policies had caused chaos in Cuba, and Castro was forced to turn to Moscow for rescue.

The flood of Soviet technicians, planners, and military experts began, and thousands had arrived by the latter part of 1960. This help came in such a stream that Washington showed alarm and Congress, high-ranking military officers, and other national leaders began to demand action.² One of the many fears that was expressed was the concern for the new ability to spread Soviet influence to other Latin American countries from Cuba.

By the end of 1960, the tens of thousands of refugees escaping from Castro's purges and property confiscations appeared to present an opportunity for the anti-Castro activists in the United States to regain control of Cuba. This was to be done with an invasion, which would count on the support of a large bloc of anti-Castro Cubans still in Cuba to join forces and expel communism.

Just before the changing of presidents, from Eisenhower to Kennedy, plans for such an invasion were formulated by the Central Intelligence Agency, (CIA). During the winter of 1960-61, the Cuban refugees were secretly armed, organized and trained by the United States, in order to provide a military force to carry out the invasion. When

2

Louis J. Halle, The Cold War as History (New York, London: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 404.

President Kennedy arrived on the scene, he was presented with a force in being designed to overthrow Castro. He had the unpopular choice of stopping the plan, which by now was getting considerable public attention, or letting it continue.³

President Kennedy executed this plan, and when the invasion failed and resulted in the disaster of the Bay of Pigs, Castro moved more firmly into the Soviet orbit. Much has been written of the inept execution of the plan. The subject of many articles and books has been the lack of proper supporting air forces, logistics and the failure of sending American forces to the rescue. The crux of the matter, which caused the failure of the invasion, was that the American government had been guilty of hopelessly misreading the Cuban people. It was obvious from the way the Cubans rallied behind Castro that dislocation of the Cuban dictator, based on an internal uprising such as that required by the Bay of Pig's plan, was improbable at that time.

The Bay of Pigs was a serious error in American policy and was a significant factor in causing Castro to announce the socialist nature of his revolution. He was recognized by Moscow as a Marxist building a socialist force in Cuba. In this he was helped by the American discomfiture and feeling of guilt, a direct outgrowth of the Bay of Pigs. This gave Castro and his Soviet allies almost complete assurance that further attempts at the displacement of the Cuban dictator would be unlikely.

For the Soviet Union the Bay of Pigs confirmed the leadership's

initial feeling of an apparent lack of resolution of the young American president.⁴ As a result, the Soviet arms build-up was accelerated. Using the invasion as an example of the aggressive American policy toward Cuba, it was easy for the Soviet leadership to explain, both at home and abroad, that the new weapons shipments were necessary to bring Cuba to a defensive level which would avoid further aggression by the United States. Khrushchev, in responding to American action, appeared to be protecting small nations.

For President Kennedy and his new administration, the Bay of Pigs was a dismal failure. From it he learned that he could not trust his experts completely in either the intelligence, military and diplomatic areas.⁵ Even though the ill-fated invasion was a definite set-back, it did not change the basic direction of the Kennedy administration. It was still activist and if anything was even more eager to flex its muscles. The President wanted to show Khrushchev and the Soviets that he was tough-minded, that the Bay of Pigs had been an accident and that it was not a reflection of his will.⁶

For the United States military the Bay of Pigs was particularly frustrating. It was an operation in which they had no real part as far as the determination of the outcome was concerned. The Joint Chiefs

4

Adam G. Ulam, The Rivals (New York: The Viking Press, 1971), p. 320.

5

Roger Hilsman, To Move a Nation (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1967), pp. 31-32.

6

David Halberstam, The Best and the Brightest (New York: Random House, 1969), pp. 71-72.

of Staff were originally consulted in the planning, but by the time the plan was activated it no longer resembled the original ideas. However, because of the very nature of the event, a great deal of criticism of the military was forthcoming when the operation failed. President Kennedy came out of the Bay of Pigs adventure skeptical of professional advice, a factor that downgraded the overall importance of military advisors in presidential decisions. In addition, the prestige of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was hurt because the President became very wary of their advice and turned more toward his civilian specialists.⁷ Much of the normal system of military intelligence against Cuba was weakened after the ill-fated invasion resulted in the loss or discredit of operatives and established information channels.

As a further reaction to the Bay of Pigs, President Kennedy placed more emphasis on special commissions to study and report on specific military problems. He did not necessarily by-pass the advice of the JCS, but he decimated their policy-making powers by moving control of military decisions into the White House. Even before the Bay of Pigs he had increased the importance in military decisions of an array of young and bright civilian aides who were organized under the Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara. More and more the Secretary and his team operated the defense establishment with decisions based on cost effectiveness and management control.⁸ This method was suspiciously eyed by the military and some congressmen

⁷
Elie Abel, The Missile Crisis (Philadelphia, New York: J.P. Lippincott Co., 1966), p. 40.

⁸
Theodore C. Sorensen, Kennedy (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 606.

because it placed key weapons systems decisions into the hands of these civilian advisers. In the eyes of the President the established military advisory system had failed during the Bay of Pigs. This caused him to place more faith in the direction of McNamara and his new managers.

Over the years the military and civilian planners in the Department of Defense followed a strategic planning concept which was designed to stop the expansion of the Soviet Union. The new policies seemed to stop the interest in this approach. Crisis management, flexible response and balanced forces for "brush fire" wars were the new challenge. By 1961, McNamara had introduced administrative concepts which brought the decision-making process almost entirely to his office. Centralization of authority had taken a giant step. Many professional military officers, including this writer, disagreed with this approach and contended that strategic advice and the selection of armament should flow from command positions within the armed forces.⁹

In late January of 1962, the Punta del Este Conference of the Organization of American States (OAS), was held in Uruguay. The conference decided to exclude Cuba from the OAS, a much milder action than that desired by the United States. By February of 1962, business and political leaders of both parties were demanding stronger action to prevent the Soviet from exerting more influential control over Cuba. In response to this pressure the President declared an economic embargo against Cuba on February 3.

In mid-summer 1962, reports became more numerous that the ship-

9

Henry A. Kissinger, ed., Problems of National Strategy (New York, London: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), p. 443.

ment of Soviet arms and troops to Cuba were being increased. This brought demands from the leadership of both political parties for action that would stop the Soviet build-up. When the first surface-to-air (SAM) missiles were detected in late August, the President's Republican opposition became more outspoken. With the Congressional elections just weeks away, the Cuban issue became very important to those politicians facing tough re-election contests. Republican Senator Homer Capehart of Indiana was one of these, and he demanded that President Kennedy order an invasion to remove the Cuban problem. The main political antagonist against the administration's Cuban policies was Senator Kenneth Keating of New York. At the end of August he took the Senate floor and warned of the arms build-up in Cuba. He urged a hard-line against the Soviet Union and Cuba to replace the Democratic "do-nothing policy."

President Kennedy was faced with a unique situation in early September. His political opponents were demanding more action against Cuba, in some cases urging an invasion. Meanwhile, the Cubans were charging that the President was already planning an invasion. On September 2, his position was further complicated when, during a Che Guevara visit, the Soviet Union announced the supply of further arms and technicians to train Cubans to meet aggressive imperialism.¹⁰

In response to these pressures, President Kennedy issued a warning to the Soviet Union on September 4, 1962. This was an attempt to head off further congressional criticism, and to this end the president pledged that he would use "whatever means necessary" to prevent ag-

10

Louise FitzSimons, The Kennedy Doctrine (New York: Random House, 1972), p. 129-130.

gression from Cuba to the Western Hemisphere. He also summarized his feeling on the situation in Cuba, by stating that there was no evidence of any organized combat force in Cuba from any Soviet-bloc country. He also warned that the gravest of issues would arise should the Soviet Union bring in offensive missiles.¹¹

This warning, by President Kennedy, worried Khrushchev. He sent Soviet Ambassador to the United States, Anatol Dobrynin, to see Robert Kennedy, to reassure the United States leaders that there were no offensive weapons in Cuba.¹²

Khrushchev kept probing. During a meeting with poet Robert Frost he made the statement that the United States was "too liberal to fight." On September 11, 1962, the Soviet Union increased the pressure on the President by warning that any attack by the United States, on Cuba or on Soviet ships bound for Cuba, would mean nuclear-rocket war.¹³

This increased pressure brought forth another important statement from President Kennedy. On September 13, he said that the United States would defend its security as it was endangered by the Soviet actions in Cuba, but he saw no need for military action at this time. This statement did not stop the political hue and cry. Senator Barry Goldwater assailed the administrative policy again as "do-nothing" and, along with

¹¹

FitzSimons, p. 131.

¹²

Stewart Alsop, "In Times of Crisis," Saturday Evening Post, CCXXXVI, (Dec. 8, 1962), pp. 16-19.

¹³

David L. Larson, ed. The Cuban Missile Crisis, Selected Documents and Chronology (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1963), p. 306.

other Senate Republicans, he tried to add a military warning to a bill which authorized a call up of selected reserves.¹⁴ In addition, pressure for a stronger stand included a call by former Vice President Richard Nixon for a Naval blockade against Cuba.

On September 21, 1962, Soviet Foreign Minister, Andrei A. Gromyko, issued a new warning in the United Nations that a United States attack on Cuba would mean war.¹⁵

By September 26, 1962, the pressure for more stringent action by President Kennedy again increased. A joint resolution of Congress, which had been passed on September 20th by the Senate by a vote of 86 to 1, passed the House 394 to 7. It expressed American determination to prevent the regime in Cuba from extending its aggressive or subversive activities to any part of the hemisphere. The resolution also stated that the United States was determined to prevent "the creation or use of an externally supported military capability endangering the security of the United States."¹⁶ There was no doubt that the Republican leadership was trying to take political advantage from the Cuban problem, but the large majority support that the resolution received would have some influence on the tough decisions that the President made later. At the time of the resolution the President passed it off as necessary for the Congress to let off steam and satisfy pressure from their con-

14

FitzSimons, p. 135.

15

Larson, p. 308.

16

FitzSimons, pp. 137-138.

stituents.

Later in September verbal attacks on the American position, relative to Cuba, by the Soviets and her satellites continued. Soviet President Leonid Breshnev reiterated the earlier Gromyko statement that an attack on Cuba meant war. The Polish Foreign Minister, Adam Rapacki, attacked United States foreign policy on Cuba in the United Nations.¹⁷

Early October saw more foreign policy maneuvering between President Kennedy and Khrushchev. This included another attempt by Khrushchev to get the former to visit Moscow for a summit conference. The Soviet leader felt he could gain favorable advantages regarding both Cuba and Berlin from such a meeting. Kennedy remembered the difficulties he had with Khrushchev in Vienna and refused such a meeting at this time. In countering Khrushchev's diplomatic initiatives, Kennedy continued to tighten the economic sanctions against Castro by pressuring America's allies to cease shipments to Cuba. By October 4, the United States Government announced its plan to penalize all ship owners who still hauled Soviet bloc materials to Cuba. This was to be accomplished by the revocation of favorable trade status and application of economic sanctions against those who continued to ship to Castro.

The Cuban-Soviet objections to the American "Naval Blockade" were again voiced in the United Nations, this time by President Osvaldo Dorticos of Cuba, on October 8, 1962. In his address before the General Assembly he denounced the United States shipping policies and renewed accusations that preparations for an invasion were continuing. There

17

Larson, pp. 308-309.

was some truth to this last charge for by this time CINCLANT was in the advanced stages of planning for a possible invasion. Dorticos also protested against the renewed activity by Cuban exile organizations, primarily Alpha 66, which pursued attacks against Cuban crops and shipping.¹⁸

While these 1962 diplomatic exchanges and maneuvers for world opinion were going on, the United States intelligence community was becoming more concerned about the presence of offensive weapons in Cuba. This concern was based on refugee reports from Cuba and also on more sophisticated methods of collection. The information was being filtered at the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) processing center for Cuba, located in Opa Locka, Florida. By late summer, these reports indicated the possibility that offensive weapons were being introduced into Cuba. To confirm this, aerial reconnaissance activity over Cuba was stepped up and U-2 high altitude flights were flown on September 5, 17, 26, 29, and October 5 and 7. These flights did not reveal anything beyond the previously discovered SAMS. These flights had been east of Havana, because of the increased possibility of the destruction of the U-2's by SAMS, the weather, and confusion in the management of this vital activity. There were two factors involved in the management problem, the controversy concerning the operation of the U-2's, between the CIA and the United States Air Force, and the fact that the control of all activities over and around Cuba had not been fully passed to the Unified Commander concerned (CINCLANT) for coordination. It was these two factors that, in my estimation, hampered the intelligence gathering effort

and, when combined with high classification created by the many bureaucratic managers involved, delayed earlier identification of the presence of the offensive missiles in Cuba.

The control of all aircraft, while they were over or around Cuba, was finally accomplished under an adjunct of CINCLANT JRC, located in Key West, Florida. This activity, known as the Joint Air Reconnaissance Coordination Center (JARCC), was created to monitor or control all air activity concerned with Cuban operations. CINCLANT had asked for a change in his force structure to create a flag billet under his direct command in order to supervise Cuban air and sea operations. The billet was approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Commander, Key West Forces (COMKEYWESTFOR), manned by a Navy admiral, was charged with this mission. The control provided directly under CINCLANT by this vital command and control change became an absolute necessity as the air activity increased, and had it been set up and working at an earlier date than just before the Crisis, the problem of late information would probably have been avoided. The creation and problems involved with this new structure will be covered more fully in a later chapter.

In any event, the photos confirming the presence of the missiles were finally obtained and were in Washington by October 15, 1962. They were presented to President Kennedy the following day. October 16 marked the beginning of a period of tense activity known as the Cuban Missile Crisis.

CHAPTER III

THE DECISION

With the delivery of the firm evidence of offensive nuclear missiles in Cuba, President Kennedy was faced with a second great crisis, relative to Cuba, in his still young administration. The evidence that had been gathered with great difficulty and a certain amount of indecision and confusion was definite. It proved that those advisors and critics who had warned about the offensive build-up in Cuba were correct.

The greatest initial frustration for Kennedy was facing up to the fact that Khrushchev had deliberately lied in his assurances to Kennedy that offensive missiles would not be placed into Cuba.¹⁹ For the President this was a personal challenge with deep political, diplomatic and military implications. His fears that Khrushchev had misjudged his determination were now realized.

The second obvious fact was that the President's policy toward Cuba had been wrong. The worst fears of high level military and civilian leaders and President Kennedy's political opponent's predictions, that Cuba would be turned into a military fortress and thereby effect the balance of power, were now approaching reality.

These two factors weighed heavily in the President's eventual decision, but some other immediate issues would be of great influence: (1) If he took a weak stance the President would lose the confidence of his

19

Sorensen, p. 668.

own party's congressmen, many of whom faced election in three weeks. (2) He had declared that such weapons would not be allowed in Cuba. Any retreat from this policy would destroy public confidence in the President. (3) Foreign powers would watch closely to see if President Kennedy had the courage to face up to the challenge and back up his statements. (4) Another retreat, so shortly after the Bay of Pigs, would undermine confidence in the President by most members of Congress and his own staff. (5) The President needed a victory to instill confidence in himself regarding his ability to do the job.²⁰

All of these factors and other pressures not so obvious indicated to President Kennedy that the only avenue available was strong, forceful action. To this end, the President, after his notification of the presence of the missiles in the early morning of the 16th of October, called a secret meeting of key national security officials and set up an Executive Committee, varying in size from 9 to 14 members. This group was to conduct the Cuban negotiations, under very tight security. The make-up of this group is interesting and covers a wide range of experience. From Defense there was Secretary McNamara, Under-Secretary Roswell Gilpatrick and Special Advisor Paul Nitze. From State, Secretary Dean Rusk, Under-Secretary George Ball, political specialist, Alexis Johnson, former Ambassador to the Soviet Union Llewellyn Thompson and Edwin Martin, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs. Attorney General Robert Kennedy was there, as was General Maxwell Taylor and sometimes, Admiral George Anderson from the Joint Staff. Sec-

retary of the Treasury Douglas Dillon and Presidential speech-writer Theodore Sorensen were present along with Special Assistant to the President for National Security McGeorge Bundy. CIA Director John McCone replaced General Carter and Vice President Lyndon Johnson and Ambassador to the United Nations Adlai Stevenson were part-time representatives.²¹

This arrangement of setting up a special Executive Committee, has brought mixed reaction from those evaluating the performance of the Executive Branch of the Government during the Crisis. It was obviously a reflection of the decision by the President to create special committees to study specific problems, rather than operating under the established governmental system. Secretary McNamara described its effectiveness as follows: "The performance of the United States Government during the critical period was more effective than any other time during my seven years service as Secretary of Defense."²² Lately there has been criticism that such extra-ordinary efforts caused fatigue and stress with the result that not all the choices were carefully considered.²³

President Kennedy emphasized the urgency of the situation when

21

Richard Gulahan, "Step by Step in a Historic Week," Life (Nov. 2, 1962), p. 42.

22

Robert Kennedy, Thirteen Days, A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis (New York: W.W. Norton, 1969), p. 14.

23

James Nathan, "The Missile Crisis, His Finest Hour, Now" World Politics, XXVII, (Jan 1975), p. 259.

he said: "Set aside all other tasks to take a prompt and intense survey of the dangers and all possible courses of action." At the same meeting he set the guidelines for the members of the Executive Committee, "As fifteen individuals on their own, representing the President and not their different departments." Sorensen goes on to say that the meetings were conducted with a sense of complete equality, where rank, protocol and experience meant little as compared to the life of the nation.²⁴ Dean Acheson, who sat in on some of these sessions as a special diplomatic advisor to the President, took exception to the equality statement. He felt the sessions were repetitive, leaderless and a waste of time. He also stated that Rusk should have taken charge.²⁵

The initial decision of the Committee boiled down to six basic options; (1) Do nothing. Although this option had very little support, it was suggested that an outward calm attitude should be kept in regard to the presence of the missiles. Any comment should relegate them to a minor role in the overall Soviet and American nuclear capability. (2) Bring about removal by diplomatic pressure. In discussing this it was felt that the main avenues for such action were the United Nations, the Organization of American States (OAS), or a direct approach to Khrushchev which would probably end up in an undesirable summit conference. Additionally, the suggested offer of a

24

Sorensen, p. 675.

25

Dean Acheson, "Dean Acheson's Version of RFK's Version of the Cuban Missile Affair," Esquire, LXXI, (Feb. 1969), pp. 76-77.

trade for our Jupiter missiles in Turkey, would only cause more demands from the Soviets and would convince our European allies that we would sacrifice them for our own security. (3) A secret approach to Castro. This was a weak course of action because the Soviets maintained control of the missiles. (4) Invasion. This was a widely-supported option by the so-called "Hawks", a term reserved for those wanting strong military action, General Taylor, McCone, Rusk, Nitze and Acheson. It was relegated as a step to be taken should the blockade fail. (5) Surgical Air Strike. This measure was favored by President Kennedy at the beginning and by the "Hawks" throughout. When the President was informed that such a plan would require 500 sorties to achieve 90% success and when the surprise feature of such an attack was likened to Pearl Harbor, this plan was deserted. (6) Blockade. This plan was finally adopted, but not before its own problems were explored: (a) It could result in a reprisal by a Berlin blockade. (b) What would happen if the Soviet controlled ships refused to obey orders for search or change of course. (c) Any mention of blockade would violate the traditional United States posture of freedom of the seas. Members then looked at the advantages. (a) It was the middle course, between no action and an attack. (b) It put the next action squarely up to Khrushchev. (c) We were in a very superior Naval position to execute such a plan. (d) Even if the plan failed, it would still buy time for reaching a better invasion posture.²⁶

The members deliberated in utmost secrecy and came up with the plan for the "Quarantine" after very pointed deliberations on all of

the above. The decision for blockade against offensive weapons only and the more palatable name of Quarantine were decided on to keep the actions in a low key. This method was chosen over a complete blockade because it presented the lowest level of action and would be the least likely to anger allies engaged in trade with Cuba. The Executive Committee met at least three times a day during the height of the Crisis. In addition, the conferees kept in touch with their staffs and headed up special projects relating to the Crisis.²⁷

The President kept to his normal routine as much as possible. He made a scheduled political trip to Connecticut on Wednesday, October 17. On Thursday, the 18th, he met with Andrei Gromyko, special envoy from Moscow. In this talk he deliberately avoided direct discussions relative to Cuba and patiently listened to the tough line Gromyko put forward relative to Berlin.²⁸

On the 19th of October, President Kennedy flew to the political hustings again, this time to the West Coast with a stop planned for Cleveland. His absence was scheduled for five days, but on the 20th of October he cancelled the rest of his trip using a cold as an excuse. He returned to Washington, and soon the real reason was to be uncovered by reporters. By Saturday, there was suspicion and speculation by many that a real clash between the United States and the Soviet Union was near.²⁹

27
Gulahan, p. 42.

28
Ibid., p. 44.

29
Ibid., p. 43,

Meanwhile, Sorensen had been preparing a speech for the President, to present the picture to the American public and the world. This speech was checked with legal experts and the final draft was sent to the various departments and agencies for comment and suggestions for change. The Executive Committee had decided on complete secrecy to be further maintained until Monday the 22nd of October. This was to give the military time to get ready and for the State Department to provide notice to the concerned American allies. There was a concern that the secrecy had been broken during the Gromyko visit, but a close check on his activities prior to his departure did not indicate that he had any extraordinary knowledge. The final strategy meeting was held in the Oval Room on Sunday evening the 21st of October. October 22 was to be the first critical day. There was extreme tension as the President went over the final draft of the speech. Crowds, interspersed with "peace" pickets outside the White House added to the over-all drama. By noon, Press Secretary Pierre Salinger made the announcement to reporters of a major policy speech by the President that evening. His emphatic wording, "a matter of the highest national urgency," caused great excitement and reaction from the reporters who were present.³⁰

From then on a well designed plan leading up to the President's speech went into action: (1) United States Military forces were placed on Defense Condition Three, a world-wide alert. (2) President Kennedy telephoned and briefed the three ex-presidents, Hoover, Truman and Eisenhower. (3) United States ambassadors notified the world leaders, first Great Britain and the NATO allies. (4) The Latin American Ambassadors

were summoned to the State Department for a briefing. (5) The Soviet Union was notified last, an hour before the President went on the air. (6) At 3 P.M., the National Security Council met for a final briefing of the President's proposed actions. (7) At 4 P.M., the President met with the new Prime Minister of Uganda, in keeping with his business-as-usual cover. (8) At 5 P.M., the Congressional leaders were briefed. This was a tense meeting and some leading Congressmen, including members of the Democratic party, urged more drastic actions than the proposed Quarantine.³¹

At 6:30 P.M. President Kennedy went on the air to inform the United States and the world of the Crisis and to outline his decision to implement a Quarantine on shipments of offensive weapons to Cuba. In this speech the President laid down the challenge. He now faced the first test of nuclear weapons between the Soviet Union and the United States. His speech outlined his mixed policies of strength, restraint and respect for the opinions of the world.³²

Throughout the decision-making process there was a certain amount of underlying tension between the President and his close civilian advisors on one hand, and the military on the other. Some of this was based on the mistrust of experts in general that came out of the Bay of Pigs affair. Some of this conflict originated in the make-up of the President's security managers who had very little faith in the military and a pronounced fear of what the military was capable of doing. Part of this fear, as expressed by James Nathan, was based on the assumption

31

Gulahan, p. 44.

32

McGeorge Bundy, "The Presidency and Peace," Foreign Affairs, XLVII, (May, 1973), p. 360.

that the newly created "ready forces were eager to demonstrate their potential."³³ During my visits to the various units in place for the invasion, no evidence of the latter was seen beyond the normal high morale and excitement that comes with troops well-trained and ready for action.

From the beginning of the decision-making discussions, the military position sponsored by the Joint Chiefs of Staff was predominantly for an air strike followed by an invasion to eliminate the entire problem of Castroism in Cuba. General David Shoup later stated that he was a dissenter in this position and was against invasion from the start.³⁴ The President was very favorable to the Air Strike option in the beginning, but this was likely because he had been given improper information by some of his advisors that the missiles could be removed by such a strike with complete assurance of success and with a minimum of damage to Cuba and her people. This misconception started from sources in the Department of Defense, probably supported by ambitious and less than completely informed Air Force Officers. Since this writer participated in the preparation of such a plan at the CINCLANT headquarters which was complete to the details of armament and expected casualties and losses, the Unified Commander was not the source of such a plan. The CINCLANT plan included information that such a strike, in order to accomplish the objective of complete negation of the missile capability, would have to be all-inclusive of Cuban military targets, including the SAM sites and especially the Cuban MIG fighter aircraft.

33

Nathan, p. 270.

34

Allison, p. 319n60.

Any strike short of being all-inclusive would have resulted in an unacceptable risk of the remaining nuclear strike potential in Cuba plus high losses of strike aircraft and flight crews. These conclusions were supported by General Walter C. Sweeney who was Commander Air Forces Atlantic (COMAFLANT), and also the Commander of the Tactical Air Command (COMTAC) which provided the Air Force's ready strike aircraft. By the time the "surgical" air strike plan was presented to the President the first time, it should have been obvious that to insure complete success, such a strike would have to be followed by an invasion. It was also obvious that the air strike would directly involve attacks on Soviet military personnel, a factor which would most likely involve Soviet military response. The President was not ready to accept the risks and consequences of an invasion, so the air strike, which would most likely lead to an invasion, was turned down.³⁵ This was done at a direct meeting between the President and the members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff which was held on October 19th and delayed the President's departure for Cleveland. The military leaders presented a plea for invasion or air strike. The arguments they presented were based strictly on the military picture and in the President's estimation did not take into account the consequences of such an action. At this meeting the Chiefs also strongly opposed the Quarantine proposal, which they felt had little chance to get the missiles removed and would permit time to complete the Soviet construction.³⁶ The meeting upset

35
Sorensen, 692.

36
Allison, p. 83.

the President, since he felt the decision for blockade had been settled the night before. It was now obvious to him that there was still a deep division between his advisors on what action to take and that the military were not convinced that the action of blockade was enough. Before he departed on his political trip he told Sorensen and Robert Kennedy that he was counting on them to pull the group together quickly, so that action could be taken by Sunday, October 21. He also told his brother to call him back to Washington when they were ready.³⁷

The President had his next meeting with representatives of the military on Sunday, October 21. This meeting was attended by General Sweeney and members of his staff and was called for by the President to again review the air strike alternatives. The President had made up his mind before this meeting that he would take no stronger action than the proposed Quarantine and this meeting was only called to assuage those still convinced that stronger action should be taken immediately. The plan that was presented was the one worked out at CINCLANT headquarters and in its general concept again went beyond the clean surgical operation and was once again turned down by the President.³⁸ The President did bring the military more towards his way of thinking, if indeed that was his objective of this meeting, by stating that the blockade on offensive weapons was only a first action.

To the very end of the decision-making process the military held out for what they believed was the only solution, stronger action

37

Sorensen, p. 692.

38

Allison, pp. 100-101.

than the Quarantine. While they were not convinced that the proposed action would do the job of removing the missiles, they came out of the last meetings with the President satisfied that it was only a first step and that it was time to get ready for the stronger application of force that would be needed. For this reason the military leaders went into the actual Crisis with the full belief that the invasion plans for Cuba, which were by this time in full progress, would be executed. In other words the strategy that was applied by President Kennedy had worked, both those for strong action and those opposed felt they had won.

CHAPTER IV

MILITARY OPERATIONS

Many stories have been written about the part played by the military in the Crisis. One thing is certain, it was a good test of the flexible response theories that had been advocated by the President and his managers. Bundy describes it: "No one military component made the difference, the existence of an adequate and rapidly deployable force, at all levels, was a direct result of balanced defenses begun in 1961."³⁹

Throughout the Crisis, President Kennedy stressed that force should be ready but should only be used to the extent it was necessary. This emphasis on restraint was included in his interdiction proclamation, which asserted the Quarantine, on October 23, 1962.⁴⁰

This proclamation, which came directly from the Commander-in-Chief, was clear in its assignment of the blockade and reconnaissance to be carried out through the Unified Command system. In studying the post-mortems of the Crisis, the one that is most publicized is the clash between the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral George Anderson and the Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. The way it is treated very often stresses the fact that the military resisted the actions taken by the President. He argues that McNamara had sensed

39

Bundy, p. 360.

40

Henry M. Pachter, Collision Course (New York, London: Frederick Praeger, 1963), pp. 199-200.

the Navy's reluctance to respond to direction from the top and thus the encounter with Anderson.⁴¹ On the surface this was a dramatic conflict and it contributed to Anderson's eventual replacement as the Chief of Naval Operations. From my view point, it was probably a result of a personality clash accented by the pressures and tensions of the situation. Nathan goes on to say that the civilians of the Defense and State departments grew to despise the military. He cites a mock clash that was set up between Averill Harriman and Marine General Victor "Brute" Krulak in support of this theory.⁴² Such incidents should not be used to outline the general feeling of the military during the Crisis. There is no doubt that some of the military leadership felt left out during the Crisis and that they were disappointed that stronger action was not taken. Under the circumstances they would not have been of much use to the President had they not favored a military solution, a necessary factor in obtaining a balanced decision. The general feeling of the Joint Chiefs was that this was the time to get rid of Castro.⁴³

Some of the controversy between the civilian and military leaders could have been avoided had everyone understood the Unified Command system and followed it. There were times during the Cuban Crisis,

41

Nathan, p. 260.

42

Nathan, p. 270. General Krulak was a very colorful, fighting Marine who was of the "old school." Matching him in a mock meeting with the staid Harriman could bring about a humorous situation, but it also proves that very often one incident or example is played up until it supposedly reflects the attitude of an entire group.

43

Arthur Schlesinger, A Thousand Days (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), p. 803.

and in some cases still are, incidents and tendencies where military functions are directed through the Commander of the service concerned or in the worst cases through civilian agencies such as the CIA, rather than the Unified Command system. The McNamara-Anderson conflict could be fit into this category. Had it taken place in the CINCLANT War Room where all the operational information was readily available in display form, there would not have been any confusion. The Cuban Crisis clearly demonstrated that the Unified Command system will work. To illustrate how it functioned successfully, this writer will outline how the staff to which he was attached performed during the Crisis. In this performance, very rarely publicized, lies the key to much of the success of the Crisis and the heart of this thesis. In order to present this story it is necessary to set the scene and briefly describe the chain-of-command as it functioned relative to the staff of the Unified Commander most concerned with the Crisis.

United States military regulations state that the Unified Commander, in whose area of operations the scene of action of a military nature occurs, shall have control of all military forces within that area. Within this premise, any operations in the Cuban area fall under the Unified Command of the Commander in Chief Atlantic (CINCLANT). Since this was one of the many hats of command worn by my Commander, Admiral William E. Dennison, the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion and its related political and military problems, became the center of attention of his staff.⁴⁴ Most of his staff officers also participated in the planning and operations of his Naval Staff, Commander in Chief

Atlantic Fleet. (CINCLANTFLT), his North Atlantic Treaty Organization, (NATO) Staffs, Supreme Allied Commander, Atlantic, (SACLANT), and Commander in Chief, Western Atlantic, (CINCPACFLT).

It is easy to see how such a complicated organization could cause some division of concentration. Very often Commanders, through their staff organization, would literally be talking to themselves. CINCLANTFLT worked for CINCLANT, so in this context, one could relay messages for action to oneself. This can be quite expeditious when things are moving in a hurry, but it can be rather troublesome when a mistake is made and in the capacity of a subordinate staff officer one had to originate action for the boss to chastise himself.⁴⁵

The actual billet title assigned to the writer in the Unified Command, Fleet, and NATO staffs was that of Air Operations Officer, in the Operations section of each staff. Normally, the most active staff was CINCLANTFLT, since it operated the Atlantic Fleet forces on a day-by-day basis through its type and operational commanders.⁴⁶ It was my particular assignment to monitor, on a continuing basis, the Fleet Air Wings and Carrier Air Wings. The other staffs, CINCPACFLT and CIN-

45

Very often a staff officer would have to originate traffic from his capacity on one staff to take action in the same capacity on the other staff. (literally giving yourself and order).

46

The Type Commander trained and maintained the fleet's ships and squadrons until they were considered operationally ready for combat. An example: Commander Air Forces Atlantic would supervise the training of new air wings on a shore base as the Type Commander for aircraft. When the pilots had completed their training they would be assigned to a Carrier which was under the Commander Second Fleet for operational duty. It might be a new Carrier just having achieved operational readiness under the same Type Commander's shipboard training group. Some other Type Commanders are Commander Anti-Submarine Forces, Commander Service Forces, Commander Cruisers and Destroyers.

LANT, were under normal conditions engaged in planning only. Forces were assigned for exercises or during actual military operations. For example, the Commander Second Fleet, who normally commands CINCLANTFLT's shipborne strike forces, would change to the operational control of CINCPACFLT in command of the same forces, but he would now act in the capacity of NATO commander of shipborne strike forces and could be assigned forces by other NATO allies. This same Commander Second Fleet in CINCLANT's Cuban operations orders would become the Commander Atlantic Naval Strike Forces, again with the same ships assigned.

Not long after my arrival at the Staff Compound in July 1961, the CINCLANT billet became the most active, because of our deep interest in Cuba. Specifically, the writer was assigned additional duties in early 1962 as the Officer-in-Charge of the Joint Reconnaissance Center, CINCLANT (JRC). In this Norfolk, Virginia center, physically located in the Joint War Room of CINCLANT-CINCLANTFLT, were undertaken all of the key operational functions and planning for the peripheral and overflight air operations and some of the sea surveillance relative to Cuba, with which these Staffs were charged. At this time electronic surveillance flights, weather reconnaissance, shipping surveillance, and peripheral photographic flights were being conducted. There were also some very sensitive operations designed to activate the Soviet-furnished radars in order to obtain more information on them. Throughout the summer of 1962 activity in this center increased, by September we were even made aware of the U-2 overflights. As the Cuban problem heated up, this position became my primary concern and the volume of work increased until by late October, 1962, the JRC part of my duties involved the supervision of as many as 24 Air Force, Navy, Army and Marine officers, a

substantial increase from the normal involvement of two officers.

At this time it is necessary to digress and explain how the JRCs in the various Unified Commands, became a reality. Prior to the Gary Powers U-2 incident, which was announced on May 1, 1960, clandestine overflights and peripheral reconnaissance flights in areas of interest and danger were hit-and-miss and very secretive affairs. Sometimes they were conducted by the operations section (J-3) from the Joint Chief's War Room in the Pentagon and sometimes by the CIA. In short, people from various agencies, both civilian and military were conducting operations all over the world without proper coordination. In this procedure lay the seeds of the struggle for control of the U-2 air intelligence effort between the CIA and the military, represented by the Strategic Air Command. This contest was to be more firmly joined in the late summer and fall of 1962. Prior to the Powers' affair, clandestine flights controlled by the CIA passed through the areas of the respective Unified Commanders and were often so highly classified that necessary knowledge was not available to the operational and staff units concerned.⁴⁷ The entire reconnaissance effort was poorly organized and over-classified to the point where it ended up in the tragedy of an international incident.

After the embarrassment caused to President Eisenhower by the Powers' shoot-down, he called for an organization designed to overlap areas of responsibility and to center control of all reconnaissance

47

This still went on with the U-2 flights. It was not until the Navy's Key West radar training center intercepted a U-2 returning from Cuba and the pilot identified the aircraft for the world to hear, that information on these flights could be released to this training site.

functions in one authority. The Committee of Overhead Reconnaissance (COMOR) became the high-level civilian controlled agency designed to approve future sensitive operations.⁴⁸ To supervise the military participation in this effort the Joint Reconnaissance Center, (JRC,J-3,JCS) was organized with an Air Force colonel in charge and officers from the various services assigned for duty. A subordinate organization was established in each Unified Command headquarters, with direct confidential voice link to the JRC in the Pentagon. At the same time, each Unified Commander was required to submit a monthly Reconnaissance Plan, which was due by the 20th of the previous month. These plans were based on tactical requirements, desired intelligence by the CIA and other agencies, and technical missions involving new equipment. The plans were closely examined by COMOR, coordinated with the various high military and civilian directors concerned, and sent to the White House for the President's approval. Additionally, during operations of overflight or great risk, such as were to happen in the Cuban Crisis, the designated staff action officer of the respective Commander would report to the JRC in Washington over secure voice communications. It was often necessary to forgo this security when the need to know was at a high level. These reports were made as the aircraft entered the critical area, at the time of any hostile reaction, and again when the pilots reported "feet wet," aviation jargon meaning the pilots were over water and out of immediate danger. Action officers from the Joint Chiefs or the respective Unified Commander's staff were held directly responsible for immediate notification of higher authority of any unusual events not

covered by the monthly schedule. This system had just been organized by the time President Kennedy took control. It required considerable development, and not until the lessons learned from the Cuban Crisis were applied were sensitive reconnaissance operations under positive control.

The disaster of the Bay of Pigs was a tragedy of paramount importance. To Khrushchev it provided an opportunity to test the mettle of the young American President and the American people.⁴⁹ To President Kennedy and the United States military and specifically to the CINCLANT staff planners and this writer it became a source of primary importance for the next two and one-half years.

The first major concern after the Bay of Pigs was to review the Cuban Contingency Plans with a view to immediate execution should the President ever need that option. These plans had been prepared in early 1960, after Castro had taken power and had started to move under the influences of the Soviet Union. Their basic structure gave the President the option of various levels of pressure to bring about the downfall of the communist regime in Cuba. The options available covered a wide spectrum and were very similar to those covered when the Executive Committee reached its decision. Cuba, after the Bay of Pigs, was of more immediate concern, and the review of these plans was made on a priority basis. The many subordinate commands, which included all the services, the Coast Guard, and civil agencies, were required to do the same. In some cases the revision of these plans included using the new forces and force structure that had become available under the

49

Charles E. Bohlen, Witness to History, 1929-1969 (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973), p. 479.

President's new policy requiring more ready forces for limited warfare. Execution of these plans, when ordered would fall upon the operational forces of CINCLANT: for Naval action, the previously mentioned CINC-LANTFLT, for Air Force Units, General Sweeney as CINCAFLANT, and for Army units, Commander Army Forces, Atlantic, (COMARLANT), his forces coming from the Commander Continental Army. (CONARC).

After the initial crisis reactions to the Bay of Pigs subsided, action settled down to observation of the increased supply of arms and ammunition by the Soviets and the related increase in military activity and construction. Such things as the partial reinforcement and rearmament with more modern weapons of Guantanamo Bay, improvement of area communications and security, and placement of advance troops in the Southeastern United States operational bases were accomplished throughout mid-1962. Additionally, contingency forces and plans were partially exercised under the guise of normal exercises by joint-fleet, land and air forces. Based on these exercises and movement orders and increased intelligence, plans were up-dated and re-written during a continuing series of visits with the various staffs and operational units. During this time the writer was assigned further additional duty which called for regular trips to London and Paris to coordinate planning and to brief military staffs there on the Cuban situation. Both the United States Naval Command in London and United States officers attached to the NATO command in Paris were briefed. These trips continued for some time after the Crisis, since Admiral Harold Paige Smith, Commander Naval Forces Europe was slated to relieve Admiral Dennison in early 1963.

By September 1962, the reconnaissance effort was increased in

reaction to intelligence of very suspicious military activity in Cuba. Electronic information collection ships were stationed on a continuous basis near the entrance to Havana harbor. Submarine sorties were executed, and the Reserve Air units that had been recalled in late 1961 in response to Khrushchev's "sabre rattling" aimed at Berlin, were integrated into the long-range sea surveillance plans of the regular forces.⁵⁰ Some of these squadrons were deployed to Guantanamo Bay and to San Juan, Puerto Rico at this time.

Several reports had been received by September 1962 that indicated the Soviets were undertaking nuclear missile installations in Cuba. These installations were advertised by the Soviet Union as anti-aircraft missile installations (SAMS). A close look at all available intelligence revealed that this was only a cover, and it was considered necessary to step up U-2 overflights to get more positive information. Some of the suspicious evidence had been collected by CINCLANT sea surveillance flights and consisted of photographs of large crates, similar to those used to transport large aircraft and missile components. The secrecy of all these additional reconnaissance flights was considered essential. Apparently it was paramount for planned diplomatic actions. From the standpoint of day-to-day operations, the high-level classification was a tremendous burden.

Much has been said about the failure of the intelligence system in the Crisis. One of the severest criticisms was by Congress and involved "philosophical preconception." The Senate investigation into this matter sharply contested the conclusion that the Soviet Union had

never deployed missiles with an offensive nuclear capability in her satellites prior to Cuba. They felt that the CIA should not have used this conclusion to downgrade the available evidence.⁵¹ Others criticized the fact that concentration was centered on the stated intentions of the Soviet Union, rather than the hard evidence that was available.⁵² Probably a better evaluation is that the American intelligence system performed in its normal, bureaucratic and systematic way and the discovery of the missiles was neither more or less successful than the system was designed for. The consensus suggested by Roger Hilsman is that based on the information available, the Chief of Intelligence, who produced the estimate that the Soviets would not introduce offensive missiles into Cuba, made a reasonable and defensible judgment.⁵³

At this time the Unified Commander was still not functioning in an operational capacity except for the JRC surveillance of reconnaissance operations and the control of some Naval units. This was a "gray" area throughout the Crisis. According to the plans, CINCLANT was only to take control of forces when actual operations of a military nature were ordered. Admiral Dennison supervised the deployment of the invasion forces, but it was often necessary to revert to Navy or Air Force command structure in exercising control for specific sea

51

U. S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Armed Services, Preparedness, on Cuban Military Build-up, Sub-Committee, Interim Report, 88th Cong., 1st sess., 1963, p. 2.

52

Hanson Baldwin, "Growing Risks of Bureaucratic Intelligence," The Reporter, XXIX, (Aug. 15, 1963), pp. 48-50.

53

U. S. Congress, House, Committee on Appropriations, Sub-Committee on Dept. of Defense Appropriations Hearings, 88th Cong., 1st sess., 1963, p. 25ff.

and air surveillance operations. The very nature of the command structure was so complicated that many of the forces had to be told what to do on a continuing basis by direct orders. This was influenced by the high-level control and the demands of secrecy. Many operational units did not have the security equipment or the clearances to receive the more sensitive communications. This resulted in the requirement for recoding and relay of many key transmissions. It also necessitated many courier flights between the Norfolk headquarters and the Florida based units for delivery of materials and for direct briefing by staff officers.

There are several versions of the struggle for power between the Strategic Air Command (SAC) and the CIA over the operational control of the U-2 flights. SAC finally won because it was felt that if another shoot-down occurred it would be better, relative to world opinion, to have an officer in uniform in the cockpit rather than a CIA agent.⁵⁴ It was unfortunate that somewhere along the line the CIA got into military operations. Whenever there is a need to collect sensitive data or to launch limited military maneuvers in areas of concern, such as Cuba, it should be handled as a military operation. This is necessary so that when things go wrong, military forces are available for whatever actions might be required. Such operations need to have detailed emergency procedures involving full support of all the forces. These are only available to the Unified Commander of the area concerned. If other procedures are used, there is much more chance for embarrassment and failure, as was the case in the Powers' affair and the Bay of

54

Graham Allison, "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Crisis," Rand Report, (August 1968), p. 30.

Pigs invasion. Just before the Cuban Crisis, the issue of control between the CIA and SAC was settled, and the latter took over the U-2 flight planning and operations. This placed all military operations around and over Cuba under the JCS, through the Unified Command system, where they belonged. When this is not the case, delays and problems have a greater probability of happening than when the normal chain of command is used.

The Cuban intelligence collection effort, just before the Crisis, was so important that it should have involved all of the forces available. The only way this could have been done was under the JCS and the JRC military surveillance system with the related military intelligence and operational support. Had it been done in this way there would have been a better chance that the information on the presence of Soviet offensive missiles could have been delivered to the President at an earlier date than October 16, 1962.

As soon as the intelligence indications were confirmed by the U-2 photos, CINCLANTFLT and CINCAFLANT photo units were requested to submit plans for low-level overflights of the suspect areas in Cuba to provide pictures illustrating the U-2 high altitude information. This planning request had been anticipated and hand-delivered charts of routes and other necessary plans were made available to the JCS as quickly as jet aircraft and helicopter relay could deliver them to the Pentagon. Now secrecy really became tight.⁵⁵ My immediate superior was not cleared

55

It was a matter of degree of clearance. Only a few officers on each staff were allowed access to the so-called "back-channel" messages that came over a special communications system. Such clearances were dependent on the assigned billet.

in those communications channels used in setting up the requirements for these flights. This does not make for the best execution and is very dangerous and in most cases unnecessary. Very few people were briefed on the proposed actions and had the Cubans reacted with a more intense defensive posture, the readiness for counter-response could have been impaired by unnecessarily high classification. This problem had come up during the Bay of Pigs invasion when a group of unmarked Navy fighters destined to provide air cover for the ill-fated venture arrived one hour late. High classification of the action message was the cause of this delay which negated the usefulness of the mission.

In any event, the planning for the first low-level overflights to be conducted on October 23 under the JRC system were secret and complete in every detail. The flights were operationally monitored by an adjunct of CINCLANT's growing reconnaissance empire. The Joint Advanced Air Coordination Center (JAARC) had been established at Key West, Florida. Some time prior to this Commander Key West Forces (COMKEYWESTFOR) had been designated as the representative for the Unified Commander. His location at Key West gave Admiral Dennison a flag officer directly under his command near the scene of action.

Protective forces for the low altitude photo flights were planned and in place. An umbrella of Combat Air Patrol fighter aircraft were assigned to defend against possible Cuban retaliation flights and to respond to the unarmed photo aircraft should they be attacked by the MIGS. These fighters were composed of both carrier-based Navy aircraft and land-based Air Force aircraft. Limited numbers of airborne attack aircraft with full armament were also available. A ret-

aliation strike against the offending missile sites was planned and probably would have been ordered had SAMS been used against the photo missions. Fighter escort aircraft had been considered but were discarded because the low-level tactics of the photo aircraft and the short time over the target area were considered sufficient precaution against Cuban reaction. Also there was the question of the desirability of not sending armed aircraft over Cuba before it was made necessary by Cuban actions.

Orders to the photo mission pilots were specific. Their routes were timed to the second with a minimum time over Cuba a major objective. No diversions were authorized. The aircraft were to make one pass. If the target was missed, there would be no return to try again for that particular mission. The pilots had undergone a long series of practice missions against targets with similar characteristics, and the chance of missing or wasting time over the target area was at a minimum.

Everything went according to schedule. The pilots the first day were from the Navy's East Coast Composite Carrier Photo Squadron (VFP-62). The flights were launched out of the Key West Naval Air Station to insure arrival over target in a minimum time. Recovery was to be at the squadron's Jacksonville, Florida base, where the Navy's Aerial Photo Laboratory was also located. The pilots used standard, very low-level approaches and probably evaded early radar detection. There was no opposition on the first mission from either the MIGS or the SAM sites.

Commander George Eckard, Commanding Officer of VFP-62, was the

flight leader. The plan covered a complete evolution which included development of the pictures at Jacksonville. Commander Eckard, with the evidence of the sensational pictures in a pouch marked for President Kennedy, was on his way to Washington by jet-courier in a short time after landing from the photo mission. A helicopter picked him up at Andrews Air Force Base and delivered him to the White House lawn so that the pictures could be made available to the President immediately. This is probably the only case in Naval history where a mission pilot was debriefed by the Commander-in-Chief.

In retrospect, when one considers the many different forces involved and all the options that had to be covered it was amazing how this very complicated operation came to such a successful conclusion. The extreme interest and national importance of these first low-level flights put unbelievable pressures on everyone involved. Members of the Joint Chiefs, COMTAC, and Admiral Dennison were all present in the CINCLANT War Room to observe the status boards as the missions progressed. A marked sigh of relief went up, when the last pilot reported clear of Cuba and success of the mission.

Success was even more gratifying when one considers how many different and sundry units were involved in the execution and support of these missions. SAC provided the U-2 flights and electronic emission collection aircraft. The Continental Air Command (CONAD) provided airborne radar aircraft, fighters on station, and air-controllers and facilities. Military Air Command (MAC) operated the weather service aircraft. TAC provided fighter support and back-up strike and photo aircraft. Naval fighter squadrons provided Combat Air Patrol

and airborne strike aircraft, plus the mission photo aircraft and the jet-courier. The Marine Air Groups, deployed to Guantanamo, had fighter and strike responsibility should there be reaction in that sector. Naval and Coast Guard vessels were on station with their air rescue helicopters to provide rescue services should any aircraft losses occur.

Defensive measures were also in the plans. Airborne and surface radar pickets, furnished by the Navy, were on station for defensive protection should Castro decide to launch surface action or air strikes. There were many highly sensitive intelligence units in place and involved in collecting reaction data. These units were charged with providing warnings should unusual reaction develop.⁵⁶

While the previously described air action was coming to a successful conclusion, preparations for execution of the Quarantine against offensive weapon delivery to Cuba were in progress. This action had been announced by President Kennedy in his address to the nation and was to commence on the 24th of October.⁵⁷ Vice Admiral John S. McCain Jr. had been called in from his duties as Commander of the Amphibious Forces, Atlantic (COMPHIBLANT) to head up the execution of the staff actions relative to the Quarantine and any other surface actions that might result. The numerous Soviet ships enroute to Cuba had already been under surveillance since they had passed into the CINCLANT area. The forces of the Commander in Chief Europe (CINCEUR) had been track-

56

This was a very refined and sophisticated system that followed Cuban response in minute detail. It was so effective that Castro's movements and actions were monitored almost continuously. The present CIA investigations are exposing some of these capabilities, i. e. the capability to listen to micro-wave telephone conversations.

57

Pachter, p. 199.

ing these ships and had provided the necessary information to make the transition easier. The surface status boards indicated the position of each ship as it was reported entering the CINCLANT area by his long range patrol aircraft or surface units. When these ships reached a certain longitude, the surface picket line took over for planned boarding and inspection. These ships had definite instructions, which included firing a disabling shot at the rudders of the transports under question, should they not comply when requested to stop. On the effective date of the Quarantine, twenty-five ships were being tracked at various positions enroute to Cuba. Twelve of these ships stopped or turned around soon after the blockade went into effect. It is assumed that these carried the nuclear missile equipment of concern.⁵⁸

The decision was made not to include tankers in the Quarantine. This decision made the turn-around orders easier for the Soviets, and when they decided to respect the blockade, tension eased and only cursory action by the United States Navy was necessary. Only one ship was actually boarded, a freighter under the Lebanese flag, chartered by the Soviet Union. By the 28th of October the major problem was overcome when Khrushchev indicated agreement and blockade action from then on took on more limited proportions.⁵⁹

President Kennedy had been provided with necessary tools for settling the issue when the combination of sensational pictures that exposed the Soviet Union in a lie, and the definite actions of the Quar-

58

Pachter, p. 44.

59

Ibid., p. 58.

antine, forced Khrushchev to retreat from the face-to-face challenge. The Cuban Crisis lasted only one week as far as the public was concerned. It lasted much longer than that from the view of a staff officer involved in both, before and after the fact, planning and operations.

President Kennedy considered several options as far as the Cuban Crisis was concerned before deciding on the Quarantine as an initial step. The options of the selective "surgical air strike" followed by an invasion had to be kept available to the President should the blockade fail to bring the desired results. Just how far these plans for strike and/or invasion went, in order to give the President this option within a quick-reaction time frame, is not common knowledge.

Immediately after the information on the presence of the offensive missiles became available CINCLANT ordered review of the previously planned Cuban actions to make them ready for what ever degree of force might be ordered. When the Crisis heated up, the forces were actually assigned, and the now familiar plans were placed in readiness for execution.⁶⁰

Steps were taken to further reenforce Guantanamo and the same shipping was used to evacuate the dependents. Marine aircraft based on Guantanamo were placed on increased alert. More sea surveillance aircraft were moved to Guantanamo and San Juan. Ships were deployed, including the requirement of at least one aircraft carrier, at sea, ready for immediate reaction to any Cuban military moves. The plans called for one Marine division from the West Coast, which was ordered to start its heavy equipment through the Panama Canal, by mid-October. Movement to Florida and other Southeastern United States bases was on a wholesale

60

Pachter, p. 56.

basis. All units, Air Force, Army, and Navy, were in readiness for any required response, by the last week in October.⁶¹ At one time a tentative invasion date of October 27 was circulated.

During this time, the previously proposed surgical air strike, with out invasion, was again proposed as a follow-up should the Quarantine fail. This was not favored by this writer and the majority of those who had lived closely with the problem in a military planning capacity. In reply to this proposal it was again suggested that if the blockade and diplomatic actions did not succeed, air strikes alone would not insure success, unless they were followed by invasion. It was also argued again that the air strikes would bring as much reaction as the full invasion because of the casualties that would be connected with such an action.⁶²

It had been a long time since massive movements of military men and equipment destined for actual warfare had taken place within the continental limits of the United States. Although the movement of force was as secret as possible, it presented a great security problem. In fact it was soon determined that very little security of any kind could be maintained as far as movement was concerned. The plans had been designed for quick and forceful capture of Cuba with the assumption that prolonged action would be very unpopular both at home and abroad. Military communications, especially with the kind of security required for this type of operation were completely inadequate. At

61

Fachter, p. 56.

62

Sorensen, pp. 694-697.

the height of the Crisis and for several days afterwards it was almost impossible to complete a long distance call to Florida from the Norfolk, Virginia, headquarters. Leased lines had to be increased on a priority basis. A large number of civilian technicians and many telephone repair and installation units from all over the country were involved in a crash program to solve this problem.

Road traffic was also a planning factor. Military units were held off the main highways during civilian rush hours, but some traffic jams could not be avoided. No one had told the tourists to stay at home, and the annual trek from New York to Florida was well under way. Supply problems were surprisingly difficult. It soon became obvious that the logistic plans we had worked out would not piggyback on top of the normal economy and carry such extreme concentration of military forces into a limited area of our country. After the main thrust of deployment was over, the snarls were soon overcome, but since the full invasion was never ordered it is hard to evaluate what would have happened to the sectional and national economy if the related evacuations and economic displacement had come about.

For many days following the original low-level overflights, on October 23, these missions were continued. Missions were alternated between Navy Crusader (F8U) photo aircraft and Air Force Voodoo (F102) aircraft with the same mission. Support of the various aircraft and surface forces, was continued and refined with each mission. The island was under a daily blanket of electronic and photographic surveillance. More sophisticated electronic and photographic equipment

was introduced, including experimental models. Special exercises, designed to gain previously unknown information on Soviet weapons systems were conducted. As can be imagined, all kinds of ideas were proposed, but except for the loss of the U-2, piloted by Major Rudolph Anderson, no more serious military problems were encountered. This action was attributed to a SAM site, but there was some doubt as to which site was involved and even whether the aircraft was hit by a missile. There was a plan to retaliate against any shoot-down of an unarmed reconnaissance plane by taking out the offending SAM site with an air strike. The President did not choose to execute this plan. There were several reasons for this. The same day a U-2 operating near Siberia strayed into Soviet territory. The resultant Soviet verbal reaction and the fact that there was considerable confusion concerning the shoot-down, with no immediate hard evidence that Anderson had actually been hit by a missile, were contributing factors. In addition the diplomatic scenario was such at the time of the U-2 loss that the President wanted to see Khrushchev's final negotiating position before taking additional military actions. This affair did tighten the combat readiness of our forces and the President authorized more fighter support for the various missions.⁶³

Pressure on the pilots engaged in overflight of Cuba was always very intense. After the Crisis ended, it was considered absolutely essential that photography continue in order to make sure Khrushchev removed the missiles and bombers as promised. At the same time, it

was even more important that provocation be held to a minimum. Rules of engagement had to be explicit, and mission pilots had to comply completely with the briefings for the flights. An over-eager pilot, who made a second pass at a target he had missed, a direct violation of the rules, brought the attention of the President, himself.⁶⁴ The pilot was severely reprimanded, and his error resulted in a complete shake-up of the squadron and the Air Force staff concerned. No departure from the established rules was tolerated; the stakes were too high. Any incident could return the favorable advantage which had been gained by the United States during the Quarantine to the Soviet Union.

It was a great surprise to me how the traditional service and inter-service rivalries became dormant during the actual days of the Crisis. Cooperation was almost complete during the days of late October and early November of 1962. However, as the wind-down commenced, the submerged struggle for recognition and reward of limited budget dollars became more apparent. From the "neutral" position of control, the staff of the Unified Commander, it was disgusting to observe the pettiness, which our cost-effective environment, introduced by the McNamara era, had brought into all the services and civilian agencies. Even the actions of close associates from my own service, the Navy, were revolting. The plain fact was obvious. When budgets are set by

64

A copy of a memorandum in the President's own handwriting questioning this action had been sent to CINCLANT and was brought to my attention. This was a perfect example of how everybody ran scared and over-reacted to anything the President questioned. The memorandum was a simple request for an answer, why had the pilot made a second pass? It was immediately obvious from the debriefing that it was a "cockpit decision." In the headquarters of CINCLANT it was not that simple, everyone "covered their number," and for days I spent valuable time checking messages and operations orders to make sure our staff had not been in error.

administrators with little understanding of the complications of the kind of an exercise such as this Crisis, the problems of who pays for what and who gets which mission and the related monies are very formidable, if not impossible. A plus factor which accrued from the new policies of the Defense Department should also be mentioned. The newly created limited warfare forces and their readiness to react on a short-time basis was a great advantage to military and civilian planners.⁶⁵ The fact that Army units had been previously married to their tactical air transports enabled these units to be left in place in their home bases until final execution of the plan. This alleviated some of the Florida congestion while at the same time still providing these forces in a real-time fashion as required by the planned operations. In addition, the Marine Forces with specialized training and equipment moved into Guantanamo so rapidly and with such strength that the attacks which could have been brought by the Cuban forces from their positions on the base perimeter were discouraged. Several new concepts, such as the Short-Field Landing and Take-off equipment installed by the Marine Air units showed very favorable promise for future operations.

For the military, even after the agreements between President Kennedy and Khrushchev, the return to normal from the Crisis was a slow operation. Throughout the fall of 1962 and well into the next year the troops involved were in a ready or semi-ready condition. The advance forces were kept in place and logistics and communications exercises were conducted on a regular basis to insure smooth performance in these

65

Bundy, p. 360.

critical areas if the invasion was ordered. Many post-mortem critiques were held, and on the basis of these CINCLANT and supporting command operations orders were completely re-written to reflect the lessons learned.

CHAPTER V

THE AFTERMATH

Cuba, as a military problem, occupied a major position in the requirements placed on the United States forces. CINCLANT came out of the Crisis with a problem of maintaining control over continuing surveillance efforts. It was necessary to keep plans current in order to be responsive to actions that might be called for as the diplomatic drama between the United States, the Soviet Union, and Cuba went on.

The Crisis had shown many weaknesses in the planning for action against Cuba, especially in communications and logistics. The plans had to be adjusted to take care of transportation problems should a repeat movement through the high-density traffic areas of the Southeastern United States be necessary.

For a time pressure had to be maintained with low-level aerial photography, electronic listening and surveillance of Soviet Bloc shipping to insure removal of the offensive weapons.

According to Harold Macmillan, the Cuban Missile Crisis represented, "one of the greatest turning points in history." President Kennedy said:

The autumn of 1962, if not a turning point, was at least a climactic period, even though its effects can't be fully perceived now. Future historians looking back at 1962 may well mark the year as the time when the tide began to turn. 66

From my viewpoint, as one who really "felt the tension" of those days and deep sense of relief when it was over, this writer's initial

reaction was that it was some kind of turning point.

The effects of the Cuban Missile Crisis on the United States military can be divided into three broad categories. First, there were significant diplomatic results that would bring about a change in the direction of American foreign policy. This in turn would have both direct and indirect influence on the United States armed forces. Second, there were certain internal decisions and influences in the United States which led to affirmation of the new look policies of the Defense Department, especially in the fields of crisis reaction and firmer and more centralized direction from the White House and the Office of the Secretary of Defense. Third, there were many lessons learned in the employment and design of military hardware, inter-service cooperation, command and control and intelligence gathering procedures. Each one of these factors will be examined in detail as they influenced the direction of the military and the lessons they learned from the Crisis.

The diplomatic reactions and conclusions will be discussed first with an observation on how each decision effected United States foreign policy, and in turn had either a direct or indirect influence on the United States armed forces.

The most dramatic lesson learned was by the Soviet Union. Her leaders were faced with the dangers of direct nuclear confrontation with the United States because of their miscalculations in Cuba. It must have been clear to them, from all that has been written and said, just how close the United States came to invading Cuba with the possible escalation of that action into thermo-nuclear war. This lesson led to such actions as the setting up of the hot-line between the two leaders.

It also started the road to the test ban treaty of 1963 and in this lies the beginning of an accommodation between the Soviet Union and the United States. This factor had a direct effect in the overall strategy of United States military planning. It brought about such things as the involvement of the military in the Strategic Arms Limitations Talks (SALT) and related matters with the planning for reduction of nuclear weapons.

The Crisis did not end the Cold War. It did however bring about a definite change in attitude between the two principals. The United States, the Soviet Union, and in fact all the principal world powers realized the polarization of power more than ever in the two great rivals. This again brought home the fact to the United States military planners that major war involving nuclear weapons, if it happened, would in all probability be between the Soviet Union and the United States. Additionally, it was more apparent than ever that limited wars, wherever they occurred, would involve the two super-powers on opposite sides, either in an active role or in a position of supplying weaponry and military advice to the nations involved.

Another significant result was the affirmation by both the United States and the Soviet Union, the latter perhaps reluctantly, of a common interest in the minimum rules of world order. They must decide on nuclear war themselves and not permit unstable parties, such as Castro, to be in a position to launch or cause nuclear war. The effect of this was significant in the American future military planning. Such plans now must include forces with the capability to isolate unstable nations and leadership with expeditious actions, otherwise small rebellions or

internal struggle for power would soon see the two super-powers on opposite sides. This would result in escalation and the danger of thermo-nuclear war.

The Crisis illustrated that the United Nations can only provide a forum for public debate between the Soviet Union and the United States when the two powers are in serious conflict. Even when a third power such as Cuba was involved, the major decisions fell on the leadership of the two giants. No matter who talked during the Crisis, President Kennedy or Premier Khrushchev were pulling the strings. The dream that the United Nations could by itself settle disputes was again proven false. American leaders realized that present world political considerations were too complex and unsettled for this to happen. For the present, it was necessary to maintain strong and ready military forces with both conventional and nuclear capability. Only from this position of strength could favorable conclusions be forged.

This lesson, that firmness of purpose and proper application of power were important elements in bringing about favorable diplomatic settlements, is considered by many, including this writer, the most important result coming from the Crisis. This feeling, that power and force are necessary, can be evaluated as being the underlying cause of the involvement and the escalation of the Vietnamese War. Unfortunately when this policy was applied to Southeast Asia it became interspersed with indecision and loss of purpose. Thus one can conclude that the tragic military involvement in the recently concluded Vietnam War had some of its seeds in the Cuban Crisis.

The Crisis delivered international law another very damaging blow.

The legality of the Quarantine became a major point of controversy. George Ball, one of the Crisis managers, stated that we no longer live under the "rule of law." He went on to say that peace is maintained under the precarious balance of power between the United States and the Soviet Union. American foreign policy is primarily orientated to maintain this balance.⁶⁷ The effect of this on the military can only be an indirect one. If one wanted to make a direct connection it would not be difficult to point out the fact that many in the military felt that the disregard of strict "rule of law" could be extended to military field actions. From that point it would not be difficult to speculate that herein lies the seed of some of the violations of the Rules of Warfare that became prominent in the Vietnam War on both sides.

The allies of both the Soviet Union and the United States were shocked when they saw how close the world was brought to thermo-nuclear conflict without significant representation by them. From this judgment there were two general recommendations for solution. Some of the allies wanted representation in future decisions through their respective treaty organizations and the United Nations. Others wanted to strengthen or to create their own nuclear arsenals so that they could participate in the nuclear game. The immediate effect in this regard on the American military was that as the number of nations with nuclear weapons increased, offensive support of defensive, strategic planning took on new complications.

Castro felt like he had been sold out by the Soviet Union and

67

George Ball, "Slogans and Realities," Foreign Affairs, XLVII, (July 1969), p. 624.

for a while he echoed the Chinese criticisms of Khrushchev's actions. It took a long visit from Soviet Foreign Minister Anastas Mikoyan to calm the Cuban leader. Castro also discredited himself with other Latin American countries because he permitted the Soviets to install the missiles.⁶⁸ The problem that the Soviets had in convincing Castro that the removal of the offensive weapons was necessary kept the heat on the United States military to keep forces in a ready condition for some time after the Crisis. It also required continuance of the reconnaissance efforts to keep the pressure on Castro to agree to the removal of the offensive missiles and the IL-28 bombers.

Both the Soviet Union and the United States moved their decision-making process to the summit of their respective hierarchies. They both functioned with the utmost secrecy. The final decision was brought about by the direct confrontation of the respective leaders, Khrushchev and President Kennedy. Here is a series of important factors that created problems in military operations during and after the Crisis. The secrecy factor in itself was a handicap but was minor when compared to the fact that a precedent was set which moved the operational decision-making process for the United States military to complete centralization in Washington. This precedent continued to grow and later again came to this writer's attention when he was a member of the controlling staff for carrier support operations for the Vietnam War, Commander Task Force Seventy-Seven (CTF-77). As the Air Operations Officer on this staff, my main duty was the supervision of

68

Phillip W. Quigg, "Latin America: A Broad Brush Appraisal, Foreign Affairs, XXXXII, (April 1964), pp. 405.

Naval air strikes against North Vietnamese targets. Centralization had reached such a ridiculous level that aerial targets were being selected in Washington by self-styled experts, many of whom were not aware of the tactical situation. This resulted in a very inefficient operation, caused low morale among the aircrews, and, even more unfortunately, wasted manpower and materials. A favorite bombing target example, that will always be a classic in air strike planning, came from this Washington description: "suspected underground oil storage sites."⁶⁹

The Cuban Missile Crisis deepened the Chinese-Soviet rift. The Chinese accused Khrushchev of appeasement and another "Munich." They made it clear in several statements that the Crisis proved that Khrushchev overestimated the importance of nuclear weapons. A further Chinese evaluation was that Khrushchev's short-range gamble was reckless and his long-range policy abandoned the revolutionary struggles of the masses.⁷⁰ China's actions and criticisms of the Soviet leader would be a contributing factor in the subsequent improvement in United States-Chinese relations and the complicated diplomatic reactions which made the Soviet Union move toward further actions leading to detente with the United States. An added factor was a lessening of the China problem which could eventually simplify United States military requirements.

69

This fiasco resulted in my early retirement from the Navy under less than happy conditions. My first civilian employment was at Johns-Hopkins University's Applied Physics Laboratory, where three futile months were spent as a consultant. During this time most of my time was used trying to convince the powers-to-be, to return tactical air operations to the pilots cockpit under the direct supervision of Task Force Commander.

70

Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Threat and Opportunity in the Communist Schism," Foreign Affairs, XXXXI, (April 9, 1963), p. 516.

These better relations between the United States and the Chinese have been severely handicapped by the Chinese Nationalist problem and the late and militarily unsatisfactory settlement of the Vietnam War, so there has been very little change in strategic military planning.

As for the effect of the Crisis on the American military resultant from internal policy decisions. Probably the most important of these was the reaction to the concern by President Kennedy with the "military response" he received throughout from his advisors. He was determined to take steps to ease tensions with the Soviet Union in order to allow some "elbow room," short of nuclear threats, should other confrontations come.

To understand the effect this had on the military it is necessary to examine the attitude of President Kennedy toward them. Although much has been written to the contrary, it was obvious that the President was desirous of having good relationship with the military, but that this would have to be on his own terms. He desired to move younger men into positions of power.⁷¹ This had been shown in an early move when he replaced Admiral Arleigh Burke on the Joint Chiefs with a younger Admiral Anderson. He also proved that he wanted men operating under his own terms when he did not reappoint Admiral Anderson as the Chief of Naval Operations but at the same time used his talents by appointing him as Ambassador to Spain.

President Kennedy made it clear throughout the Crisis and after-

71

A hold-over of the youth syndrome reached home in 1964, when this writer and 20 other "older" selectees for Captain in the Navy were removed from the promotion list in order to reduce the average age of selection by two-tenths of a year.

wards that he would exercise firm control of the military and that he would handle emergencies at the highest level in order to permit the kind of selective response required to minimize the danger of nuclear confrontation. He had shown his disappointment with the "military response" that had been given to him by top military advisors as the only action available. It was now clear that in future decisions the President would require that the military leadership consider other than purely military options.

Generally, it can be said that the Cuban Crisis was a watershed for the United States military. They became more involved in political maneuvering by Congress and the President. The politics connected with the Crisis often included reference to military readiness and generally put the American military more into the public limelight than they had been since the Korean War. Whether they were in agreement or not with the new policies of crisis management, flexible response, cost effectiveness and centralized control, these things were now a fact of life and had to be accepted by the military. The very success achieved by the military during the crisis gave the new look of the defense establishment the credibility of success in its first great test.

General Maxwell Taylor was firmly interposed between the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the President as a result of his performance throughout the Crisis. Along with this went the firm establishment of a "War Room" in the White House with the President's security director, McGeorge Bundy, in charge. These men became very close to the President and often worked outside the regular military channels to keep close track of military operations. When an error, such as the

"like ducks in a row" parking of Air Force aircraft in Florida, was discovered, they illustrated it, repeated it, and overlaid it to the point of great embarrassment and irritation of the military. In actuality they kept their own military displays and very frequently resorted to direct communications with advance military units to gather information the President wanted or they thought he might want.

Secretary McNamara came out of the Crisis firmly in charge. His youthful advisors, who became known as the "Whiz Kids," gained considerable stature and had to be accepted by the military traditionalists as a matter of career survival. Many could not accept the new order, and there were premature retirements in all branches of the services.

In conclusion, the following is a discussion of military achievements and the lessons learned in tactics, command and control and in the use of new weapons and surveillance equipment.

The Unified Command system proved that it could work in spite of misunderstandings and inter-service rivalries. The preparations for the invasion were expeditious and were executed under the firm control of CINCLANT. The advance planning, although it had overlooked some trying logistics problems, had been adequate, and the experience of the Crisis deployment would be valuable in any future Cuban planning. It should be mentioned that many in high places did not realize the amount of planning and exercising that had been engaged in to get the armed forces ready for actions such as those called for during the Crisis. In this lies one of the greatest reasons for success, which has never been mentioned in the post-crisis plaudits or criticisms.

The intelligence community, including the military branches, suffered an initial blow because of all the controversy connected with the

evaluation of available information prior to the Crisis. This resulted in many investigations, some of which are or will be reflected in the present high-level investigations of CIA activities. There is no doubt that the CIA and other agencies were deeply involved in serious attempts to solve the Cuban problem and that they considered all options in settling the very difficult situation. Given the mood of and the danger to the country at the time, these efforts were justified. A final review of the performance of the CIA and its military counterparts brings their actions and recommendations into a more favorable light. A good effect of the Crisis was that relative to Cuba the CIA was removed, at least for a time, from direct control of forces with military responsibilities.

The Unified Command system functioned well, especially during the days of the Crisis. Command and control appeared satisfactory, but soon after the Crisis a recently created Unified Commander, Commander in Chief Strike Command (CINCSTRIKE) was interposed into the Cuban planning picture. This set up another great power struggle, well laced with the ingredients of a traditional Army-Navy struggle, with the Air Force alternating between the two as indicated, for its own benefit. The forces assigned to this new organization were the same as those required for CINCLANT's Cuban operations. The idea behind this incorporation of ready army forces, the Tactical Air Command and airlift forces was probably a sound concept, but it was implemented in an arbitrary way with very confusing and incomplete instructions. It further complicated an already over-complicated system. The creation of the Unified Strike Command was uncalled for and could only lead to more confusion in the military command and control establishment.

The importance of having a controlled, unified and efficient reconnaissance system was illustrated before, during, and after the Crisis. Any operation which violates the airspace of a target country is inherently dangerous. When it has the additional limelight of international interest, it borders continuously on calamity and crisis. The operations necessary to secure the required information relative to the offensive missiles in Cuba were and probably still are the most extensive operations of this nature ever conducted by any military force. Many new techniques were used and many established intelligence gathering activities were perfected. The presence of modern Soviet electronic systems connected with the SAMS, MIGS, and other installations gave our electronic information gathering forces an outstanding opportunity to gather or confirm information that had great value in future planning against Soviet equipment. Much of the information gathered relative to the Soviet SAM sites proved invaluable in perfecting countermeasures later used in attack aircraft against targets in North Vietnam, which were guarded by similar Soviet-furnished installations. The system of reconnaissance control that had been established directly under the JCS functioned in an excellent manner by the time the Crisis was over. It overcame the handicaps of very centralized control and a high degree of secrecy, plus the many last minute changes in top-level orders.

For years many have maintained that control of electronic emissions and the related electronic environment will be very important in deciding any future military engagement. Cuba, around the time of the Crisis, became the objective of a very large concentration of electronic intelligence units, all ready and eager to prove this point. Aerial

squadrons, with the mission of listening to and evaluating Soviet equipment, were brought together from all over the world to gather data. Surface and sub-surface units, equipped for special surveillance, carried out sensitive approaches to suspect areas to get the Cubans to "light-up" their radars so that desired pulse-rates, frequencies, and other characteristics could be delicately measured and recorded. In this area it was especially difficult to control the various agencies, each of whom had their own ideas of how to accomplish the mission. Very often there was tendency to hide behind high classification of equipment in order to keep operational objectives hidden. It was almost unbelievable how much new equipment "came out of the wood-work," ready to be tested against an environment of Soviet electronic equipment. With all the activity in progress, emission control became a trying problem. At first, the confusion often led to one unit interfering with another, almost to the point where they literally "jammed"⁷² each other's equipment. It was not until after the Crisis, when the JARCC in Key West was located in the same facility with the Continental Air Defense Command north of the City that completely satisfactory control was achieved. Highly classified and ultra-sensitive listening was accomplished relative to Cuban-Soviet communications networks. Very significant contributions to the military effort in this field came from a CIA controlled ship stationed near Havana.

The entire spectrum of military communications, from the field units to the special, semi-secure, leased line between CINCLANT and

72

The actual code word used by military forces to describe electronic noise made in an area specifically planned to interfere with electronic reception.

Commander Caribbean Sea Frontier in San Juan,⁷³ was under constant pressure throughout the Crisis. The existing facilities were completely inadequate at the beginning, but with the full cooperation of commercial telephone companies, they were brought to an acceptable condition by the end of the Crisis. It is my estimation that a major communications overload condition would have come about had the full invasion been ordered. For some time during the most trying periods of the Crisis, an official condition of communications control, Operation Minimize, was established to eliminate unnecessary traffic. Lessons learned were applied in a staff revision of the communications annex to CINCLANT's Cuban Operations Order. It also resulted in the immediate increase in priority for the new headquarters building and improved facilities for communications at CINCLANT's Norfolk compound.

Most of the principals involved at the working level of the Crisis concurred that military operations were seriously handicapped by the high security classifications. Ever since crisis management became the watchword of the new defense establishment, secrecy was paramount. To this writer it seemed that classification was used to build empires, since certain individuals at every level of control equated high classification with importance of action. Highly sensitive and important communications channels and procedures that were never intended for such purposes were used for mounds of traffic that could have been relegated to more normal channels. Not only was such a situation operationally inefficient, but it threatened compromise of a very necessary and ex-

73

The cost of leasing this line was 25,000 dollars per month.

tremely expensive system of intelligence communications. Unfortunately, not much was learned from this experience because the same problems were encountered during my tour in Vietnam.

An additional impact of the Crisis was that the three individual services were given some new roles and also were required to place emphasis on other assignments that had been given lesser priority.

The Navy, in pursuit of the objectives of the Quarantine, was required to use new techniques of gathering information on Soviet shipping. Navy ships were required to remain on station for long periods of time under great restraint and sometimes with conflicting and ever-changing instructions. Naval forces were given an excellent opportunity to exercise newly developed anti-submarine tactics, although this created controversy because of the danger foreseen by the President during the Crisis. He felt this application of approved techniques against the Soviet submarines could result in a direct clash with Soviet forces. In fact there were several very active incidents with Soviet submarines causing several of them to surface. Experience was also gained by the Navy's Carrier Task Forces. They again proved that such ships could respond with much less expense and confusion than air units which had to depend on land air bases close to enemy territory for their support. The long-range patrol aircraft made excellent use of the Naval Reserve squadrons that had been recalled to active duty. They also improved their communications procedures and perfected some excellent photographic techniques when they were required to furnish photos of deck-cargo loads with enough resolution for intelligence on Soviet missiles and support equipment. Ship-borne helicopters proved themselves ab-

solutely essential to the role of close surveillance required by the Quarantine. Their pictures were particularly helpful in determining that the missiles were actually removed.

The Army's greatest benefit came from the exercising of its combat-ready, quick-reaction forces. Many problems of cooperation with the Tactical Air Command forces were worked out. Airlift problems became apparent, and as a result Reserves were called up as a short-range solution, while improved planning and equipment were provided for long range answers to the problems. Base and communications facilities were inadequate to accommodate the large numbers of Army forces deployed. As a result of this, valuable experience in base renovation was gained and the Army engineers were able to evaluate some of their new construction techniques. Army light aircraft forces had a significant mission in the operational order for the invasion of Cuba. As a result of the Crisis, they were moved to Florida and were able to operate from airfields under forward area conditions. In addition, these and other Army forces gained experience in troop and equipment load-out into tactical vessels.

The Air Force probably had the most difficult time. The base best suited for their tactical air operations, Homestead Air Force Base, Florida, was predominantly occupied by SAC and was equipped for large aircraft operations. Parking facilities at this field and others designated for the support of the invasion were inadequate, a fact that led to the close-parking situation for which CINCLANT and Air Force planners were so severely criticized. There was a considerable problem with priorities. The main clash came between the air defense and

reconnaissance forces who were actually flying sorties in connection with the Crisis and the tactical strike forces who had to be ready to go. Both had to use the same base facilities and supporting aerial tankers. It finally got to the point where directives from the Unified Commander and the JCS were required to settle some of these problems.

In retrospect, the Cuban Crisis, as far as military actions were concerned, brought many benefits. Probably the greatest of these benefits came from the fact that they were able to adjust their actions as requirements from the President were increased or decreased during the rapidly changing situation. Constraint of forces that are motivated and ready to go, as was the case in Cuba, can be a very difficult situation for the immediate Commander and all the way up the chain-of-command to the President. It has always been amazing to this writer that more serious incidents did not occur.

On the other hand, what happened in the Crisis as far as the use of the military is concerned should have been a warning for what was to come in Vietnam. Communications is the backbone of all military operations. What follows is that the better the communications, the more centralized the control of an operation will become. The Cuban Missile Crisis was another step in the movement of operational control of the military forces into the White House. This is particularly true when operations are critical to international relations, such as the ones connected with the Crisis. The world-wide policy of "flexible response" brought about the "crisis managers" that John Donovan talks about in his book, The Cold Warriors.⁷⁴ The principal managers in-

74

John C. Donovan, The Cold Warriors (Lexington: D. D. Heath & Co., 1974), p. 185.

volved in the Cuban Crisis included Bundy, Sorensen, Robert Kennedy, General Taylor, McNamara, Paul Nitze, Roswell Gilpatrick and Rusk.⁷⁵ Not only were they members of the famous Executive Committee, but they established their own War Room in the White House. Although they consulted with the Joint Chiefs, there were times when a junior officer, such as the writer, was required to update directly, through the White House switchboard. This starts to reflect down the line and causes confusion and discontent. The Joint Chiefs in turn by-pass the Unified Commander and talk directly to operational units. The situation really became difficult and this method of operation fostered by the crisis managers and firm control at the top of every detail, destroys the initiative of the on-the-scene Commander, who must, even in modern warfare, still make decisions without consulting the White House.

75

Sorensen, p. 674.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abel, Elie, The Missile Crisis, Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1968.
- Acheson, Dean, "Dean Acheson's Version of RFK's Version of the Cuban Affair," Esquire, LXXI, Feb. 1969.
- Allison, Graham, "Conceptual Models of the Cuban Crisis," Rand Report, P3919, August, 1968.
- Allison, Graham, Essence of Decision, Boston, Little, Brown and Co., 1971.
- Alsop, Stewart, "In Times of Crisis," Saturday Evening Post, CCXXXVI, Dec. 8, 1962.
- Baldwin, Hanson, "Growing Risks of Bureaucratic Intelligence," The Reporter, XXIX, Aug. 15, 1963.
- Ball, George, "Slogans and Realities," Foreign Affairs, XLVII, July, 1969.
- Beedham, Brian, "Cuba and the Balance of Power," Foreign Affairs, XIX, Jan. 1963.
- Ben, Phillip, "U Thant and the Cuban Crisis," The New Republic, CXLVII, Nov. 17, 1962.
- Bohlen, Charles, Witness to History, New York, W. W. Norton, 1973.
- Brzezinski, Zbigniew, "Cuba and Soviet Strategy," The New Republic, CXLV, Nov. 3, 1962.
- Brzezinski, Zbigniew, "Threat and Opportunity in the Communist Schism," Foreign Affairs, XLII, April, 1963.
- Bundy, McGeorge, "The Presidency and Peace," Foreign Affairs, XLVII, May 1963.
- Caldwell, Robert, The Lopez Expeditions to Cuba, Princeton University Press, 1915.
- Chayes, Abraham, The Cuban Missile Crisis, New York, Oxford University Press, 1974.
- Crane, Robert, "The Missile Crisis," Orbis, VI, Winter, 1963.
- Donovan, John, The Cold Warriors, Lexington, D. C. Heath & Co., 1974.
- FitzSimons, Louise, The Kennedy Doctrine, New York, Schribner, 1971.

- Gehlen, Michael, The Politics of Coexistence, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1967.
- Gulahan, Richard, "Step by Step in a Historic Week, Life, Nov. 2, 1962.
- Halberstam, David, The Best and the Brightest, New York, Random House, 1969.
- Halle, Louis, The Cold War as History, New York, Harper & Row, 1971.
- Hilsman, Roger, To Move A Nation, Garden City, Doubleday & Co., 1967.
- Horelick, Arnold, "The Cuban Missile Crisis," World Politics, XVI, April, 1964.
- Kennedy, Robert, Thirteen Days, A Memoir of the Cuban Crisis, New York, W.W. Norton, 1969.
- Kissinger, Henry, ed., Problems of Modern Strategy, New York, Frederick A. Praeger, 1965.
- Langley, Lester, The Cuban Policy of the United States, New York, Wiley, 1968.
- Larson, David, ed., The Cuban Missile Crisis, Selected Documents and Chronology, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1963.
- Marshall, Charles, "Afterthought of the Cuban Blockade," The New Republic, CXVII, Nov. 10, 1962.
- Nathan, James, "The Cuban Missile Crisis, His Finest Hour, Now," World Politics, XXVII, Jan., 1975.
- Pachter, Henry, Collision Course, New York, Frederick A. Praeger, 1963.
- Quigg, Phillip, "Latin America: A Broad Brush Approach," Foreign Affairs, XLII, April, 1964.
- Schlesinger, Arthur, A Thousand Days, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1965.
- Sorensen, Theodore, Kennedy, New York, Harper & Row, 1965.
- Ulam, Adam, The Rivals, New York, The Viking Press, 1971.
- U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Armed Services, Preparedness, on Cuban Military Build-up, Sub-Committee, Interim Report, 1st sess., 88th Cong., 1963.
- U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Appropriations, Sub-Committee on Dept. of Defense Appropriations Hearings, 88th Cong., 1st sess., 1963.