

THE LIMITS OF
COERCIVE DIPLOMACY
Laos, Cuba, Vietnam

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THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS, 1962

I. THE DECISION TO TRY COERCIVE DIPLOMACY

"If we had to act on Wednesday in the first twenty-four hours" of the crisis, the president said later, "I don't think we would have chosen as prudently as we finally did." It was indeed fortunate that the high-level decision of September 10, 1962, to avoid overflights of western Cuba was finally set aside, permitting a U-2 photo reconnaissance flight on Sunday, October 14, which revealed secret Soviet preparations of medium range (MRBM) missile sites in that part of the island.¹ The discovery came before the Soviet missiles achieved operational readiness. Thus, Kennedy could deliberate at some length with his advisers as to how to respond to this unexpected development. It would be about ten days, intelligence specialists estimated, before the missiles would be ready for firing.²

One of the president's first decisions was that he would not be hurried into action but would take full advantage of the time available to consider the problem facing his administration from every standpoint. This decision, as the president's reflection on the crisis we have quoted suggests, was possibly momentous in its

consequences. For at first most of the members of the group of advisers Kennedy quickly assembled, which came to be known as ExCom (Executive Committee of the National Security Council), thought that the president would have to resort to an air strike in order to remove the missiles. "A so-called 'surgical' strike," Sorensen reports, appealed "to almost everyone first considering the matter, including President Kennedy on Tuesday and Wednesday."³ The president had been convinced from the beginning, upon being shown the photographs and given the interpretation of their significance, that he would have to act, that the United States would have to bring the threat to an end one way or another.⁴

The belief that an air strike should be undertaken persisted several days though the number of advisers favoring it gradually declined. The strength and depth of this belief among its staunchest proponents is indicated by the fact that as late as 1969 Dean Acheson still believed that an air strike confined to the missile sites "was the necessary and only effective method of achieving our purpose."⁵ Only remarkable luck, Acheson holds, enabled Kennedy to get the missiles removed without an air strike.

Though leaning toward an air strike, the president wanted to consider thoroughly all alternatives. He was careful not to let his own thoughts influence his advisers; and he encouraged them to try to think of other alternatives when for a moment on Tuesday the choice seemed to lie between an air strike and acquiescence.⁶ On Wednesday McNamara developed the idea of a blockade, which had been briefly mentioned the preceding day.

We shall pass over the details of the debate within ExCom concerning the air strike and blockade options.⁷ The president's interest in the blockade option was soon caught by the possibility that it might rescue him from the many-horned dilemma confronting him. He had quickly rejected acquiescence to the missile deployment in Cuba; to do nothing seemed to him the worst of all options. A purely diplomatic overture to Khrushchev — that is, words without action — would be not only ineffectual but dangerous. It could precipitate a crash effort by the Soviets to capitalize on their missile deployment. An air strike or invasion, on the other hand, would result in heavy casualties; moreover it carried grave risks of a strong Soviet response and the danger of war. Might a blockade somehow enable Kennedy to obtain removal of the missiles without having to take direct military action?

From the very beginning the idea of a blockade raised the question whether Khrushchev could be induced to remove the missiles. No one believed that Khrushchev would lightly forgo the considerable advantages he expected to obtain from his covert missile deployment or that he would tolerantly accept the loss of domestic and international prestige which would be associated with a blatant retreat. Pressure would be necessary. But were Khrushchev and other members of the Soviet government coercible on this matter? Were they capable of "retreating," as their doctrine enjoined them to do when faced with overwhelming danger?⁸ Or were the Soviet leaders so committed to the daring venture on which they had embarked that, for them, there could be no turning back? This was indeed a critical question, but available accounts of the ExCom meetings hardly refer to it. An affirmative answer to the question was implicit in ExCom's analysis of the calculations of the Soviet decision to deploy the missiles. Most of Kennedy's advisers felt that the Soviet leaders had miscalculated the risks of their action and that once made aware of these risks they would be capable of retreating, at least in principle. But a theoretical answer to the question, while not without value, did not suffice. The more difficult question was the practical one: Could a way be found to induce the Soviet leaders to retreat? Adherents of the air strike, particularly those who remained committed to it, appear to have answered this question negatively. They did not see how the blockade option could generate enough pressure to achieve this result, certainly not before the missiles had been made operational, which everyone seemed to agree would drastically alter the situation in Khrushchev's favor.

In the end, however, the president's image of Khrushchev was decisive. "The President believed from the start," his brother reported "that the Soviet Chairman was a rational, intelligent man who, if given sufficient time and shown determination, would alter his position."⁹ The president's answer, therefore, was that Khrushchev was capable of retreating and that an effort should be made to induce him to do so. At the same time, Kennedy was keenly aware of the danger of backing his opponent into a corner without leaving open a line of retreat.

Thus, Kennedy chose to try coercive diplomacy instead of opting immediately for the "quick, decisive" military strategy represented by the air strike. Kennedy chose this strategy even though he realized that its success would be jeopardized because a block-

ade—indeed any public demand for removal of the missiles—would inevitably engage Khrushchev's prestige. In fact, a blockade could well push both sides into "rigid postures of simultaneous commitment with regard to a specific and highly visible point of confrontation."¹⁰ Kennedy was by no means oblivious of this danger. He felt he had no choice but to challenge Khrushchev's prestige if he wanted to get the missiles out before they became operational. Any diplomatic action by the United States that did not involve Khrushchev's authority was likely to be ineffectual. A blockade would at least engage his prestige less than an air strike. And, besides, as we shall see, Kennedy was prepared to help make it easier for Khrushchev to retreat, not merely by cooperating in perfunctory face-saving gestures but also by making a meaningful contribution of his own to a quid pro quo that would secure removal of the missiles.

II. KENNEDY'S VIEW OF THE STAKES

The president quickly perceived the multiple dangers implicit in Khrushchev's bold move. Robert Kennedy reported that his brother "knew he would have to act. The U.S. could not accept what the Russians had done. What that action would be was still to be determined. But he was convinced from the beginning that he would have to do something."¹¹ We need not exclude the possibility that the president momentarily wavered and wondered whether a strong response was necessary or feasible, or might even be postponed.* This possibility, however, is less important than his considered judgment that the stakes were very high indeed and that time was all-important.

Kennedy's motivation was complex. It was obvious to him and to others that, if allowed to succeed, Khrushchev's move could have a variety of damaging consequences for the United States position in the world, for Kennedy's foreign and domestic policies, and also for his ability to provide leadership thereafter. Not merely his personal prestige and his political future, but also the prestige and interests of the United States were at stake. It is idle to attempt to sort out and weigh separately, as some critics have tried to do, these two dimensions of the president's motivation.¹² A

* One story has it that, when the president was told by McGeorge Bundy that the missiles had been discovered, his initial response was to ask whether action could be deferred until after the congressional elections.

leader's sense of his personal stakes usually enters in some way into his judgment of his country's interests. And often, though not always, there is in fact some basis in reality to encourage the tendency to identify personal stakes in an issue with those of party or country.

Khrushchev could hardly have thought of a better way to ensure that both dimensions of Kennedy's motivation would be strongly aroused and, indeed, so fused as to become virtually inseparable. However hard the president might have tried in this situation, he could not have found a way to accept damage to his personal political stakes without also accepting damage to major United States interests. The kind of personal and political humiliation that the covert deployment of missiles would inflict upon the president could hardly have escaped Khrushchev's attention altogether when he planned and carried it out. Of those several aspects of Khrushchev's bold move that reflect bad judgment and miscalculation, his willingness to inflict personal and political humiliation upon Kennedy is by far the most irresponsible. If Eisenhower had inadvertently embarrassed Khrushchev personally and politically by his clumsy handling of the U-2 affair in May 1960, Khrushchev foolishly repaid Kennedy tenfold and under far more dangerous circumstances.

After the Bay of Pigs fiasco of April 1961 the administration had settled upon the indirect approach of attempting to isolate Castro diplomatically and of applying economic pressures. To many this policy seemed to underestimate the danger of allowing a Communist base to exist in the Caribbean from which revolution could be exported to other Latin American countries. As the Soviet military build-up in Cuba that began in July 1962 took on an ominous character during the summer, domestic discontent with Kennedy's Cuban policy was severely exacerbated and generated pressure for stronger measures. The Republicans announced that Cuba would be the dominant issue in the congressional elections in November. The administration, in turn, mobilized itself to reassure the voters that the danger was being exaggerated and that there was no reason for war-like measures. Administration spokesmen, including Vice President Johnson, rejected the call for blockade measures against Cuba on the ground that this would constitute an "act of war" against the Soviet Union. The administration disclosed considerable intelligence information at its disposal concerning the character of the Soviet military supplies and personnel flowing into

Cuba, hoping thereby to assure the public that it was well informed as to what the Soviets were and were not doing.

As much to calm the war psychosis encouraged by critics such as senators Keating and Goldwater as to deter the Soviets, Kennedy made his position explicitly clear on September 4 and again on September 13. He warned the Soviets that his administration would not tolerate the introduction of "offensive" weapons into Cuba.* The president thereby publicly pledged himself to act if missiles were introduced into Cuba. Kennedy did so perhaps largely, though certainly not exclusively, for domestic political purposes, for he thought it most unlikely that the Soviets would undertake such action. But once he had taken his stand on this issue, his public pledge to act thereafter if challenged was irrevocable.¹³ Also, the president had become particularly vulnerable since he personally, as well as members of his administration, had persistently deemphasized the danger of a missile deployment in order to counter charges by Senator Keating and others that the Soviets were already secretly moving missiles into Cuba. When the missiles were finally discovered in mid-October, therefore, "the United States might not be in mortal danger but the Administration most certainly was."¹⁴

Even without the added impetus of Kennedy's personal political stakes, the need to find a way to remove the missiles before they became operational was compelling, but not because the missiles being placed in Cuba would shift the strategic military balance in Russia's favor. Had the Soviet deployment been of that magnitude, which it clearly was not, Kennedy's motivation would have been even stronger. Rather, initial intelligence on the Soviet missile deployment was such that it was possible for Secretary of Defense McNamara to argue that "a missile is a missile," and to suggest that the administration try to accept Soviet missiles in Cuba without creating a major international crisis.¹⁵ Some critics of Kennedy's handling of the crisis have used the fact that the secretary of defense himself was not upset by the military signifi-

* Kennedy also warned the Soviets against taking other actions in Cuba as well that would "endanger or interfere" with United States security, "including our base at Guantanamo, our passage to the Panama Canal, our missile and space activities at Cape Canaveral, or the lives of American citizens in the country." American action was threatened also in case Cuba attempted "to export its aggressive purposes by force or the threat of force against any country in this hemisphere," or became "an offensive base of significant capacity for the Soviet Union."

cance of the Soviet missiles in Cuba to charge that the president created a dangerous crisis quite unnecessarily in order to preserve his personal political interests. Among the important factors this thesis overlooks is that McNamara's initial judgment of the military significance of the missiles was overly sanguine, that he initially ignored the political-diplomatic significance of the missiles, and that he shortly changed his mind regarding the importance of what was at stake.

Among those who quickly disagreed with McNamara's initial view of the military significance of the Cuban missiles was Paul Nitze, his assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs. Nitze felt that the missiles in Cuba would expose a large part of the American strategic bomber force, based in the southeastern states, to sudden attack by reducing the warning time from fifteen to two or three minutes.¹⁶ The forty-two MRBMs and the twenty-four to thirty-two IRBMs that were already in Cuba or on the way, it was later estimated, did not give the Soviets a good first strike capability, but they did increase the destructive power that the Soviets could deliver on United States targets by about 50 per cent. Moreover, one could not ignore the possibility that Moscow might decide later to send still more medium-range missiles to Cuba. Even now, with additional time and the benefit of hindsight, efforts to assess the real military significance of the missiles quickly lead to intricate technical considerations. We forgo further discussion of this here, because the president and his advisers were swayed not by the military threat but largely by the important political-diplomatic advantages they saw accruing to Khrushchev if the missiles remained in Cuba.¹⁷ As the president himself said later, after discounting the immediate military threat of the Cuban-based missiles, "It would have politically changed the balance of power. It would have appeared to, and appearances contribute to reality."¹⁸

No one could be certain what the Soviet leaders intended to do with their Cuban-based missiles. Many possibilities suggested themselves, and ExCom and the president gave considerable weight to the theory, supported by circumstantial evidence, that Khrushchev hoped his Cuban missiles would radically redefine the setting in which the Berlin problem could be reopened after the elections in November. Indeed, before the missiles were discovered, Khrushchev had indirectly warned that the Berlin problem would once again

come to the forefront after the United States mid-term congressional elections. The threat was severe enough to lead Kennedy to obtain authorization from Congress in early September for a call-up of reserves.

The administration's specialists on Soviet behavior foresaw that Khrushchev would be able, if he wished, to draw many important advantages from the missiles in Cuba.* Khrushchev in effect was asking Kennedy to accept his assurance that this large missile force would be used only to deter an American attack on Cuba, that it would not be used psychologically, politically, and diplomatically to enhance other, even more important Soviet foreign policy objectives at the expense of the United States and its allies. That was an extraordinary thing to ask Kennedy to believe!¹⁹

Moreover, for the president to retreat from the explicit public commitment given as recently as September that he would not tolerate "offensive" missiles in Cuba would have eroded all United States commitments and invited Khrushchev and others to question Kennedy's future credibility in the most painful and dangerous way. To the familiar criticism that Kennedy over-reacted to what was really only a matter of prestige, Charles Burton Marshall later replied, "Why *only*? Prestige is the faculty enabling a great power to avoid final, miserable choices between surrender and war. Prestige is the ingredient of authority in international affairs. . . . The quality that demands being listened to is prestige — and a nation suffers loss of it at great peril."²⁰

Finally, an important, long-range goal of the president's foreign policy was at stake. He came to office believing that the Cold War should be modified, that a mutually acceptable form of coexistence with the Soviet Union could be worked out through negotiation and serious exploration of each other's interests. "Braving criticism

* Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, pp. 161, 164, reports that one group of Sovietologists in the State Department concluded that the decision to put missiles into Cuba was best viewed as "a generalized, strategic response to a whole set of problems, military, economic, and political" facing Soviet leadership in 1962. "A general improvement in the Soviet military position would affect the entire political context, strengthening their hand for dealing with the whole range of problems facing them. . . . If the move in Cuba were successful and the over-all Soviet position strengthened, their leverage on Berlin would indeed be improved. NATO would surely be shaken and the chances of the U.S. successfully creating a multilateral nuclear force reduced. In Latin America, other potential 'Castros' would be encouraged. American power would be less impressive and American protection less desirable."

from allies abroad and enemies at home," Pachter notes, Kennedy had made at least a start in this direction, seeking solutions for the Congo, Berlin, a test-ban treaty. The Cuban missile deployment was a blow at the very foundation of this policy aspiration. "He knew that, were he humiliated a second time in Cuba, he would lose all hopes for a stable world peace."²¹

Having characterized the multifaceted nature of Kennedy's perception of what was at stake, we should also mention some constraints and limits on his otherwise strong motivation to secure removal of the missiles. The question of motivation cannot be discussed independently of the objectives toward which it might be channeled. Kennedy's motivation was strong particularly insofar as it was focused and concentrated upon the limited objective he clearly set for his response and consistently followed — namely the removal of the missiles, no more and no less. His motivation was not oriented toward the objective of seizing the occasion to topple Castro and drive out Soviet influence from Cuba altogether. The probable costs and risks of this objective were perceived by him to be excessive and the strength of his motivation would not suffice if it were linked to this more ambitious goal.

Finally, even with respect to the removal of the missiles, we do not know for certain whether the value the president attached to this objective would have been strong enough to lead him to order an air strike in the event that his ultimatum of Saturday, October 27, failed to produce Khrushchev's compliance. Kennedy was moving toward that decision but had not yet committed himself to it when the crisis ended. Therefore, the possible limits of his motivation were not in fact fully tested. That the missiles were not yet operational offered Kennedy an opportunity to initiate action without war. In doing so, to be sure, he accepted the risk of war; but he did not behave recklessly to increase its probability. We can also say that there is nothing in the available materials to suggest that the president's judgment was distorted by an emotional response to being deceived by Khrushchev, by adherence to an extreme Cold War image of the Soviets, or by a desire to punish Khrushchev for his misbehavior—although certainly the president did feel it necessary to correct his opponent's mistaken notion that he lacked determination. Finally, while Kennedy was out to "win" the confrontation, "defeating Khrushchev," as Pachter states, "was not a final goal but a milestone beyond which lay war and peace."²²

III. CHOICE OF THE BLOCKADE: ITS USES AND LIMITATIONS FOR COERCIVE DIPLOMACY

Despite the accomplishments of the ExCom during seven days of feverish planning, the administration entered the overt phase of the crisis on October 22 without having resolved a critical ambiguity in its strategy. The president chose the blockade option because it enabled him to postpone and control the risk of a major war better than an air strike would have. In this respect the blockade had advantages that the air strike option lacked altogether: it enabled the president to initiate the showdown with Khrushchev without immediate resort to force; it permitted him to retain personal control over United States actions and to be immediately responsive to changes in the situation; and it offered at least the possibility of coercing and persuading Khrushchev to remove the missiles voluntarily. The president still had to find a way of utilizing the blockade for this purpose, however.

Herein lay the critical gap in the ExCom's deliberations of the first seven days. The weakness and lack of relevance of the blockade for obtaining the withdrawal of missiles already in Cuba had been argued very cogently indeed by those ExCom members who advocated an air strike. The limitations of the blockade had been perceived and conceded also by those who opposed an immediate air strike and favored a blockade. But the advocates of the blockade had failed to come up with a specific plan for utilizing the blockade in order to obtain removal of the missiles, and they had only a vague and inadequate concept of how this might be done.

Aware of this gap in ExCom's planning, the president nonetheless decided to give priority for the time being to the imperatives of crisis management in order to avoid war if possible. He chose to employ a strategy of coercive diplomacy despite its ambiguities and uncertainties and to hold in reserve the military solution to the problem of the missiles. Notwithstanding the administration's successful application of coercive diplomacy earlier in Laos in 1961, it still lacked a clear concept of the nature of this strategy and an adequate understanding of its complex requirements.

As a result, the president entered the showdown with Khrushchev on October 22 with a serious disadvantage. He was caught squarely between the conflicting requirements of crisis control and those of coercive diplomacy. Fortunately he under-

stood at least the first set of requirements quite well. Indeed, the president and his key advisers made imaginative use of the inherent flexibility of the blockade option to control its conflict potential. In contrast, the requirements of coercive diplomacy were less well understood and were given less weight in Kennedy's actions until Friday, October 25. Until then the president relied essentially upon a weak form of coercive strategy for persuading Khrushchev to remove the missiles * — what we have labeled the "try-and-see" approach. Then, driven by circumstances at the end of the week, Kennedy was forced to improvise a much stronger variant of coercive diplomacy, namely what we have called the "tacit-ultimatum" approach.

With these distinctions in mind, let us review ExCom's deliberations during the seven-day planning period preceding Kennedy's speech of October 22. The possibility of an ultimatum was considered only in connection with the air strike; it was never tied into or related to the blockade option. Even the idea of a private ultimatum threatening Khrushchev with an immediate air strike if he did not agree to withdraw the missiles was soon abandoned within ExCom, evidently because no feasible way of translating it into action could be envisaged. As Sorensen reports, "Many of those originally attracted to the air-strike course had favored it in the hope that a warning would suffice, and that the Soviets would then withdraw their missiles. But no one could devise any method of warning that would not enable Khrushchev either to tie us into knots or force us into obloquy." †

* As noted in Chapter One, while the blockade was a relatively weak strategy for persuading the opponent *to undo* or reverse what he had already done — remove the missiles in Cuba — it was a much stronger coercive strategy for persuading him *to stop* sending more missiles to Cuba. We focus our remarks here on the more ambitious and more difficult of these two objectives of Kennedy's coercive policy.

† Sorensen adds: "I tried my hand, for example, at an airtight letter to be carried out from the President to the Soviet Chairman by a high-level personal envoy. The letter would inform Khrushchev that only if he agreed in his conference with that courier (and such others as he called in) to order the missiles dismantled would U.S. military action be withheld while our surveillance oversaw their removal. But no matter how many references I put in to a summit, to peaceful intentions and to previous warnings and pledges, the letter still constituted the kind of ultimatum which no great power could accept, and a justification for either a preemptive strike against this country or our indictment in the court of history. From that point on, I veered away from the air-strike course." (Sorensen, *Kennedy*, p. 685)

Proponents of the blockade option were unable to envisage more than a try-and-see use of it. This was true even of McNamara's now celebrated argument of Thursday, October 18, in which he held that a blockade would "maintain the options." If the blockade failed, McNamara reasoned, the president would then have a choice of responses. He could decide to deny the Cubans other kinds of cargo — petroleum, for example — or he could move up the scale to an air strike. If one form of pressure failed in its purpose, then another, more severe pressure could be applied. Far from attempting to show how the threat of an air strike could be used to increase the coercive impact of the blockade, McNamara's concept of "maintaining the options" served merely to remind everyone that the blockade could be applied without losing the option to launch an air strike later.²³

Insofar as McNamara's concept of "maintaining the options" had a strategic dimension, the strategy he had in mind was that of graduated escalation. But in the ensuing policy discussions of the next few days it became evident that there were two divergent, competing notions of how escalation strategy ought to be applied, should the blockade fail to persuade Khrushchev to remove the missiles. Some members of ExCom believed that, in that event, the president should proceed immediately to an air strike without going through many additional escalatory steps.²⁴ Others picked up and elaborated McNamara's image of a more gradual, step-by-step escalation with many intermediate steps before resorting to an air strike.²⁵ These competing images of gradual and abrupt escalation contained sharply different implications for policy, but the disagreement was not thrashed out in the ExCom meetings. In fact, this latent policy conflict remained unresolved throughout the entire crisis. The competing views as to escalation strategy were revived at the end of the week, but Khrushchev's acceptance on October 28 of Kennedy's formula for ending the crisis served to forestall a major clash over this issue. Both of these competing views of the blockade as the initial step in graduated escalation fell into the category of what we have called the "try-and-see" approach to coercive diplomacy. There is no indication that the proponents of either of these two concepts suggested that the coercive potential of gradual escalation could be enhanced by adding a time limit for compliance with the demand for removing the missiles, using the threat of an air strike to motivate Khrushchev's compliance.

Rather, the eventual conversion of the "try-and-see" approach into an ultimatum seems to have been entirely improvised at the last minute by President Kennedy himself.

IV. THE PRESIDENT'S PROBLEM: SIGNAL DETERMINATION WITHOUT RISKING WAR

The evidence indicates that for Kennedy, too, the attractiveness of the blockade option lay not in some pre-vision of how he could make it part of a tacit-ultimatum. Rather, he preferred the blockade for other reasons, some of which we have already indicated and one which deserves to be singled out before proceeding.

From the very beginning of the crisis the president, probably more so than most of his advisers, was deeply impressed — indeed, perhaps haunted — by the feeling that Khrushchev's missile gambit could be explained only in terms of a long-standing problem that had plagued Kennedy. Almost from the day he entered office the president had wrestled with the problem of how to convey his determination to the Soviet leader in order to prevent him from attempting dangerous encroachments on the world position of the United States. The disaster of the Bay of Pigs and Khrushchev's performance at the summit meeting at Vienna severely exacerbated Kennedy's problem and his concern. As the tension over Berlin mounted once again in the summer of 1961, the president unburdened himself to James Wechsler of the *New York Post*:

What worried [Kennedy] was that Khrushchev might interpret his reluctance to wage nuclear war as a symptom of an American loss of nerve. Some day, he said, the time might come when he would have to run the supreme risk to convince Khrushchev that conciliation did not mean humiliation. "If Khrushchev wants to rub my nose in the dirt," he told Wechsler, "it's all over." But how to convince Khrushchev short of a showdown? "That son of a bitch won't pay attention to words," the President said bitterly on another occasion. "He has to see you move."²⁶

As the prolonged negotiations over Berlin ground to an inconclusive halt during the summer of 1962, the administration readied itself for new Soviet pressure against West Berlin. Many indications pointed to the likelihood that Khrushchev was preparing another major challenge. Some of them were imbedded in his curiously juxtaposed assurances of September and October that

Soviet military assistance to Cuba was for purely "defensive" purposes and that he would not embarrass the president by raising the Berlin issue again until after the forthcoming congressional elections of November. In other ways, too, Khrushchev was suggesting a linkage between Cuba and Berlin. This was not lost upon the administration, but Kennedy and his advisers failed to penetrate the deception and to guess the linkage — and the trap — that Khrushchev was preparing. Even in September, Sorensen reports, Kennedy was concerned over the possibility that Khrushchev was giving increasing military assistance to Cuba in order to provoke Washington into another invasion of Cuba that would make a martyr out of Castro and wreck United States relations with Latin America, while the Soviets moved in on West Berlin. This suspicion was revived briefly after the missiles were discovered and is contained in one of the early theories, the "Diverting Trap" theory, that ExCom entertained when mulling over the motives behind the missile deployment.²⁷

For many months, therefore, as Pachter puts it, "Kennedy had worried that Khrushchev might underestimate his determination and present him with an ultimatum [on the Berlin problem] he might have to reject. War might break out unless Khrushchev modified his overconfidence, or someone did it for him."²⁸

This, then, was the president's mental set when he learned on October 16 that Khrushchev had been secretly putting missiles into Cuba even while systematically deceiving him with false assurances. Recovering from the shock, the president realized at once that the development he had long feared had now materialized, though not in the guise he had expected and not with immediate reference to Berlin. He realized, too, that — as he had expressed to Wechsler earlier — the time had come when he had no choice but to face "the supreme risk." Words alone would not suffice with Khrushchev; "he has to see you move."

Almost intuitively, the president saw that in the dangerous situation created by Khrushchev's miscalculation the only chance of getting the missiles out of Cuba without war lay in finding a way of impressing Khrushchev, as never before, with his determination. We may suppose that this perceived requirement contributed to Kennedy's instinctive decision not to disclose his knowledge of the missile deployment until he was ready to act and to seize the initiative. The same objective of correcting Khrushchev's image of his weak determination, it is clear, entered into other decisions and

judgments the president was called upon to make throughout the crisis. It contributed, for example, to Kennedy's rejection of the advice that he start not with the blockade but with a purely diplomatic approach to Khrushchev. If Kennedy gave serious thought to the idea, noted above, of beginning the crisis by sending a private ultimatum to Khrushchev, he also probably wondered whether Khrushchev, still prone to question his determination, might conclude he was only bluffing.

The point we wish to emphasize here is that, in addition to the reasons already noted, the blockade option appealed to Kennedy because it offered him a badly needed opportunity to correct Khrushchev's misjudgment of his determination by means short of more dangerous, irreversible military actions. This was a tactical objective of an essentially psychological nature.* For Kennedy it was a necessary first step for achieving a peaceful and acceptable resolution of the crisis. Therefore, it assumed a priority of a special kind in Kennedy's calculations. It helped shape his strategy and tactics, both of which reflected a strong element of improvisation to be sure but one that was guided by a search for means of impressing Khrushchev with his strong motivation and by careful attention to indications of whether or not this message was getting through.

V. NEGOTIATIONS: THE IMPORTANCE OF TIMING

Having emphasized the importance to Kennedy of finding a way of impressing Khrushchev with his determination, let us now consider how this tactical requirement fitted into Kennedy's conception of the role that negotiation would eventually play in terminating the crisis. The president did not have a clearly defined image of the negotiating phase of the crisis that lay before him when he disclosed his knowledge of the missiles in Cuba and announced the blockade; rather, his view of negotiation was dominated by the conviction that he must impress Khrushchev with his determination before entering into the process of bargaining. The timing of negotiations was critical in this respect for, as the

* As Hugh Sidey puts it, Kennedy ordered the blockade of Cuba "not to stop ships from bringing in missiles — that did not matter in the time which the U.S. had to act — but as a device to send the message of our determination through clearly to Nikita Khrushchev." *Life* magazine, November 22, 1968.

president correctly perceived, if he tried to bargain with Khrushchev before correcting the Soviet leader's mistaken view of his determination, Khrushchev's appetite and expectations might well remain excessive and unrealistic. In that event either Kennedy would have to pay too high a price to secure removal of the missiles, or else the negotiations would become prolonged or break down and the president would be forced to take further actions that would risk war.

We must recall at this point our earlier remarks on the theory and art of coercive diplomacy. In Chapter One we emphasized that the feasibility of this strategy depends among other things on whether one combines threats with positive inducements. The addition of a "carrot" may make possible something the "stick" cannot achieve by itself, unless it is a very formidable one. Thus, a proper reading of Kennedy's success in coercing the Soviets to withdraw their missiles from Cuba must call attention not only to the president's threats but also to his willingness to give Khrushchev a substantial quid pro quo. Kennedy eventually offered not only a conditional pledge not to invade Cuba but — as his brother's posthumous account has now made clear — he also gave Khrushchev a private assurance that the Jupiter missiles in Turkey would be removed soon. (That Kennedy added the stipulation that the Turkish missile bases could not be considered to be part of the formal quid pro quo for settling the crisis substantially reduced but did not altogether eliminate their value as part of the "carrot.") *

It is clear that the "carrot" offered by Kennedy was a genuine payment, not merely an inconsequential concession to permit Khrushchev to save face. But it is also clear that this payment would not have been sufficient by itself — that is, the "carrot" alone without the "stick" — to induce Khrushchev to take the missiles out.

Of course, Kennedy might have tried to buy his way out of the

* Not only were the United States Jupiter missiles in Turkey few in number — far fewer than the number of missiles the Soviets deployed into Cuba — they were also an obsolescent first-generation missile that President Kennedy had already directed be dismantled and removed. Abel, *The Missile Crisis*, pp. 189–190. It can be safely assumed the Soviets knew that the Jupiters were few in number and of low quality. Therefore, the value of Kennedy's concession in removing them lay not in reducing the military threat to the Soviet Union but in the political significance of offering them as an open payment for removal of Soviet missiles from Cuba.

crisis without making a serious effort at coercion. A careful reading of the record, however, indicates that Kennedy was certain that Khrushchev's price tag in that event would be too large. Accordingly, *Kennedy relied on coercion to reduce substantially his part of the quid pro quo*. He did not rely on coercion exclusively to secure removal of the missiles. This point is critical both for understanding Kennedy's strategy and for tempering the temptation to misread the lessons of this case as supporting a simple-minded and overly optimistic view of the utility and feasibility of coercion as an instrument of foreign policy.

It may come as a surprise even to those who have followed closely the literature on the Cuban missile crisis if we assert that from an early stage the president believed he would probably have to pay a price to get the missiles out. Not only the president himself but others within the ExCom as well believed this. The president's rejection of Adlai Stevenson's more explicit and more extreme views regarding what the United States ought to be prepared to contribute to a quid pro quo and the notoriety that Stevenson's views achieved thereafter have obscured the fact that others, too, entertained the belief that the United States might have to, and ought to be willing to, make concessions in return for the removal of the missiles. Even before Stevenson joined the late afternoon meeting of the ExCom on Friday, October 18, "someone observed that the United States would have to pay a price to get them out: perhaps we should throw in our now obsolescent and vulnerable Jupiter missile bases in Turkey and Italy, whose removal the Joint Congressional Committee on Atomic Energy as well as the Secretary of Defense had recommended in 1961."²⁹

The president gave an early hint of his view that a delay in the timing of the offer of a quid pro quo was all-important. In the ExCom planning session at which Stevenson outlined his thoughts the president expressed the belief that such talk of negotiating formulas was "premature." Rather, the president wanted to concentrate in his signaling and communications to Khrushchev "on a single issue — the enormity of the introduction of the missiles and the absolute necessity for their removal."³⁰

The president's awareness of the eventual necessity of a two-sided quid pro quo was conveyed more explicitly by his brother. Schlesinger reports that after the president, Robert Kennedy, Rusk, and others had finished going over the draft of the initial speech on the crisis to be delivered by Ambassador Stevenson

before the United Nations, "The Attorney General drew me aside to say, 'we're counting on you to watch things in New York. . . . *We will have to make a deal at the end, but we must stand absolutely firm now. Concessions must come at the end of negotiations, not at the beginning.*'"³¹

The need to avoid being drawn into serious bargaining until he had impressed Khrushchev with his determination and developed important bargaining assets remained with the president as the crisis unfolded. We see this consideration at work when he and a few advisers were going over a draft of the important October 22 speech. Discussion turned to the question of what the president should say about negotiation in the speech. President Kennedy's answer, Sorensen reports, was in effect, "Nothing that would tie our hands, anything that would strengthen our stand." Furthermore, "*the President deleted from my [Sorensen's] original draft a call for a summit meeting,*" preferring to state simply, in the words of the speech as given, that "this nation is prepared to present its case against the Soviet threat to peace, and our own proposals for a peaceful world, at any time and in any forum . . . — *without limiting our freedom of action.*"³²

Later on, when he became depressed and worried by signs that the Russians were about to challenge the quarantine, the president controlled his impulse to rush into negotiations prematurely. On Tuesday evening, October 23, his brother relayed a private conversation with the Soviet ambassador in which Dobrynin said he knew of no change in instructions in Soviet vessels nearing the blockade line and expected that they would attempt to go through to Cuba. The president, evidently agitated at hearing this, spoke at once about the possibility of arranging an immediate summit with Khrushchev, "but finally dismissed the idea, concluding that *such a meeting would be useless until Khrushchev first accepted, as a result of our deeds as well as our statements, the U.S. determination in this matter.* Before a summit took place, and it should, the President wanted to have some cards in his own hands."³³

VI. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BLOCKADE

During the three and a half days following his address of Monday, October 22, the president's actions were dominated by the priority he gave to the requirements of careful crisis management.

He was embarked on an effort to secure his objective, the removal of the missiles, by means of coercive diplomacy. But the bite and impact of this coercive strategy were diluted by the priority Kennedy gave to managing the crisis to avoid dangerous incidents. Kennedy took one small step at a time; when he saw that would not suffice he reluctantly took another step. There was, indeed, a strong element of improvisation in Kennedy's effort to devise a coercive strategy.

Missing, or only present in weak form, were two of the three components of the stronger, "ultimatum" variant of the strategy. In seizing the initiative on October 22, Kennedy stated clearly his demand for removal of the missiles. He also announced his intention to impose a naval quarantine on vessels bringing offensive weapons and related components to Cuba. But his speech of October 22 was considerably vaguer with respect to laying down a time limit for compliance with his demand and threatening a credible and potent punishment for non-compliance. These two components of the classical ultimatum were hinted but not sharply conveyed in Kennedy's opening speech. True, the president did state that "these actions may only be the beginning," and he emphasized that the quarantine and other actions he was announcing were "initial steps." He added, "Should these offensive military preparations continue, thus increasing the threat to the hemisphere, further action will be justified. I have directed the Armed Forces to prepare for all eventualities; and I trust that, in the interest of both the Cuban people and the Soviet technicians at the sites, the hazards to all concerned of continuing this threat will be recognized."

Here we have a clear reference to the possibility of further escalation and a veiled threat of an air strike against the missile sites. But, at the same time, the notion of a time limit or sense of urgency for compliance with the demand for removal of the missiles is lacking. Moreover, Kennedy by no means threatened that air action against the missile sites would be the next or even an early step in his threatened escalation. Rather, a quite different impression was given by his statement that the quarantine would be extended, "if needed, to other types of cargo and carriers," thus clearly implying a gradual, piecemeal escalation rather than an abrupt jump to the air strike. This image of a prolonged, slowly developing crisis could only be reinforced by the statement, toward the end of the speech, intended particularly for American

listeners but, of course, heard also by Soviet leaders that "*many months* of sacrifice and self-discipline lie ahead — *months* in which both our patience and our will will be tested, *months* in which many threats and denunciations will keep us aware of our dangers."

Therefore, notwithstanding the clear hints and warnings of further actions, including a possible air strike, included in the speech, it fell far short of an ultimatum.* Moreover, there is nothing in the record to indicate that Kennedy strengthened the speech by coupling it with a private, informal ultimatum to Khrushchev, as he was to do later in the case of his October 27 letter.

That the speech of October 22 did not go further in specifying a time limit of some kind and a threat of punishment for non-compliance, we may assume, was deliberate on Kennedy's part. We have noted that there had been some discussion earlier in ExCom of the possibility of giving a private ultimatum to Khrushchev and that this idea was discarded on the grounds that it was impossible to implement properly as well as being risky. We also know that on October 22 the president vetoed a passage in a draft speech to be given by Stevenson at the United Nations that explicitly threatened an American strike if the Soviet build-up in Cuba continued.³⁴ † Kennedy's private letters to Khrushchev during the week, so far as we know, contained no wording suggestive of an ultimatum regarding the demand for removal of the missiles, though in these private communications as well as in most of his public statements on the issue Kennedy consistently portrayed this matter to be urgent or as having priority over other matters. Also, as the days passed, Kennedy and other administration spokesmen repeatedly pointed out that work on the missile sites was still proceeding.

Kennedy was undoubtedly right in believing that the tough, determined opponent he faced would not be particularly impressed by words alone but would be watching to see what Kennedy was

* We do not take up here other important aspects of the October 22 speech that do not bear on the points being made. Thus, for example, the speech included a threat of massive retaliation against the Soviet Union if any missiles were fired from Cuba against any country in the Western Hemisphere. This was a deterrent threat, not directly employed to coerce Khrushchev into removing the missiles. Kennedy did not repeat it during the crisis. Of course, Kennedy's statement was also a bid for hemispheric solidarity.

† Schlesinger, who was present, adds that Kennedy implied or stated that he preferred to leave the possibility of an American strike to Moscow's imagination.

doing. Indeed, the president did a great deal, both before and after his opening speech of October 22. He put into effect a full strategic alert and conducted an unprecedented mobilization of tactical forces poised for action in the Caribbean.

But much was at stake for the Soviet Union, too, and it quickly became evident that its leaders, though taken by surprise, were not going to conduct a hasty retreat. They might have to take out the missiles, but they would attempt to salvage as much as possible from their Cuban venture. The time afforded them by Kennedy's prudent approach to crisis management offered them useful opportunities to exert counter-pressure against his stance, to test the depth and scope of his determination, and to mobilize world opinion roused by the danger of war to undermine and soften, if possible, the American position. It became clear rather soon, therefore, that the mere announcement of a blockade would not suffice and that its implementation would have to play an important role in Kennedy's strategy. His opponent would not cave in merely because of the impressive build-up of United States strategic and tactical forces. We must examine more closely, therefore, the way in which Kennedy chose to implement the blockade and the effect this had on the Soviet government's behavior.

In the ExCom deliberations the blockade was favored as the initial step, to be followed by others as necessary. As it turned out, however, when Kennedy turned his attention to implementing the blockade option he began his actions many rungs of the ladder below the final act of blockade. Why he did so is important. The president foresaw that the critical and most dangerous point in the blockade scenario would be reached when American naval vessels would be called upon to stop and inspect a Soviet vessel. Unless one or the other side backed away from this confrontation, or unless Soviet vessels bound for Cuba submitted to the United States Navy's procedures for boarding and inspecting, the confrontation would result in a dangerous military clash.

While such a confrontation would indeed display United States determination, Kennedy was mindful of its risks and shied away from it. All accounts indicate that he thought it quite likely that Khrushchev would feel himself obliged to retaliate, most likely by some action against West Berlin. Accordingly, the president felt it necessary to give Khrushchev time to consider what he would do and time to issue new orders to the captains of the vessels bound

for Cuba. And he hoped desperately that something short of actually boarding and inspecting a Soviet vessel would suffice to signal his determination sufficiently to persuade Khrushchev not to attempt to force the blockade. What that lesser action might be, and even whether a lesser action would suffice, remained to be seen.

Kennedy inserted several discrete steps into his implementation of the blockade to put off a direct, possibly fateful confrontation on the high seas. As the Wohlstetters have observed, Kennedy's behavior in this respect shows that "where the alternative is to be ruled by events with such enormous consequences, the head of a great state is likely to examine his acts of choice in crisis and during it to subdivide these possible acts in ways that make it feasible to continue exercising choice."³⁵

The logic of Kennedy's tactic of subdividing the blockade option, we may add, grew out of his recognition that the possibility for careful presidential control of the conflict would decline rapidly once a military incident occurred. He was concerned throughout the crisis that it would reach the dangerous point of no return toward war; he spoke movingly of his fear that, as had happened at the outset of World War I, the momentum of events would at some point sweep aside efforts to maintain control of the conflict. Accordingly, the president jealously safeguarded his options and withheld use of them as long as possible to avoid reaching that dangerous threshold too soon and perhaps unnecessarily. At the same time he was imaginative in subdividing one option into several smaller ones so as to slow up the momentum of the unfolding crisis and retain personal control of it. Ironically, the desperate feeling that he was about to lose control over the momentum of events at the end of the week forced him to pass from the careful "try-and-see" approach to an ultimatum. Let us review quickly the way in which Kennedy introduced the blockade in a deliberately slow, piecemeal fashion.

In his speech of Monday, October 22, Kennedy announced his intention to impose a quarantine. He waited until after obtaining approval from the Organization of American States on Tuesday, to issue the official proclamation of the quarantine. In turn, the proclamation stated that the interdiction of vessels bound for Cuba would begin on the following day, at 2 P.M. Greenwich time, Wednesday, October 24.

Late Tuesday evening the president moved the original blockade line that stretched out 800 miles around Cuba back to 500 miles. The circumstances and motivation for this decision are a revealing example of the way in which political desiderata in crisis management can dominate military considerations. Earlier in the evening the president and his advisers had learned that an extraordinary number of coded messages had been sent to all the Russian ships on their way to Cuba. "What they said," Robert Kennedy reported, "we did not know then, nor do we know now." But it was clear that the Soviet vessels as of that moment were still on a straight course for Cuba. Information about the coded messages came to Kennedy's attention some hours after he had received a private letter from Khrushchev in which the Soviet leader asserted in unmistakable language that the Soviet Union would not observe the blockade. Khrushchev added that the Soviet Union would not give instructions to the captains of the vessels bound for Cuba to obey the orders of American naval forces. To this he added the threat that if any effort were made to interfere with Soviet ships, "we would then be forced for our part to take measures which we deem necessary and adequate in order to protect our rights. For this we have all that is necessary."³⁶ Khrushchev's threat was similar to other efforts being made at this time by Soviet diplomatic and military personnel to convey a hard, "burned bridges" Soviet posture vis-à-vis the blockade.³⁷

The president immediately composed a letter to Khrushchev asking him to observe the quarantine and making it clear that the United States did not wish to fire on Soviet vessels. Other decisions then taken in the Tuesday evening meeting reveal the president's heightening concern to find ways of reducing and controlling the risks of an untoward incident. If a confrontation took place with a vessel refusing to cooperate with the interdiction procedures, the navy was to shoot at the rudders and propellers of the vessel in order to avoid loss of life or the sinking of the ship. The ExCom also considered ways and means whereby vessels clearly not carrying military equipment might be let through without being boarded and searched.

At the close of this ExCom meeting, the president sent his brother to see Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin, among other reasons to find out the import of the coded messages of a few hours ago from Moscow to the Russian vessels en route to Cuba. At the end

of their conversation Robert Kennedy asked Dobrynin if the Soviet vessels were going to go through to Cuba. Dobrynin replied that that had been their instructions and he knew of no changes.³⁸ According to another account, Robert Kennedy reported back to the president late that evening that Dobrynin had "seemed very shaken, out of the picture and unaware of any instructions," and that "this meant the imposition of the quarantine the next day might well bring a clash."³⁹

Then British Ambassador Ormsby-Gore, a close friend of the president who was present when Robert Kennedy relayed his account of the conversation with Dobrynin, suggested that the line of interception for the blockade might be shortened. Otherwise an interception might take place within a few hours. "Why not give them more time," he asked, "to analyze their position?" Thereupon the president, fearful that the Soviets were still moving to confront the quarantine, called McNamara and shortened the interdiction line to 500 miles.⁴⁰ This action was taken before the quarantine was scheduled to go into effect the following day, illustrating the recurring tension in crisis management between political and military requirements for use and control of forces, to which we called attention in Chapter One. The navy had wanted the interdiction line 800 miles out from Cuba in order to reduce the vulnerability of its warships to MIG's stationed on Cuba. This military consideration gave way to the over-riding political consideration though not, it is reported, without adding to the tension between military and civilian chiefs in the Department of Defense.⁴¹

The next morning, Wednesday, the quarantine went into effect. Tension immediately mounted in the ExCom as reports came in that Russian vessels were approaching the blockade barrier. The moment had arrived when the president could no longer find a way of postponing further confrontation and the necessity of impressing Khrushchev with his determination. "We either had to intercept them or announce we were withdrawing," the president's brother reported later.⁴²

As is well known, Khrushchev pulled back at the last moment. At 10:25 A.M. a preliminary report indicated that some of the Russian ships had stopped dead in the water. Shortly thereafter, this report was confirmed and amplified. The twenty Russian vessels closest to the interdiction barrier had stopped dead in the

water or turned around.* Later that day it emerged that fourteen of the Soviet ships had stopped or turned back. Most of those continuing were tankers. One of them, the *Bucharest*, reached the barrier during the day. After identifying itself it was allowed, because it was a tanker, to pass without being boarded and inspected. This evidently followed from an instruction issued hurriedly by the president when he learned that some Soviet vessels were turning back; he directed that no ships should be stopped or intercepted for the time being in order to give them a further opportunity to turn back. The president's decision was sharply challenged by other ExCom members who felt that the *Bucharest* should be stopped and boarded, so that Khrushchev would not be misled as to the administration's intent and will. The president postponed a final decision and ordered the *Bucharest* shadowed by American warships after it had passed the quarantine line.⁴³

In the following days an East German passenger ship was allowed to go through, again after strong arguments against doing so within the administration; and finally on Friday morning, October 26, the first vessel was stopped and boarded. This vessel, the *Marucla*, was carefully selected by the president for this purpose. Since it was not a Soviet vessel but a Panamanian-owned, Lebanese-registered vessel under Soviet charter, it could be stopped without offering a direct affront to the Soviets. At the same time, by stopping and searching a vessel carrying Soviet cargo the president would demonstrate to Khrushchev that he was going to enforce the quarantine fully.

But by Friday, when the *Marucla* was boarded, it had become somewhat less urgent and certainly far less risky to stage this confrontation. For Khrushchev had already been impressed with Kennedy's determination. The Soviet leader had stopped many of his vessels that were bound for Cuba — presumably those carrying weapons. He had already accepted conditionally U Thant's first proposal of Wednesday, October 24, coupling a "voluntary suspension of all arms shipments to Cuba" with "the voluntary suspension of the quarantine measures involving the searching of ships bound for Cuba."

U Thant's first proposal in effect clearly favored Khrushchev

* The significance of this Soviet action was not immediately evident. Some of Kennedy's advisers thought that the Soviet ships were changing course or waiting in order to join up with Soviet submarines before challenging the blockade.

since it would relax the blockade in return for suspension of further arms shipments without any reference to those already in Cuba. Thus, it would have hampered Kennedy in his effort to use the blockade to increase pressure and a sense of urgency with respect to his demand for removal of missiles already in Cuba. For this reason it was quickly turned down by the president.

U Thant's first appeal of October 24 to Khrushchev contained no reference at all to the importance of stopping work on the missile sites. Instead, U Thant directed such an appeal to Castro simultaneously with his joint proposal to the United States and Soviet leaders. Khrushchev's reply accepting U Thant's proposal made no reference to the appeal to Castro or, indeed, to the continuation of work on the missile sites in Cuba.*

When the *Marucla* was boarded on Friday morning Khrushchev had before him a new proposal from U Thant, received on the preceding day. In it the United Nations secretary general diluted his first proposal in order to make it more acceptable to Kennedy. U Thant now called upon Khrushchev "to instruct the Soviet ships already on their way to Cuba to stay away from the interception area for a limited time only." In return, Kennedy was "to do everything possible to avoid direct confrontation with Soviet ships in the next few days in order to minimize the risk of any untoward incident." In effect, U Thant's new proposal asked Khrushchev to formalize and accept openly what he had already accepted in fact on Wednesday in the first dramatic turning point of the crisis when he ordered Soviet vessels to turn back. Still, Khrushchev's acceptance of the proposal would be of considerable value for it would constitute Moscow's first formal acceptance of the quarantine and offer some assurance against a resumption of a direct Soviet challenge of the blockade.

U Thant's second proposal was valuable also because it offered Khrushchev a quick face-saving formula for reducing embarrass-

* In the absence of a reply from Castro, U Thant renewed his appeal to him on Friday, October 26, and requested an affirmative reply "very urgently." Castro replied on the following day indicating he "would be prepared to accept the compromises you request as efforts in favor of peace, provided that at the same time, while negotiations are in progress, the United States Government desists from threats and aggressive actions against Cuba, including the naval blockade of our country." (The relevant documents are reproduced in Pachter, *Collision Course*, and also in David L. Larson, ed., *The "Cuban Crisis" of 1962: Selected Documents and Chronology* [Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1963].) But by then, Khrushchev had already set into motion his feelings regarding a quid pro quo for removal of the missiles.

ment caused by the retreat forced upon him on the high seas by Kennedy's determined application of the blockade the preceding day. U Thant's constructive, well-timed second proposal may have been influenced by United States diplomacy.* Certainly U Thant's second proposal received prompt attention and immediate acceptance by the president on the very same day it was made. And Khrushchev accepted it the following day, Friday, October 26.†

We have suggested that the boarding and inspection of the *Marucla* on Friday was not the decisive point of the confrontation. Let us consider in more detail now earlier actions that may have impressed Khrushchev with the strength of Kennedy's determination and caused him to pull back vessels carrying weapons to Cuba. We can only speculate on the basis of available facts. Despite disclosures regarding the events of Wednesday made by United States sources on various occasions and, in particular by Robert Kennedy in *Thirteen Days*, important details are still lacking. It appears likely that the decisive action that convinced Khrushchev to pull back was the American navy's actions against Soviet submarines that were leading and attempting to shield the merchant vessels approaching the interdiction line.⁴⁴

On Tuesday Kennedy learned that Russian submarines were beginning to operate in the Caribbean. "The President ordered the Navy to give the highest priority to tracking the submarines and to put into effect the greatest possible safety measures to protect our own aircraft carriers and other vessels."⁴⁵ On Wednesday morning when two Soviet ships, the *Gagarin* and the *Komilies*, were within a few miles of the quarantine barrier, it was reported that a Soviet submarine had moved into position between them. Robert Kennedy's account of the response to this new threat is revealing:

It had originally been planned to have a cruiser make the first interception, but, because of the increased danger, it was decided in the past few hours to send in an aircraft carrier, supported by helicopters, carrying antisubmarine equipment,

* This hypothesis is supported by Elie Abel's report that on Wednesday night Undersecretary of State Ball asked Stevenson to suggest to U Thant that he issue an appeal to the Russians to stop their ships for a while. Stevenson finally agreed, after a second call from Ball, to wake U Thant and to put the time-buying proposition before him. Abel, *The Missile Crisis*, p. 138.

† Knowledge of Khrushchev's acceptance of the second U Thant proposal probably arrived in Washington after the decision made very early Friday morning to board the *Marucla*.

hovering overhead. The carrier *Essex* was to signal the submarine by sonar to surface and identify itself. If it refused, said Secretary McNamara, depth charges with a small explosive would be used until the submarine surfaced.⁴⁶

Robert Kennedy does not report explicitly what then happened. He implies that the submarine was forced to surface, but whether depth charges were dropped is not clear. He further implies that action against the submarine or submarines preceded the turning point already referred to, namely the turning back of the Soviet vessels. The United States Navy continued its harassment of the Soviet submarines: "All six Russian submarines then in the area or moving toward Cuba from the Atlantic were followed and harassed, and at one time or another, forced to surface in the presence of U.S. military ships."⁴⁷ * Details are lacking as to the nature of the harassment and the precise time at which these events, particularly the important initial encounter, took place.⁴⁸

Robert Kennedy does not explicitly say so, but it would appear from his account that the president's quest for a means of impressing Khrushchev with his determination was provided — rather unexpectedly, it would seem — by United States naval harassment of the Soviet submarines. This may well have impressed Khrushchev and his military chieftains with Kennedy's willingness to use his superiority in conventional forces to enforce the blockade. Of course the navy's action against the Soviet submarines took place in the context of a highly menacing build-up of United States strategic and tactical forces.

If this interpretation regarding the significance of the navy's action against the submarines is correct, it is ironic that the presi-

* Similarly in an early account of the Cuban missile crisis two journalists, James Daniel and John G. Hubbell, reported that "the Russian subs were 'found' immediately. Wherever they moved, they were followed. Aware, through their own sonar devices, that they were being tracked on the surface, cat-and-mouse fashion, the Russians could only go on as long as possible while submerged, then prepare to come face to face with American warships as they surfaced to charge their batteries." *Strike in the West* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), p. 1965. An article by Commander Andrew J. Valentine (U.S.N.), "Rx:Quarantine," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* (May 1963), was accompanied by a photograph of a United States Navy CH 19-E helicopter hovering over a Large Attack Type Russian F-Class submarine during the Cuban quarantine operations. This information accompanied the photograph; there was no discussion of the subject in the article itself. The *New York Times*, November 10, 1962, also published a photograph of a United States helicopter observing a Soviet submarine, which was cruising on the surface in Caribbean waters during the quarantine operations.

dent wavered at the last minute and was inclined to avoid the confrontation with the Soviet submarine on Wednesday morning. "Isn't there some way we can avoid having our first exchange with a Russian submarine — almost anything but that?" McNamara held the President firm. "No, there's too much danger to our ships. There is no alternative," said McNamara. "Our commanders have been instructed to avoid hostilities if at all possible, but this is what we must be prepared for, and this is what we must expect."⁴⁹ Some minutes later the preliminary report arrived stating that some Russian ships had apparently stopped dead in the water.

In reflecting on this phase of the crisis it is worth observing that the blockade, while initiated and implemented on a "try-and-see" basis, always contained the latent threat of a *de facto* ultimatum.⁵⁰ Thus, Kennedy demanded that Khrushchev stop doing something he was already doing, namely sending vessels with "offensive weapons" to Cuba. In case of non-compliance with this demand, Kennedy threatened to stop Soviet vessels and prevent those carrying such cargo from proceeding. The other component of an ultimatum — a time limit for compliance — was less obvious, but also present in the situation since the United States Navy interposed itself between the Soviet vessels and Cuba. There need be no explicit time limit for compliance since the blockade was self-enforcing in this respect. Not only was Khrushchev forced to judge whether Kennedy was bluffing but, because of the structure of the situation, he was forced to initiate risky actions — i.e. allowing Soviet vessels to reach and attempt to pass the interception line — in order to find out. As we have seen, Khrushchev made some efforts to test and weaken Kennedy's resolution and to find out whether Kennedy's threat was credible; but the Soviet leader did not call Kennedy's bluff in the most direct and also the most risky manner by attempting to send the vessels carrying "offensive weapons" through the interception barrier. Perhaps, as we suggested earlier, Kennedy's threat of preventing such vessels from proceeding had gained the final necessary credibility in Khrushchev's eyes as a result of the harassment of Soviet submarines. On the other hand, given the fragmentary information available, we cannot exclude the possibility that the Soviet leaders would have turned back these vessels even in the absence of the harassment of their submarines.

Clearly, Khrushchev accepted the blockade and was presumably impressed with Kennedy's determination. But most of the missiles

were already in Cuba and the effort to bring them to operational readiness was proceeding at a rapid pace. Would a continuation of the blockade help coerce Khrushchev into removing them? Or would Kennedy have to step up pressure in a more substantial manner?

VII. FROM "TRY-AND-SEE" TO ULTIMATUM

The successful boarding of the *Marucla* notwithstanding, a feeling of gloom began to settle over the ExCom on Friday morning, and for good reason. Soviet acquiescence to the blockade did indeed cut off the flow of missiles and related weapons to Cuba, but United States intelligence reported that at least thirty MRBM's were already in Cuba. (In fact, as was learned later, forty-two had already arrived.) True, the blockade had enabled Kennedy to really impress Khrushchev with his determination. This was an important achievement that would contribute eventually to the termination of the crisis, perhaps even more than Kennedy could perceive on Friday morning. But the determination which Kennedy had conveyed and the successful imposition of the blockade still did not add up to the leverage needed to secure the president's irreducible objective: the removal of the missiles. And every successive intelligence report had indicated that work on the missile sites was continuing at a rapid pace and that they would soon be operational.

As seen by the president and his advisers, therefore, the situation on Friday morning was a most difficult one and would rapidly get worse. Khrushchev was still in a position to gain the upper hand without having to directly challenge the blockade. For three and a half days, Kennedy had adhered faithfully to his conviction that he must slow up events leading to a confrontation in order to give Khrushchev time to reflect, time to reconsider and alter his policy, time to issue new directives to his vessels approaching the blockade line. Thereby, a possibly dangerous confrontation on the high seas had been avoided. But the same time given Khrushchev for this purpose had also enabled the Russians to rush the missiles already in Cuba toward completion and to devise and put into effect a counter-strategy for salvaging as many gains as possible.

Thus the president had paid a price — how large and serious it would turn out to be no one yet knew — for his faithful adherence thus far to prudent crisis management principles. He had know-

ingly decided to do so a week earlier when in the ExCom planning sessions he had listened carefully to the arguments against the blockade option, accepted their validity, and decided nonetheless that the blockade was preferable to the air strike. And since then he and other members of the ExCom had seen the predicted disadvantages of the blockade option begin to materialize one by one. Indeed, sober forecasts by ExCom of the blockade's chief limitations and risks had been remarkably prescient. "At first there had been very little support of a blockade," Sorensen recalls, for "it appeared almost irrelevant to the problem of missiles. . . . The greatest single drawback to the blockade was time. Instead of presenting Khrushchev and the world with a *fait accompli*, it offered a prolonged and agonizing approach, uncertain in its effect, indefinite in its duration, enabling the missiles to become operational, subjecting us to counter-threats from Khrushchev . . . and in all these ways making more difficult a subsequent air strike if the missiles remained."⁵¹ Nonetheless, the president had finally chosen the blockade option because the disadvantages and risks of the alternatives to it seemed even worse.

When he announced his choice of the blockade to the ExCom, the president, striving to pull together the badly divided group, had said half jokingly that those whose advice on what to do had been rejected were the truly fortunate ones since they would be able later to say they had been right!⁵² That time was at hand on Friday, October 26, and even more so the following day. Now the fact that even a successful blockade would not remove the missiles from Cuba, and the additional fact that the Russians were rapidly bringing the missiles to a state of readiness reactivated the powerful voices of the air strike advocates. Their arguments took on new force and relevance that could not be turned aside so easily as before. Their pressure on Kennedy mounted with every passing hour, with every new disturbing development that Friday and especially Saturday brought.

During these two days, as a matter of fact, two distinct phases can be detected in Kennedy's response to the situation. On Friday morning, when he began to tighten the screws, he distinctly confined his actions to a "gradual increase in pressure."⁵³ There is no indication at this stage that the president was thinking of moving beyond gradual increase in pressure to an ultimatum. He ordered more low-level flights and, significantly, as evidence of the gradual escalation he had in mind at this stage he asked the State and

Defense departments to prepare to add petroleum and lubricants to the embargo list.

"But privately," his brother reports, "the President was not sanguine about the results of even these efforts. Each hour the situation grew steadily more serious."⁵⁴ Recognizing this and looking ahead to actions he might be forced to take, the president also ordered the State Department to proceed with preparations for a "crash program" on civil government in Cuba after a United States invasion.

On Friday, even while stepping up the pressure, the president was still trying to retain some of his earlier allegiance to ultra-prudent crisis management principles. Lincoln White, the State Department press officer, went somewhat beyond his instructions in threatening additional action by calling attention to that sentence in the president's speech of October 22 which stated that "further action will be justified" if work on the missile sites did not stop. This triggered headlines that an invasion was imminent. Kennedy immediately rebuked White and made his displeasure known also to Rusk and others.* His major interest at this time was to communicate, which he did in various ways, the American sense of urgency that work on the missile sites must stop very soon. But added to the signal that emerged, whether or not the president fully intended it, was the widespread interpretation that the United States could hold off its next step for no more than a few days. While members of the administration may have fostered rumors and leaks to this effect, the president was not officially committed thereby even though he may have instigated some of these reports himself. Kennedy was moving toward a full-fledged ultimatum, but he had still to formulate it explicitly and give it to the Soviet government directly.

A step in this direction occurred when Rusk took advantage of an unexpected opportunity on Friday afternoon. John Scali, a State Department correspondent, received a telephone call from

* An interesting indication that even at this stage in the crisis the president envisaged the possibility that it might drag on for a considerable period is contained in his rebuke to the State Department for White's press conference. According to Sorensen, *Kennedy*, p. 712, the president argued that "this was going to be a prolonged struggle . . . requiring caution, patience and as little public pressure on him as possible." But in the next twenty-four hours the president joked about White's unauthorized statement saying that it may have helped the Soviets realize how urgent the situation really was. Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 214.

Aleksander Fomin, a counselor at the Soviet Embassy, requesting an immediate meeting. When they met shortly thereafter Fomin urged Scali to find out whether the administration would be interested in a solution to the crisis whereby the Soviet government would remove the missiles, with United Nations inspection, in return for a public pledge by the United States not to invade Cuba. Rusk, after discussion with other members of the ExCom including the president, authorized Scali to reply that the United States was interested, but that it was his [Scali's] "impression" that "time is very urgent."⁵⁵

Khrushchev now resolved an important question the president had not yet faced. Kennedy had refused, as we observed earlier, to begin serious bargaining with Khrushchev over the terms of a quid pro quo for ending the crisis until he had succeeded in impressing the Soviet leader with his determination and accumulated some bargaining assets. So far as can be established from available materials, Kennedy had not developed a formula of his own for a quid pro quo which he was holding back to introduce at the right moment. The subject had not been discussed much in the ExCom — indeed the president had actively discouraged discussion of whether the United States should pay a price to secure voluntary removal of the missiles. Lack of preparation on the subject is evidenced in accounts of ExCom's somewhat desperate last-minute efforts on Saturday to consider how the Turkish bases might be offered up as part of the quid pro quo.⁵⁶ Very conveniently for Kennedy, Khrushchev took the initiative in signaling on Friday, October 26, that the time for serious bargaining was at hand.* Some time before Fomin's call to Scali at 1:30 P.M. — how much before is critical for reconstructing and explaining more fully the factors and events that influenced the Soviet decision, but this is not known — Khrushchev evidently decided that it was time to begin a serious exploration of how to bring the crisis to an end and to find out how much he could hope to salvage out of it.

The interpretation advanced here is that Khrushchev opened the bargaining without having made a firm decision to end the

* Khrushchev employed multiple channels for this purpose. At about the same time that Fomin was talking to Scali, Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 827, reports, "in New York . . . we heard that Zorin had advanced the same proposal to U Thant, and that the Cubans at the UN were beginning to hint to unaligned delegates that the bases might be dismantled and removed if the United States would guarantee the territorial integrity of Cuba."

crisis immediately and without a fixed view as to the terms of an acceptable settlement. It is possible, as some commentators have suggested, that Khrushchev's decision early on October 26, or even on October 25, went beyond this, that he and his associates "decided that the game was up: the U.S.S.R. would yield."⁵⁷ Such an interpretation, however, is too simple a post hoc explanation; it reads back from Khrushchev's later actions that a clear-cut decision to yield must have been made earlier and it leaves out intervening events. It also overlooks the possible impact on Soviet policy of the increase in Kennedy's pressure on Friday and Saturday, and it ignores the fact that work on the missile sites continued while Khrushchev opened the bargaining. This latter point — that Khrushchev continued work on the missile sites — is critical. Evidently, for the time being, Moscow preferred the bargaining advantages expected from bringing the missiles to a state of readiness to the calming effect a cessation of work on the missile sites would have imposed on Kennedy and the more hawkish of his advisers.

Had Khrushchev's top priority been to de-fuse the danger that the crisis might suddenly and uncontrollably erupt into war, *he had only to stop work on the missile sites*. For it was this, obviously, that was driving the president, otherwise reluctant to escalate, to increase pressure. Here was an option of considerable potential utility to Khrushchev. At some point he could have stopped further work on the missile sites *without beginning to dismantle them*; and then, after waiting for the steam behind Kennedy's momentum to dissipate, as it surely would have if work on the missile sites stopped, he could have renewed the bargaining in a more leisurely fashion in order to extract as high a price as possible for an agreement to dismantle and remove the missiles. Such a bargaining strategy would have capitalized more effectively on the widespread support at the United Nations and throughout the world for the proposal the Soviets finally unveiled on Saturday, October 27, for a swap of Turkish and Cuban bases. Instead, the Soviet leaders, perhaps divided on this issue, chose to couple this bid for a bigger pay-off with a decision to continue work on the missile sites, gambling that this would pressure Kennedy to cave in and agree to remove his Jupiters from Turkey as well as pledge himself not to invade Cuba.

Some indirect evidence indicates that the Soviet government finally decided to call off work on the missile sites, just when they

were becoming operational,⁵⁸ but without agreeing as yet to dismantle and remove them. Khrushchev's letter of Sunday morning, October 28, which accepted Kennedy's formula for removing the missiles, contained a cryptic reference to "earlier instructions on the discontinuation of further work on weapons constructions sites" in addition to which, Khrushchev added, he had now "given a new order to dismantle the arms which you described as offensive, and to crate and return them to the Soviet Union." It is possible, of course, that Khrushchev's reference to an earlier order was contrived so as to present as a matter of his own decision what was in fact forced upon him by Kennedy.

Available materials do not indicate that Khrushchev attempted to bring such an earlier order to Kennedy's attention. Indeed, none of the commentaries and analyses of the crisis that I am familiar with have taken note of this passage in Khrushchev's letter. If the Soviet government finally resorted to this option because it was suddenly impressed with the danger of an American attack — before or after receiving Dobrynin's account of Kennedy's ultimatum — then it had waited too long to put into effect the attractive bargaining strategy described in the preceding paragraphs. At this late stage Khrushchev could no longer be sure that an offer to stop work on the missile sites would defuse the momentum of Kennedy's ultimatum.* We note, finally, without being able to clarify it, the possible link between Castro's belated reply to U Thant earlier on Saturday in which he conditionally agreed to a cessation of work on the missiles, and Khrushchev's reference to such an order as having been given in his letter to Kennedy. Castro's acquiescence may have been considered as desirable, if not necessary, before ordering work to stop on the missile sites; but this in itself does not clarify the other components of the Soviet decision.

Whatever Khrushchev's reasons for opening the bargaining on Friday, it is likely that his initial calculations shifted in response to new developments. It is also possible that disagreements divided Soviet leaders so badly as the crisis intensified that they no longer followed a consistent, well-integrated policy. Whatever the calculations of Soviet policy-makers, however, events themselves make clear that two coercive processes were going on simultaneously on Friday and Saturday, one in each direction. The president was

* The details of Kennedy's ultimatum are presented below.

stepping up pressure for getting the missiles out and was still trying, as he had all week, to keep down the price he knew he would probably have to pay as his contribution to an eventual quid pro quo. At the same time, however, Soviet leaders were engaged in a crash effort to blackmail Kennedy into paying as much as possible, even while cooperating in the essential aspects of crisis management in order to avoid war.

Before we turn to the often confused bargaining that occurred, particularly on Saturday, we should make several additional observations. Earlier in the week, as various commentators have noted, tacit cooperation in careful crisis management had developed between Kennedy and Khrushchev. Even while the Soviet leader blustered and exerted pressure of his own in order to undermine Kennedy's resolve and his ability to implement a coercive strategy, Khrushchev nonetheless also "went to great lengths to guarantee the avoidance of a clash at sea. Submarines were not used to interfere with the blockade and no attempt was made to break it with surface vessels." Instead, he "abided by the American rules for the blockade and submitted to all the demands of the American Navy."⁵⁹

Once the confrontation on the high seas was safely accomplished, however, United States and Soviet cooperation in managing the crisis began to break down on Friday as Kennedy deliberately stepped up pressure and the Soviet government insisted nonetheless on rushing the missile sites to completion. As a result, the tempo of events speeded up and a startling lack of synchronization began to characterize the interaction between the two sides. The context and meaning of certain possibly critical moves and communications that one side was making became confusing to the other. Deciphering the intentions and calculations behind the specific moves of the opponent became difficult. We know that Kennedy experienced this problem acutely and we have to assume that his adversary felt the same unsettling phenomenon in Moscow. There was real danger in this, but the disturbing sensation that things were getting out of control and the mounting fear that one side or the other might miscalculate was probably not without value in helping to bring the crisis to a sudden halt on early Sunday morning.

United States policy-makers and those writing about the crisis since then have found it difficult to explain the discrepancy between Khrushchev's more personal and more emotional private

letter of Friday evening, in which he suggested removal of the missiles in return for a pledge of non-invasion of Cuba, and the more formal and composed letter which he issued publicly on Saturday morning demanding that the United States remove its missiles from Turkey as well. Various interpretations were entertained at the time and have been offered since. One interpretation that attracted considerable support initially is Henry Pachter's ingenious and plausibly argued thesis that Khrushchev's second letter was written first but was delayed because of Soviet clearance procedures or because it was timed for release on Saturday morning in order to secure maximum impact at the United Nations.⁶⁰ Pachter interprets Khrushchev's Friday night letter as being a hurried improvisation by a man who was responding desperately to growing signs earlier in the day that Kennedy was getting ready for a major escalation of the crisis. Consistent with Pachter's interpretation is that the Friday night letter asked less of Kennedy by way of a quid pro quo than did the Saturday morning letter. Presumably Khrushchev made a quick decision to lower the price because he feared that the situation was about to get out of hand. That the Saturday letter was then issued, even though it was out of date, can be explained variously: either Khrushchev and his aides neglected to cancel the delayed release of the first letter or perhaps the "hawks" in the Kremlin insisted it, too, should go out.

Pachter's interpretation is weakened, however, when we consider additional facts, not available to him when he wrote in 1963. Not knowing of Fomin's approach to Scali early Friday afternoon and similar Soviet initiatives in the United Nations corridors, Pachter did not know that Khrushchev's Friday evening letter contained essentially the same feelers that Fomin and Soviet diplomats had unveiled earlier in the day before the burden of Kennedy's new pressure was felt. Thus the decision to probe Kennedy's bargaining position had been made much earlier, no later than Friday morning. The Friday night letter, then, was not as hurried and belated an improvisation as Pachter believes and this, in turn, weakens the thesis that Khrushchev suddenly wrote it on Friday night because he was responding to signs during the day that Kennedy was getting ready to escalate.

A slightly different interpretation holds, more simply, that the hawks in the Kremlin, learning of and disapproving Khrushchev's personal initiative of Friday night, overruled him and wrote a new letter that demanded more. This thought occurred to members of

the ExCom at the time and was an additional source of confusion and anxiety.⁶¹

Still another interpretation, somewhat different from each of the preceding, seems worth considering. Having learned from their probe on Friday via the Fomin-Scali exchange that the president was immediately willing to pledge the United States not to invade Cuba in order to get the missiles out, Soviet leaders may have decided to bargain harder in order to find out whether Kennedy would be willing to contribute more than that to a quid pro quo. The tactic of raising the price after an opponent has agreed to your first proposition, in effect trying to get him to pay twice for the concession made to him, is a familiar aspect of Soviet and other negotiating styles. In any case, we can assume that upon learning of Kennedy's immediately favorable response to their first overture, Khrushchev and his colleagues wondered whether the president was prepared to pay an even bigger price for removal of the missiles. The more modest quid pro quo offered the president on Friday could be expected — and perhaps was intended — to calm down the pressure building up in the administration for further escalation. Perhaps it was safe now to try to raise the price. Was it so unlikely that the president would agree to throw in removal of the obsolescent Jupiter bases in Turkey? There was, after all, Walter Lippmann's article of Thursday, October 25, suggesting that the president do so. Soviet leaders might well have thought this was a trial balloon inspired by the more dovish members of the administration and, additionally, they might have noticed that the administration did not disassociate itself from Lippmann's position.

Even before Lippmann's article appeared, the Soviet government had been preparing the ground for a demand for a "symmetrical" trade of United States and Soviet overseas bases. Thus, although the Soviet government had carefully refrained from threatening action in Berlin in response to the blockade, it had been exerting counter-pressure with regard to United States bases in Turkey.* Removal of the Jupiter missiles from Turkey would

* As early as Tuesday, October 23, Soviet Defense Minister Malinovsky, in a conversation with a Western diplomat, had compared Cuba and Turkey. In the middle of the week, according to unconfirmed sources, the Soviet ambassador in Ankara had threatened annihilation of Turkish cities in case the American bases there were not soon dismantled. On Friday the Red Army paper, *Red Star*, referred to the idea of a trade of the Cuban and Turkish bases. (Pachter, *Collision Course*, pp. 49-52.) The idea of such a base swap

not constitute the large gains Khrushchev had expected when he deployed missiles secretly into Cuba, but his problem now was to salvage as much as he could. Besides, to force Kennedy into agreeing to remove the bases in Turkey would by no means constitute an insignificant prize — not because of the military significance of the Jupiters to either the United States or the Soviet Union but because such a concession under duress would have damaging political-diplomatic consequences for the American position in NATO.

According to this interpretation, some of the disturbing Soviet actions of Saturday constituted a deliberate increase of pressure designed to motivate Kennedy to accept the latest base swap proposal. A U-2 was shot down over Cuba; two other reconnaissance planes were shot at as they swooped low over the missile sites Saturday morning; outside the quarantine line a single Soviet ship detached itself from the others and headed for the blockade line.

In Washington these actions were interpreted, not surprisingly, as grim indications that the Soviets had decided to test United States determination. Some ExCom members reasoned that since the Soviets must have realized shooting down U-2s would force the United States to take direct action against the SAMs, "their action seemed to mean that they had decided on a showdown."⁶² There was speculation as to whether Khrushchev was still in charge in the Kremlin, and contradictory speculation that Khrushchev was trying to extract a higher price. The president would have to decide what to do next under the burden of considerable uncertainty and confusion as to what was going on in the Kremlin.

Whether or not the shooting down of the U-2 was a calculated part of Soviet bargaining strategy,* it served as the critical trigger that pushed the president before the day was over into giving Khrushchev a tacit ultimatum.⁶³ Kennedy withstood pressure from

had received sympathetic mention in the British press early in the week and attracted widespread support in the United Nations where to many representatives it appeared to be a natural and reasonable way to end the dreadful danger of war.

* Other possibilities are that the U-2 was shot down by the Soviet SAM crew on the initiative of local Soviet commanders in Cuba without authorization from higher authorities, or that the timing of the incident was fortuitous, with Soviet forces having orders to use the SAMs as soon as they became operational. Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 183, states that the SAMs and their associated radar nets did not become operational as a system until about October 27, when the U-2 was shot down, or at most a day or two earlier.

his advisers to put into effect contingency plans calling for a retaliatory air strike against one SAM site in Cuba, but it was clear that the reconnaissance flights would have to continue and that if another one were shot down he could not hold off a reprisal attack against SAM sites. What would happen, thereafter, he feared could lead to uncontrollable escalation.⁶⁴ An immediate effort to end the crisis before it went out of control was necessary. Motivated as never before — not merely by a desire to get the missiles removed but by a desperate need to try to end the crisis before it resulted in war — Kennedy was finally ready to give Khrushchev an ultimatum.*

He accepted his brother's suggestion to reply to Khrushchev's contradictory two letters by ignoring the Saturday morning demand for an exchange of bases and "accepting" Khrushchev's earlier suggestion of a quid pro quo linking removal of the missiles with a United States pledge not to invade Cuba. Kennedy's formal letter to Khrushchev did not hint at an ultimatum, though it conveyed a sense of urgency. The ultimatum was transmitted orally by his brother when he gave the letter to Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin in the early evening of Saturday, October 27. Robert Kennedy summarized what he told Dobrynin: "We had to have a commitment by tomorrow that those bases [missiles in Cuba] would be removed. I was not giving them an ultimatum but a statement of fact. He should understand that if they did not remove those bases, we would remove them. . . . Time was running out. We had only a few more hours — we needed an answer immediately from the Soviet Union. I said we must have it the next day."⁶⁵

Thus, to his long-standing demand for removal of the missiles the president had finally added the two missing elements of a classical ultimatum — a time limit for compliance and a credible threat of punishment for non-compliance. On the next day, Sunday, October 28, Khrushchev accepted Kennedy's formula — taken from Khrushchev's feelers of the preceding Friday — for settling the crisis. A few months later, on December 12, 1962, Khrushchev

* As Richard Smoke has noted (in a personal communication), Kennedy was evidently led to escalate from try-and-see to ultimatum at this point quite paradoxically by both coercive-diplomatic and crisis-managerial considerations. This state of affairs is rather odd and unexpected since one expects that crisis-management considerations normally encourage the more cautious try-and-see strategy.

defended his conduct of the Cuban venture in a major speech to the Supreme Soviet. He did not mention or allude to an ultimatum per se. However, he did go very far toward indicating the urgent pressure under which he had been placed:

In the morning of October 27 we received information from our Cuban comrades *and from other sources* which directly stated that this attack would be carried out within the next two or three days. We regarded the telegrams received as a *signal of utmost alarm*, and this alarm was justified. Immediate actions were *required* in order to prevent an attack against Cuba and preserve the peace.⁶⁶

VIII. WHAT IF?

What would Kennedy have done if Khrushchev had not accepted the ultimatum of Saturday, October 27? Would he have then ordered the air strike or would he have tried to find still other ways of persuading Khrushchev to remove the missiles? While an answer to this question is necessarily speculative, the available evidence strongly suggests that the president would not have resorted immediately to the air strike option.

Before we review the material bearing on this question, let us recall that during the planning period an important split had emerged among members of the ExCom regarding the way in which graduated escalation should be applied. Some felt that there should be relatively few, if any, intermediate steps between the blockade and an air strike. Others thought in terms of a series of intervening steps or options which would permit the president to increase pressure more gradually in the hope that at some point short of an air strike Khrushchev would agree to remove the missiles. A more finely graduated escalation appealed to them also because it would enable the president to retain control over the momentum of events for as long as possible.

Disagreement on this critical issue among Kennedy's advisers during the ExCom planning sessions had not been resolved; rather, it was set aside when Kennedy chose to start with the blockade option. The issue was coming to the fore again at the end of the week, however, for it was now clear that the partial success of the blockade notwithstanding, more pressure would have to be applied to get Khrushchev to remove his missiles. The issue was further

sharpened by the possibility that continued SAM attacks against United States reconnaissance planes flying over Cuba might force the president to put into effect the contingency plan for retaliatory attacks against the SAM sites which, in turn, could have set off an escalatory spiral.

On Saturday afternoon and evening, even while the tacit ultimatum to Khrushchev was being planned and delivered, Sorensen reports, "the Executive Committee was somewhat heatedly discussing plans for the next step. . . . The POL [petroleum products] blockade, air-strike and invasion advocates differed over what to do when."⁶⁷ Consistent with his earlier advocacy of the gradual, slow approach to escalation, McNamara was now in favor of tightening the blockade rather than going immediately to the air strike. The secretary of defense later recalled that while the air strike would have been ready to go in thirty hours, it "would not have been my next recommendation. I had told Ros Gilpatric [Deputy Secretary of Defense] that I would recommend deferring the air-strike option. I would have added POL to the contraband list and tightened the blockade instead."⁶⁸ The next morning, Sunday, McNamara rose early to draw up a list of "steps to take short of invasion."⁶⁹

The Joint Chiefs of Staff and others in ExCom who had favored the air strike earlier were now pressing the case for it with renewed vigor.* Since the sense of urgency behind Kennedy's pressure on Khrushchev had always been geared to the expectation that the missiles would soon be operational, what the latest intelligence estimates were saying on this critical question is quite relevant. The information available on this point is fragmentary and by no means provides the detailed picture we would like. On Friday morning, October 26, the latest aerial photographs indicated that the Russians were racing to put the missile sites into operation. "Time was running out," Elie Abel states in his account of the ExCom meeting that morning. "In a matter of hours, the Soviet missiles could be ready to fire. Some said the lesser danger was to knock them out before they could threaten the United States."⁷⁰ Essentially the same intelligence picture was reported to the ExCom the following morning, Saturday, October 27.⁷¹

* On Saturday night, Sorensen recalls, the president adjourned the ExCom meeting "as the hawks began to dominate the discussion and to urge an immediate air strike." (Theodore Sorensen, *The Kennedy Legacy* [New York: Macmillan, 1969], p. 190.)

However, Hilsman flatly states that "all the MRBMs were operational by October 28," the day on which Khrushchev agreed to the president's formula.⁷²

Indeed, if all or many of the missiles were thought to be operational on October 28, the question arises whether Kennedy would have been inhibited thereafter from ordering an air strike out of fear that some missiles would survive and be fired against American cities. Various other arguments against an air strike could also have been raised at this juncture by those who favored a tightening of the blockade. McNamara, for example, believed that the fact that the Soviet air defense missiles (SAMs) were operational made the air strike riskier than a tightening of the blockade. He said, "I would rather have sunk a Russian ship than bombed the missile sites."⁷³ Moreover, by this time intelligence had established that the missile sites were guarded by Soviet ground combat units equipped with tactical nuclear weapons. Under these circumstances an American air strike and invasion, as Hilsman remarks, would have been awesome to contemplate.⁷⁴

Kennedy's advisers later offered other predictions as to what he would have done next had Khrushchev turned down the ultimatum or temporized. Robert Kennedy states that on Saturday night neither the president nor he was optimistic as to Khrushchev's acceptance of the ultimatum they had just passed on to him; rather, their expectation was that events were moving to "a military showdown by Tuesday and possibly tomorrow." Yet, on Sunday morning the attorney general took his daughters to a horse show — hardly the action of a man who expected an important decision to be made momentarily — where at 10:00 A.M. he received a call from Secretary of State Rusk saying that Khrushchev had agreed to remove the missiles. As for Sorensen, in his judgment the president "would not . . . have moved immediately to either an air strike or an invasion; but the pressures for such a move on the following Tuesday were rapidly and irresistibly growing."⁷⁵

It is clear enough that at the Saturday-night meeting of the ExCom "no decisions were made, except to call up twenty-four troop carrier squadrons of the Air Force Reserve," which would be needed if it became necessary to invade Cuba.⁷⁶ While this was no bluff, as Elie Abel notes, and while the president was inching toward such a decision, he had not yet made it, and he was still

trying to keep his options open. The president did not himself know what he would do next if Khrushchev turned him down. Probably much would have depended on the way in which Khrushchev turned down or temporized over Kennedy's demand and on what the president then concluded regarding the utility of further bargaining. It is interesting to speculate, therefore, how the president would have reacted had Khrushchev announced that he had stopped all work on the missile sites but that he would need a more equitable quid pro quo which included the Turkish bases before he would agree to dismantle and remove his missiles.

Dean Acheson, a strong advocate of the air strike, has stated that the president was "phenomenally lucky" to have obtained the removal of the missiles without an air strike. Elaborating, Acheson refers to "the luck of Khrushchev's befuddlement and loss of nerve. . . . He went to pieces when the military confrontation seemed inevitable. But he need not have done so." Acheson adds that his reading of Robert Kennedy's account of the crisis, *Thirteen Days*, "does not convince me that an attack would have been inevitable if Khrushchev had 'played it cool.'" ⁷⁷

Indeed, there is some uncertainty, as we have tried to indicate, as to what the president would have done next if Khrushchev had not obliged him. But the threat of an air strike and invasion was not, after all, a case of bluff, pure and simple. The preparations had been made; and Kennedy had already managed to convey his determination to Khrushchev by implementing the blockade. Moreover, it is only by ignoring the fact that Kennedy did improvise and apply a strong coercive strategy on Saturday that Acheson is able to arrive at his sweeping conclusion as to Kennedy's "phenomenal luck" and Khrushchev's "befuddlement and loss of nerve." Curiously, Acheson makes no mention of the ultimatum transmitted to Khrushchev; he fails to appreciate why the Soviet leader would find it necessary to credit the ultimatum with sufficient credibility; he passes over too lightly the risks Khrushchev would have run had he rejected it; and he fails to consider that Khrushchev received a meaningful quid pro quo and did not act exclusively out of "befuddlement and loss of nerve." Good fortune was not missing from the equation. But to regard Kennedy as having been "phenomenally lucky" fails altogether to appreciate that by Saturday night Kennedy had earned the remaining luck he needed to persuade Khrushchev to pull out the missiles.

IX. LESSONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Critics have chided Kennedy for going to the brink unnecessarily, a judgment they feel justified since the missiles in Cuba did not reverse the strategic balance in Russia's favor. Other critics, agreeing with the administration's judgment that the missiles were a threat which had to be removed, have professed to believe that Kennedy could have persuaded Khrushchev to remove the missiles through quiet diplomacy without creating such a dangerous crisis. Understandably appalled by the danger of war that Kennedy's response to the missiles created, most critics have generally failed to credit him for having withstood pressures to resort to military action, for having refused advice to step up demands on Khrushchev once the latter began to retreat, for having been guided throughout by a desire not merely to secure the removal of the missiles but to do so in a way that would create a stepping stone toward détente, serious arms control agreements, and a new form of coexistence to replace the Cold War.

While it is still too early to judge whether the outcome of the Cuban missile crisis marked a turning point in the Cold War, its immediate consequences for Soviet-American relations were beneficial. The crisis was hardly over before cautious cooperation in seeking a more general relaxation of tensions emerged. As on earlier occasions in history when one or both sides stepped back from the brink of war,⁷⁸ a détente quickly followed and policies that had dangerously exacerbated the earlier conflict of interests were re-examined. Within ten months of their dangerous brush with war, the two leaders had cooperated in bringing about a partial test ban treaty.

From his success in the Cuban crisis Kennedy obtained, therefore, not only the removal of the missiles but also an important modification of the offensive thrust of Khrushchev's policies toward the West. This is not the place to trace the important shift in the priorities and operating objectives of Soviet foreign policy following the Cuban crisis,⁷⁹ but contrary to all indications prior to the discovery of missiles in Cuba, including Khrushchev's own intimations, the Soviet government did not resume pressure against West Berlin. Nor have Khrushchev's successors returned to this familiar Cold War battleground. At the very least Kennedy's handling of the Cuban crisis gained an important, prolonged respite in the dangerous clash over unresolved European issues. That bet-

ter use has not been made of this reprieve to deal constructively with the requirements for creating a more stable world system can be acknowledged and deplored without losing sight of Kennedy's attempt to convert the Cuban missile crisis into an opportunity to initiate meaningful steps in this direction.

Paradoxically, the most important lesson of Kennedy's success in this crisis is that it is extremely difficult to apply coercive diplomacy effectively even when one possesses overall military superiority and other advantages as well. I have chosen to stress this in the preceding account of the crisis because I think it is important to draw from historical experience a better understanding of the practical difficulties of applying the theory of coercive diplomacy.

As we noted in the Introduction, the missile crisis was hardly over when some members of the administration, including the president himself, cautioned against the temptation to generalize from its successful outcome. Inadequate and incomplete analysis of the Cuban crisis, however, inevitably encouraged oversimplified formulations of the theory and practice of coercion. On the side of theory, neither those who participated in the administration's handling of the crisis nor those who wrote about it subsequently distinguished clearly between the try-and-see and the ultimatum variants of the strategy, so evident in the evolution of Kennedy's handling of the crisis. They directed attention, rather, to questions such as the respective merits of rapid, large-step escalation against a more gradual piecemeal increase in pressure. This was, as we have described, a controversial issue among United States policymakers during the Cuban crisis, and it has remained controversial since then. It erupted once more during the controversy over policy in the Vietnam War.

While the argument over gradual versus rapid escalation is also important, it has not been related to the more fundamental distinction between the try-and-see and the ultimatum variants of coercive diplomacy. Both the rapid, large-step and the gradual, piecemeal types of escalation can be conducted in the try-and-see manner, that is, without specifying a time limit for compliance and a credible threat of punishment. Similarly, an initially cautious piecemeal type of escalation can be converted into an ultimatum, as in the Cuban missile crisis, without actually engaging in a rapid, large-step escalation. Hence, the strategy of coercive diplomacy cannot be adequately described or discussed solely in

the terms in which the argument over rapid versus piecemeal escalation has been conducted.

Some observers have incorrectly drawn support from the Cuban missile crisis for a concept of this strategy that rests exclusively on coercive threats. Their theory of coercive diplomacy makes no provision for the carrot as well as the stick. Or, to put it another way, their theory envisages that one offers an opponent only face-saving gestures on trivial or peripheral matters. Thus, they overlook the possibility that coercive diplomacy in any given situation may be facilitated by, if indeed it does not require, genuine concessions to the opponent as part of a *quid pro quo* that secures one's essential demands. Coercive diplomacy, therefore, must be distinguished from pure coercion; it includes bargaining, negotiations, and compromise as well as coercive threats.

Some observers are overly impressed by Kennedy's success. Once the president's attempt at coercive diplomacy succeeded, relieving the acute anxieties the crisis had engendered — and still engenders among those who read graphic accounts of it — his accomplishment looked far easier than it had been in fact. Kennedy's success was certainly spectacular. It was all too easy at the time and since then to regard him as a masterful virtuoso who pulled just the right strings to bring about Khrushchev's defeat — a heroic image that the humility with which Kennedy spoke of his achievement only succeeded in swelling further.

For such grateful admirers, Kennedy's handling of the crisis quickly became, as Pachter says, "a feat whose technical elegance compelled the professionals' admiration." Denis Healy, the British Labour party expert on defense and a man noted for a critical attitude toward United States foreign policy, exclaimed afterwards that Kennedy's handling of the crisis "could be cited as a model in any text-book of diplomacy." One can only hope that the difficulties Kennedy experienced in applying coercive diplomacy as well as his ultimate success will be recorded in the textbooks. Even Khrushchev is supposed to have confided to a Western diplomat: "Had I been in the White House instead of the Kremlin, I would have acted like Kennedy" — a compliment to the president, as Pachter states, that was no doubt meant to reflect back favorably on the speaker.⁸⁰

American experts with special policy axes to grind quickly passed over the president's difficulties in making his strategy of coercive diplomacy work. For them, the compelling need was not to reflect

soberly on the problems that had beset Kennedy; rather, it was to provide explanations for his success that would support their favored positions on matters of doctrine and force posture. Advocates of United States strategic nuclear superiority argued that it had played the decisive role in forcing Khrushchev to back down. Firm believers in the virtues of ample conventional military capabilities, on the other hand, saw Khrushchev as having been checkmated by the superior conventional capabilities the United States had quickly mustered in the Caribbean. Nonpartisans in this dispute exercised the wisdom of eclecticism by observing that Khrushchev had been squeezed between American strategic and local superiority.

This competition in locating the basis for Kennedy's success in one or another component of the United States military posture obscured a much more significant point about the crisis: how difficult it had been for the president to utilize his combined strategic and local superiority in order to find a way of imposing his will on Khrushchev without going to war!

What then did the Cuban crisis reveal about the problems of utilizing the strategy of coercive diplomacy? First, even when strongly motivated a responsible leader will draw back from the risks of giving an ultimatum to an opponent who is also strongly motivated and commands formidable military capabilities of his own. A leader must consider whether an ultimatum threat will be credible; whether the recipient will regard it as a bluff and, if so, whether the side that issued it will be prepared to demonstrate otherwise; or whether the ultimatum will provoke the recipient into seizing the initiative himself to engage in a major escalation of the conflict.

Kennedy felt that he must first find a safe way to impress Khrushchev with his determination so that Khrushchev would believe him if and when it became necessary to press harder to secure removal of the missiles. He chose the blockade option as the vehicle by which he would demonstrate his resolve and rid himself of the image of weakness in Khrushchev's eyes. To achieve his important tactical objective, Kennedy had to implement the blockade with careful attention to the requirements of crisis management lest the blockade measures provoke Khrushchev and lead to war.

One important policy dilemma revealed by the Cuban crisis was that prudent crisis management generally tends to conflict with the requirements for strong coercive diplomacy. As a result, the

decision-maker may well end up — as Kennedy did during the first part of the crisis — having to dilute the content and impact of his attempt at coercive diplomacy. And yet, paradoxically, special crisis management considerations toward the end of the week also pushed the president into issuing an ultimatum!

The strategy of coercive diplomacy may require that at some point in the crisis a sense of urgency be created for the opponent's compliance. However, the practice of deliberately slowing up and spacing out military actions, which crisis management requires, may be difficult to reconcile with the need to generate the sense of urgency for compliance. Another principle of crisis management, giving the opponent enough time to receive and reflect on the signals directed toward him and to reconsider his policy and set into motion the desired changes, also dilutes the necessary sense of urgency and also inevitably carries with it the risk that the opponent will use that time in other ways. He may mount counter-pressure to undermine the strategy of coercive diplomacy directed toward him, he may increase his own military preparations, or he may even seize the military initiative. Crisis management considerations dominated Kennedy's handling of the crisis in the first three and a half days. Only several unusual developments in the situation — the fact that work on the missile sites was bringing them to the point of operational readiness, which would have drastically altered the bargaining context in Khrushchev's favor, and the fact that a U-2 reconnaissance plane was shot down over Cuba, which increased pressure on Kennedy to retaliate and thereby possibly lose control over events — forced the president finally to summon the nerve and determination to convert the try-and-see approach he had been following into an ultimatum. Thus, although the theory of coercive diplomacy may emphasize the general advantages of the ultimatum over the try-and-see approach, it is evidently not very easy in practice to adopt the ultimatum variant of the strategy. Moreover, since each approach may have advantages under difficult conditions, flexibility and timing may be all-important.

Another problem in utilizing the strategy of coercive diplomacy concerns the difficulty of achieving optimum timing of negotiations. Kennedy's task was to delay serious bargaining until he had succeeded in impressing Khrushchev with his determination. If he had entered negotiations prematurely, Kennedy would have been at a serious bargaining disadvantage. In the Cuban case Kennedy was successful in delaying the bargaining until he had forced

Khrushchev to back down over the blockade and had accumulated other important bargaining assets. Kennedy achieved this, moreover, without having to pay a high price in terms of negative domestic or international reactions to his delaying negotiations. In other situations — for example, Vietnam — it is not so easy for the president to delay serious bargaining in order to acquire negotiating assets without paying a heavy price.

Closely related to the need for a sense of urgency and the difficulty of timing is the problem of impressing an opponent with the strength of your motivation before subjecting him to the strong form of coercive diplomacy. The Cuban crisis stands out as a case in which a relatively small and carefully applied amount of force — the blockade — when combined with the threat of additional force — the ultimatum — sufficed to secure the objective without major escalation or prolongation of the conflict. What helped the strategy of coercive diplomacy succeed in this case was that the implementation of the blockade and the United States Navy's harassment of the Soviet submarines strongly impressed the opponent with Kennedy's determination. This, together with the menacing United States military build-up, very much strengthened the credibility of the later threats Kennedy made when he passed the ultimatum on to Khrushchev. But the initial actions taken in a crisis, on which one hopes to build a strategy of coercive threats, may not always signal strong determination to the opponent. Rather, they may inadvertently and incorrectly signal timidity and irresolution.

A fourth problem of utilizing coercive diplomacy concerns the need to formulate the content of the carrot and stick so that it is commensurate with the magnitude of the demand made on the opponent. The task of coercive diplomacy can be relatively easy or quite formidable, depending on what one demands of the opponent and how strongly he is motivated not to do what is asked of him. To employ the strategy of coercive diplomacy successfully, therefore, necessitates finding a combination of carrot and stick that will suffice to overcome the opponent's disinclination to yield. What is demanded of the opponent, that is, must be less unattractive to him than the threatened consequences if he does not acquiesce. And if the threatened consequences are not potent enough for this purpose, then concessions must be offered to the opponent as well so that the combination of negative and positive inducements directed toward him will outweigh the un-

attractiveness of what is demanded. In the Cuban case Kennedy was able to formulate a combined carrot and stick that neutralized Khrushchev's initially strong motivation not to yield to the demand that the missiles be removed. Indeed, as we have seen, Khrushchev actually helped Kennedy to do this by initiating the quid pro quo himself. In other circumstances and in other cases, however, the opponent who is the target of coercive diplomacy may not be so cooperative in helping to formulate a quid pro quo. In that event, the United States may have great difficulty in formulating a carrot and stick inducement that suffices to overcome the opponent's strong reluctance to do what is demanded of him before the United States threat to escalate is called and American leaders are faced with the decision to act or back away from their demand.

This suggests a fifth problem of utilizing coercive diplomacy. Not merely the timing of negotiations but, more specifically, the timing of the carrot and stick may be critical. An otherwise serviceable and workable quid pro quo may be offered too late, after one's military operations have hardened the opponent's determination and made it more difficult for him to accept what is demanded of him. Kennedy's timing, it turned out, was just right, neither too early nor too late.

The question of timing, of course, calls attention to the importance of skill in applying the strategy of coercive diplomacy. We consider this problem in more detail in Chapter Five. Here it will suffice to say that, judging by the results, Kennedy dealt with the problems of the strategy of coercive diplomacy skillfully. But there was no guarantee that he would and no way of predicting. The results could easily have been otherwise. Besides, certain underlying situational conditions favored skillful implementation of the strategy of coercive diplomacy in this case. We have not discussed these conditions explicitly in this chapter but will do so in the final chapter after examining the Vietnam case, characterized by a more complex set of conditions that made the adoption and skillful implementation of the strong variant of coercive diplomacy more difficult.

NOTES

¹ The decision to halt U-2 flights over western Cuba was taken on September 10 to avoid the possibility of a U-2 being shot down. Information on this aspect of the United States intelligence "failure" emerged only belatedly. See Elie Abel, *The Missile Crisis* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co. 1966), p. 14; Roger Hilsman, *To Move a Nation* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), pp. 174-190; Graham T. Allison, "Policy, Process and Politics: Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis," (Unpubl. Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1968), pp. 192-201, 283-291.

² Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1965), p. 803.

³ Theodore C. Sorensen, *Kennedy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 684.

⁴ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 801; Sorensen, *Kennedy*, pp. 682-683; Robert F. Kennedy, *Thirteen Days* (New York: Norton, 1969), p. 33; Hugh Sidey, *John F. Kennedy, President* (New York: Atheneum, 1963), p. 327.

⁵ Acheson distinguished the concept of a smaller-scale air strike confined to the missiles, which he favored, from the larger air strike proposed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, which included other targets as well. Dean Acheson, review of Robert F. Kennedy's *Thirteen Days*, in *Esquire*, February, 1969.

⁶ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 803.

⁷ In addition to materials on the ExCom policy deliberations in Abel, *Missile Crisis*; Sorensen, *Kennedy*; Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*; Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*; Acheson, review of *Thirteen Days*; and Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, see the perceptive analysis of the politics of decision-making provided by Allison, *Policy, Process and Politics*. A condensed version appears under the title "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis," *American Political Science Review*, LXIII (September 1969), pp. 689-718.

⁸ See, for example, Nathan Leites, *A Study of Bolshevism* (New York: Free Press, 1953).

⁹ Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, pp. 126-127.

¹⁰ Oran Young, *The Politics of Force* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 258-259.

¹¹ Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, p. 33.

¹² A recent article which emphasizes Kennedy's personal stakes is Thomas M. Mongar, "Personality and Decision-making: John F. Kennedy in Four Crisis Decisions," *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, II (1969), pp. 200-225.

¹³ Sorensen, *Kennedy*, p. 674.

¹⁴ Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, pp. 196-198; see also Allison, *Policy, Process and Politics*, pp. 283-287.

¹⁵ Abel, *The Missile Crisis*, pp. 51, 60; Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, pp. 195, 197; Sorensen, *Kennedy*, p. 683.

¹⁶ Abel, *The Missile Crisis*, pp. 52, 59-60; Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 195.

¹⁷ In addition to the accounts by Sorensen, *Kennedy*; Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*; Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*; and Abel, *The Missile Crisis*, see also the discussion of the significance of the missiles by Dean Acheson in review of *Thirteen Days*; Arnold Horelick, "The Cuban Missile Crisis: An Analysis of Soviet Calculations and Behavior," *World Politics*, XVI (April 1964), pp. 364-377; Albert and Roberta Wohlstetter, "Controlling the Risks in Cuba," Adelphi Paper No. 17, Institute of Strategic Studies, London, April 1965.

See also the briefing of February 6, 1963, by John Hughes, Special Assistant to General Carroll, reprinted in *Department of Defense Appropriations for 1964*, U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, 88th Session, Part I, 1963, Washington, D.C.

¹⁸ Interview with President Kennedy, *Washington Post*, December 18, 1962.

¹⁹ Horelick, "The Cuban Missile Crisis," p. 366, argues persuasively that so large and expensive an offensive capability would not have been placed in Cuba had Khrushchev's objective been limited to deterring a United States attack on Cuba or had it also included removal of United States Jupiter missiles from Turkey.

²⁰ Charles Burton Marshall, *Cuba: Thoughts Prompted by the Crisis* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Center of Foreign Policy Research, n.d.), p. 3.

²¹ Henry M. Pachter, *Collision Course* (New York: Praeger, 1963), p. 13.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Abel, *The Missile Crisis*, p. 81. McNamara's argument had been anticipated and partly formulated in earlier ExCom meetings, *ibid.*, p. 62, though evidently not phrased so colorfully and appealingly in terms of "maintaining the options."

²⁴ At the Friday night (October 19) session of the ExCom, for example, Paul Nitze recalls having stated that "it [the blockade] might or might not work. But if, after a reasonable period we saw that the Russians were going ahead with their missile bases or uncrating the B-28 bombers just delivered, then we would go to an air strike." *Ibid.*, p. 89. Italics added. This was true also of Nitze's written recommendation of Sunday, October 21, as quoted *ibid.*, p. 94.

²⁵ In a final presentation to the president at the ExCom meeting of Saturday, October 20, "the choices put before Kennedy that afternoon were two: begin with the naval blockade and, if need be, *move up the ladder of military responses, rung by rung*; or begin with an air strike, then move almost certainly to a full-scale invasion of Cuba." *Ibid.*, p. 93. Italics added. The available historical sources do not make clear the nature and number of intermediate escalatory steps envisaged by the advocates of the slow, graduated escalation strategy.

²⁶ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 391.

²⁷ Sorensen, *Kennedy*, pp. 671, 677, 681. The linkage of the unresolved Berlin problem to the Cuban missile deployment is traced by Jack M. Schick in "The Berlin Conflict, 1958-62" (unpubl. ms.).

²⁸ To this perceptive observation Pachter, *Collision Course*, p. 84, adds, with some embellishment, that "Kennedy was waiting to be tested. He needed an opportunity to show his mettle. That this opportunity came in Cuba may have given him additional satisfaction. Here was a chance to cancel out last year's humiliation."

²⁹ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 807.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 810.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 811. Italics added.

³² Sorensen, *Kennedy*, p. 699. Italics added.

³³ Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, pp. 66-67. Italics added.

³⁴ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 811.

³⁵ Wohlstetter and Wohlstetter, "Controlling the Risks in Cuba," p. 19.

³⁶ Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, pp. 79-80.

³⁷ See, for example, Abel, *The Missile Crisis*, pp. 133-134, 151.

³⁸ Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, p. 66.

³⁹ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 817.

⁴⁰ Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, p. 67.

⁴¹ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 818; Sorensen, *Kennedy*, p. 710. Abel, *The Missile Crisis*, pp. 154-156, and Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 215, report that a similar clash over implementation of the blockade took place on the following day. Allison, writing before Robert Kennedy's *Thirteen Days* became available, offers a different interpretation of these events which suggests that the navy did not observe Kennedy's Tuesday night order to pull back the blockade line. See "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis," p. 706.

⁴² Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, p. 68. This book, relied on heavily here, provides the most detailed public account of the critical events of the Wednesday morning confrontation at the blockade barrier.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁴⁴ Brief references to the navy's shadowing of Soviet submarines in the Caribbean and forcing them to surface appeared in earlier accounts: Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 822; Abel, *The Missile Crisis*, p. 155; and Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 214.

⁴⁵ Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, pp. 61-62.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 77; see also Abel, *The Missile Crisis*, p. 155.

⁴⁸ Admiral Anderson, Chief of Naval Operations, was less specific than Abel and Robert Kennedy in his public references to the navy's anti-submarine activities. See his speech to a Navy League banquet, November 9, 1962, *New York Times*, November 10, 1962; and his testimony, cited in Allison, *Policy, Process, and Politics*, before the House Armed Services Committee in 1963, *Hearings on Military Posture*, 88th Congress, 1st Session, 1963, p. 897.

⁴⁹ Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, p. 70.

⁵⁰ I am indebted to David Hall for this interpretation of the blockade.

⁵¹ Sorensen, *Kennedy*, pp. 687-688.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 694.

⁵³ Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, p. 83; see also Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, pp. 213-214; Abel, *The Missile Crisis*, p. 173; and Sorensen, *Kennedy*, p. 711.

⁵⁴ Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, p. 83.

⁵⁵ This quotation is taken from Hilsman's record of what Rusk wrote on a piece of paper for Scali to say. However, Rusk was evidently more specific in his verbal instructions to Scali; according to Hilsman, Rusk told Scali to say that "no more than two days" remained. Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 218. Italics added. We have no independent account of what formulation of the sense of urgency Scali actually transmitted to Fomin when they met again at 7:35 P.M. Detailed accounts of the Scali-Fomin meetings, which continued into November, appear also in Abel, *The Missile Crisis*, pp. 175-177, and particularly in Pierre Salinger, *With Kennedy* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), pp. 341-348.

⁵⁶ See particularly Abel, *The Missile Crisis*, pp. 194-195.

⁵⁷ Adam Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence* (New York: Praeger, 1968), p. 674.

⁵⁸ See p. 64.

⁵⁹ Young, *The Politics of Force*, pp. 330-331.

⁶⁰ Pachter, *Collision Course*, pp. 67-68.

⁶¹ Michael Tatu, *Power in the Kremlin* (New York: Viking, 1969), p. 263; Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, pp. 220-221; Abel, *The Missile Crisis*, pp. 188-189.

⁶² Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 220.

⁶³ Robert Kennedy in *Thirteen Days*, p. 97, referred to the shooting down of the U-2 as the event which was "to change the whole course of events and alter history."

⁶⁴ Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 220; Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, p. 98; Sorensen, *Kennedy*, p. 713.

⁶⁵ Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, p. 109. Robert Kennedy initially disclosed his role in the ultimatum six months after the crisis in a speech prepared for delivery in Columbia, South Carolina, on April 25, 1963. See *New York Times*, April 26, 1963. This account of it was less detailed than that which he gave later and there are, as a result, some discrepancies. Another statement about the ultimatum was given by Robert Kennedy for quotation in a memorial volume for his brother. As quoted on this occasion, he erroneously indicated that the deadline for compliance was contained in the president's letter. See Goddard Lieberman, ed., *John Fitzgerald Kennedy, As We Remember Him* (New York: Atheneum, 1965). Reference to a deadline for compliance or an ultimatum is contained in a number of other accounts: Pachter, *Collision Course*, pp. 54-55; Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 829; Sorensen, *Kennedy*, p. 715; Abel, *The Missile Crisis*, p. 199; Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 224. The possibility that not all members of ExCom and lesser officials in the administration knew that an ultimatum was given, even for some time after the crisis, cannot be excluded. Unnamed "high officials" who took part in the critical decisions of October 27, asked to comment on Robert Kennedy's disclosure in his speech in Columbia, South Carolina, stated "that they knew of no secret messages or ultimatum. They supported the attorney general's statement that Major Anderson's death was a major element in bringing this country to the edge of drastic action, such as an air strike on Cuban bases. But they said the warning to Mr. Khrushchev—the 'notification'—was by way of deeds, not words." *New York Times*, April 26, 1963.

⁶⁶ Quoted from *Pravda*, December 13, 1962, by Horelick, "The Cuban Missile Crisis," p. 368.

⁶⁷ Sorensen, *Kennedy*, p. 715.

⁶⁸ Abel, *The Missile Crisis*, p. 193.

⁶⁹ Sorensen, *Kennedy*, p. 716. Unnamed White House sources told the *New York Times* shortly after the end of the crisis that any next step would almost certainly have been an expansion of the blockade rather than an attack. "Invasion was hardly ever seriously considered," another official stated. "Chronology of Cuban Missile Crisis," *New York Times*, November 3, 1962.

⁷⁰ Abel, *The Missile Crisis*, p. 173.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 186, 192.

⁷² Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 227. The same disclosure was made by John Hughes, Defense Department photo interpretation specialist, in his authoritative briefing to the House Appropriations Committee, *Department of Defense Appropriations for 1964*, 88th Congress, 1st Session, 1963, p. 12.

⁷³ Abel, *The Missile Crisis*, p. 193.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 227; Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 227.

⁷⁵ Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, pp. 109-110; Sorensen, *Kennedy*, pp. 715-716.

⁷⁶ Abel, *The Missile Crisis*, pp. 178-179; see also Sorensen, *Kennedy*, p. 717; *New York Times*, November 3, 1962.

⁷⁷ Acheson, review of *Thirteen Days*.

⁷⁸ See Herbert Dinerstein, "The Transformation of Alliance Systems," *American Political Science Review*, LIX (September 1965).

⁷⁹ See, for example, Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence*, pp. 677 ff.

⁸⁰ Pachter, *Collision Course*, pp. 87, 89.

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