

expedition succeeded, the overthrow of Castro would greatly strengthen democratic prospects in the hemisphere; if he called it off, he would forever be haunted by the feeling that his scruples had preserved Castro in power.

More generally, the decision resulted from the fact that he had been in office only 77 days. He had not had the time or opportunity to test the inherited instrumentalities of government. He could not know which of his advisers were competent and which were not. For their part, they did not know him or each other well enough to raise hard questions with force and candor. Moreover, the massed and caparisoned authority of his senior officials in the realm of foreign policy and defense was unanimous for going ahead. The director of the Central Intelligence Agency advocated the adventure; the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of Defense approved its military aspects, the Secretary of State its political aspects. They all spoke with the sacerdotal prerogative of men vested with a unique understanding of arcane matters. "If someone comes in to tell me this or that about the minimum wage bill," Kennedy said to me later, "I have no hesitation in overruling them. But you always assume that the military and intelligence people have some secret skill not available to ordinary mortals." The only opposition came from Fulbright and myself (he knew nothing of Bowles's memorandum to

Rusk, nor did he know that Edward R. Murrow, the new director of the United States Information Agency, who had learned about the operation from a *New York Times* reporter early in April, was also deeply opposed), and this did not bulk large against the united voice of institutional authority. Had one senior adviser opposed the adventure, I believe that Kennedy would have canceled it. Not one snoke against it.

One further factor no doubt influenced him: the enormous confidence in his own luck. Everything had broken right for him since 1956. He had won the nomination and the election against all the odds in the book. Everyone around him thought he had the Midas touch and could not lose. Despite himself, even this dispassionate and skeptical man may have been affected by the soaring euphoria of the new day.

On the following Tuesday the Robert Kennedys gave a party to celebrate Ethel's birthday. It was a large, lively, uproarious affair, overrun by guests, skits, children, and dogs. In the midst of the gaiety Robert Kennedy drew me aside. He said, "I hear you don't think much of this business." He asked why and listened without expression as I gave my reasons. Finally he said, "You may be right or you may be wrong, but the President has made his mind up. Don't push it any further. Now is the time for everyone to help him all they can."

Cuban Missile Crisis

Case 3-11

THIRTEEN DAYS

"Tuesday Morning, October 16, 1962 . . ."

On Tuesday morning, October 16, 1962, shortly after 9 o'clock, President Kennedy called and asked me to come to the White House. He said only that we were facing great trouble. Shortly afterward, in his office, he told me that a U-2 had just finished a photographic mission and that the

Intelligence Community had become convinced that Russia was placing missiles and atomic weapons in Cuba.

From Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis by Robert F. Kennedy. Copyright © 1968 by McCall Corporation. Used by permission of W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

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That was the beginning of the Cuban missile crisis—a confrontation between the two giant atomic nations, the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, which brought the world to the abyss of nuclear destruction and the end of mankind. From that moment in President Kennedy's office until Sunday morning, October 28, that was my life—and for Americans and Russians, for the whole world, it was their life as well.

At 11:45 that same morning, in the Cabinet Room, a formal presentation was made by the Central Intelligence Agency to a number of high officials of the government. Photographs were shown to us. Experts arrived with their charts and their pointers and told us that if we looked carefully, we could see there was a missile base being constructed in a field near San Cristobal, Cuba. I, for one, had to take their word for it. I examined the pictures carefully, and what I saw appeared to be no more than the clearing of a field for a farm or the basement of a house. I was relieved to hear later that this was the same reaction of virtually everyone at the meeting including President Kennedy. Even a few days later, when more work had taken place on the site, he remarked that it looked like a football field.

The dominant feeling at the meeting was stunned surprise. No one had expected or anticipated that the Russians would deploy surface-to-surface ballistic missiles in Cuba. I thought back to my meeting with Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin in my office some weeks before. He came to tell me that the Russians were prepared to sign an atmospheric-test-ban treaty if we could make certain agreements on underground testing. I told him I would transmit this message and the accompanying documents to President Kennedy.

I told him we were deeply concerned within the Administration about the amount of military equipment being sent to Cuba. That very morning, I had met on this subject with the President and the Secretaries of State and Defense. There was some evidence that, in addition to the surface-to-air missile (SAM) sites that were being

erected, the Russians, under the guise of a fishing village, were constructing a large naval shipyard and a base for submarines. This was all being watched carefully—through agents within Cuba who were reporting the military buildup in a limited but frequently important way, through the questioning of refugees who were screened and processed as they arrived in Florida, and through U-2 flights.

It was election time. The autumn days of September and October were filled with charges and countercharges. Republicans "viewing with alarm" were claiming the United States was not taking the necessary steps to protect our security. Some, such as Senator Homer E. Capehart of Indiana, were suggesting that we take military action against Cuba.

I told Ambassador Dobrynin of President Kennedy's deep concern about what was happening. He told me I should not be concerned, for he was instructed by Soviet Chairman Nikita S. Khrushchev to assure President Kennedy that there would be no ground-to-ground missiles or offensive weapons placed in Cuba. Further, he said, I could assure the President that this military buildup was not of any significance and that Khrushchev would do nothing to disrupt the relationship of our two countries during this period prior to the election. Chairman Khrushchev, he said, liked President Kennedy and did not wish to embarrass him.

I pointed out that I felt he had a very strange way of showing his admiration; that what the Russians had been doing in Cuba was a matter of the deepest concern to the United States; and that his protestations of friendship meant little alongside the military activities in the Caribbean. I told him we were watching the buildup carefully and that he should know it would be of the gravest consequence if the Soviet Union placed missiles in Cuba. That would never happen, he assured me, and left.

I reported the conversation to President Kennedy, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, and relayed my own skepticism, and suggested that it might

be advisable to issue a statement making it unequivocally clear that the United States would not tolerate the introduction of offensive surface-to-surface missiles, or offensive weapons of any kind, into Cuba.

That same afternoon, September 4, from a draft prepared by Nicholas Katzenbach, the Deputy Attorney General, and myself, the President issued exactly this kind of warning and pointed out the serious consequences that would result from such a step.

A week later, on September 11, Moscow disclaimed publicly any intention of taking such action and stated that there was no need for nuclear missiles to be transferred to any country outside the Soviet Union, including Cuba.

During this same period of time, an important official in the Soviet Embassy, returning from Moscow, brought me a personal message from Khrushchev to President Kennedy, stating that he wanted the President to be assured that under no circumstances would surface-to-surface missiles be sent to Cuba.

Now, as the representatives of the CIA explained the U-2 photographs that morning, Tuesday, October 16, we realized that it had all been lies, one gigantic fabric of lies. The Russians were putting missiles in Cuba, and they had been shipping them there and beginning the construction of the sites at the same time those various private and public assurances were being forwarded by Chairman Khrushchev to President Kennedy.

Thus, the dominant feeling was one of shocked incredulity. We had been deceived by Khrushchev, but we had also fooled ourselves. No official within the government had ever suggested to President Kennedy that the Russian buildup in Cuba would include missiles. On a number of occasions, the President had asked for a specific evaluation on what the Intelligence Community felt to be the implications for the United States of that buildup. The Intelligence Community, in its National Estimate of the future course of events, had advised him—on each of the four occasions in 1962 when

they furnished him with official reports on Cuba and the Caribbean—that the Russians would not make offensive weapons available to Cuba. The last estimate before our meeting of the 16th of October was dated the 19th of September, and it advised the President that without reservation the United States Intelligence Board, after considerable discussion and examination, had concluded that the Soviet Union would not make Cuba a strategic base. It pointed out that the Soviet Union had not taken this kind of step with any of its satellites in the past and would feel the risk of retaliation from the United States to be too great to take the risk in this case.

We heard later, in a postmortem study, that reports had come from agents within Cuba indicating the presence of missiles in September of 1962. Most of the reports were false; some were the result of confusion by untrained observers between surface-to-air missiles and surface-to-surface missiles. Several reports, however, turned out to be accurate—one from a former employee at the Hilton Hotel in Havana, who believed a missile installation was being constructed near San Cristobal, and another from someone who overheard Premier Fidel Castro's pilot talking in a boastful and intoxicated way one evening about the nuclear missiles that were going to be furnished Cuba by Russia.

But before these reports were given substance, they had to be checked and rechecked. They were not even considered substantial enough to pass on to the President or other high officials within the government.

The same group that met that first morning in the Cabinet Room met almost continuously through the next 12 days and almost daily for some six weeks thereafter. Others in the group, which was later to be called the "Ex Comm" (the Executive Committee of the National Security Council), included Secretary of State Dean Rusk; Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara; Director of the Central Intelligence Agency John McCone; Secretary of the Treasury Douglas Dillon;

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President Kennedy's adviser on national-security affairs, McGeorge Bundy; Presidential Counsel Ted Sorensen; Under Secretary of State George Ball; Deputy Under Secretary of State U. Alexis Johnson; General Maxwell Taylor, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Edward Martin, Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America; originally, Chip Bohlen, who, after the first day, left to become Ambassador to France and was succeeded by Llewellyn Thompson as the adviser on Russian affairs; Roswell Gilpatric, Deputy Secretary of Defense; Paul Nitze, Assistant Secretary of Defense; and, intermittently at various meetings, Vice-President Lyndon B. Johnson; Adlai Stevenson, Ambassador to the United Nations; Ken O'Donnell, Special Assistant to the President; and Don Wilson, who was Deputy Director of the United States Information Agency. This was the group that met, talked, argued, and fought together during that crucial period of time. From this group came the recommendations from which President Kennedy was ultimately to select his course of action.

They were men of the highest intelligence, industrious, courageous, and dedicated to their country's well-being. It is no reflection on them that none was consistent in his opinion from the very beginning to the very end. That kind of open, unfettered mind was essential. For some there were only small changes, perhaps varieties of a single idea. For others there were continuous changes of opinion each day; some, because of the pressure of events, even appeared to lose their judgment and stability.

The general feeling in the beginning was that some form of action was required. There were those, although they were a small minority, who felt the missiles did not alter the balance of power and therefore necessitated no action. Most felt, at that stage, that an air strike against the missile sites could be the only course. Listening to the proposals, I passed a note to the President: "I now know how Tojo felt when he was planning Pearl Harbor."

"The President . . . knew he would have to act"

After the meeting in the Cabinet Room, I walked back to the Mansion with the President. It would be difficult; the stakes were high—of the highest and most substantial kind—but he knew he would have to act. The United States 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. To keep the discussions from being inhibited and because he did not want to arouse attention, he decided not to attend all the meetings of our committee. This was wise. Personalities change when the President is present, and frequently even strong men make recommendations on the basis of what they believe the President wishes to hear. He instructed our group to come forward with recommendations for one course or possibly several alternative courses of action.

It was during the afternoon and evening of that first day, Tuesday, that we began to discuss the idea of a quarantine or blockade. Secretary McNamara, by Wednesday, became the blockade's strongest advocate. He argued that it was limited pressure, which could be increased as the circumstances warranted. Further, it was dramatic and forceful pressure, which would be understood yet, most importantly, still leave us in control of events. Later he reinforced his position by reporting that a surprise air strike against the missile bases alone—a surgical air strike, as it came to be called—was militarily impractical in the view of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, that any such military action would have to include all military installations in Cuba, eventually leading to an invasion. Perhaps we would come to that, he argued. Perhaps that course of action would turn out to be inevitable. "But let's not start with that course," if by chance that kind of confrontation with Cuba, and of necessity with the Soviet Union, could be avoided.

Those who argued for the military strike instead of a blockade pointed out that a blockade would

not in fact remove the missiles and would not even stop the work from going ahead on the missile sites themselves. The missiles were already in Cuba, and all we would be doing with a blockade would be "closing the door after the horse had left the barn." Further, they argued, we would be bringing about a confrontation with the Soviet Union by stopping their ships, when we should be concentrating on Cuba and Castro.

Their most forceful argument was that our installation of a blockade around Cuba invited the Russians to do the same to Berlin. If we demanded the removal of missiles from Cuba as the price for lifting our blockade, they would demand the removal of missiles surrounding the Soviet Union as the reciprocal act.

And so we argued, and so we disagreed—all dedicated, intelligent men, disagreeing and fighting about the future of their country, and of mankind. Meanwhile, time was slowly running out.

An examination of photography taken on Wednesday, the 17th of October, showed several other installations, with at least 16 and possibly 32 missiles of over a thousand-mile range. Our military experts advised that these missiles could be in operation within a week. The next day, Thursday, estimates by our Intelligence Community placed in Cuba missiles with an atomic-warhead potential of about one-half the current ICBM capacity of the entire Soviet Union. The photography having indicated that the missiles were being directed at certain American cities, the estimate was that within a few minutes of their being fired 80 million Americans would be dead.

The members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff were unanimous in calling for immediate military action. They forcefully presented their view that the blockade would not be effective. General Curtis LeMay, Air Force Chief of Staff, argued strongly with the President that a military attack was essential. When the President questioned what the response of the Russians might be General LeMay assured him there would be no reaction. President Kennedy was skeptical. "They, no more than we, can let these things go by without doing something. They can't afford all their

statements, permit us to take out their missiles, kill a lot of Russians, and then do nothing. If they don't take action in Cuba, they certainly will in Berlin."

The President went on to say that he recognized the validity of the arguments made by the Joint Chiefs, the danger that more and more missiles would be placed in Cuba, and the likelihood, if we did nothing, that the Russians would move on Berlin and in other areas of the world, feeling the United States was completely impotent. Then it would be too late to do anything in Cuba, for by that time all their missiles would be operational.

General David M. Shoup, Commandant of the Marine Corps, summed up everyone's feelings: "You are in a pretty bad fix, Mr. President." The President answered quickly, "You are in it with me." Everyone laughed, and, with no final decision, the meeting adjourned.

Later, Secretary McNamara, although he told the President he disagreed with the Joint Chiefs and favored a blockade rather than an attack, informed him that the necessary planes, men, and ammunition were being deployed and that we could be ready to move with the necessary air bombardments on Tuesday, October 23, if that was to be the decision. The plans called for an initial attack, consisting of 500 sorties, striking all military targets, including the missile sites, airfields, ports, and gun emplacements.

I supported McNamara's position in favor of a blockade. This was not from a deep conviction that it would be a successful course of action, but a feeling that it had more flexibility and fewer liabilities than a military attack. Most importantly, like others, I could not accept the idea that the United States would rain bombs on Cuba, killing thousands and thousands of civilians in a surprise attack. Maybe the alternatives were not very palatable, but I simply did not see how we could accept that course of action for our country.

"A majority opinion . . . for a blockade . . ."

By Thursday night, there was a majority opinion in our group for a blockade. Our committee went from the State Department to the White House

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around 9:15 that night. In order to avoid the suspicion that would have ensued from the presence of a long line of limousines, we all went in my car—John McCone, Maxwell Taylor, the driver, and myself all crowded together in the front seat, and six others sitting in back.

We explained our recommendations to the President. At the beginning, the meeting seemed to proceed in an orderly and satisfactory way. However, as people talked, as the President raised probing questions, minds and opinions began to change again, and not only on small points. For some, it was from one extreme to another—supporting an air attack at the beginning of the meeting and, by the time we left the White House, supporting no action at all.

The President, not at all satisfied, sent us back to our deliberations. Because any other step would arouse suspicion, he returned to his regular schedule and his campaign speaking engagements.

The next morning, at our meeting at the State Department, there were sharp disagreements again. The strain and the hours without sleep were beginning to take their toll.

Finally we agreed on a procedure by which we felt we could give some intelligent recommendations to the President. We knew that time was running out and that delay was not possible. We split into groups to write up our respective recommendations, beginning with an outline of the President's speech to the nation and the whole course of action thereafter, trying to anticipate all possible contingencies and setting forth recommendations as to how to react to them.

In the early afternoon, we exchanged papers, each group dissected and criticized the other, and then the papers were returned to the original group to develop further answers. Gradually from all this came the outline of definitive plans. For the group that advocated the blockade, it was an outline of the legal basis for our action, an agenda for a meeting of the Organization of American States, recommendations for the role of the United Nations, the military procedures for stopping ships, and, finally, the circumstances under which military force

might be used. For the group that advocated immediate military action, it was an outline of the areas to be attacked, a defense of our position in the United Nations, suggestions as to how to obtain support from Latin American countries, and a proposed communication to Khrushchev to convince him of the inadvisability of moving militarily against us in the Caribbean, Berlin, or elsewhere in the world.

During all these deliberations, we all spoke as equals. There was no rank, and, in fact, we did not even have a chairman. Dean Rusk—who, as Secretary of State, might have assumed that position—had other duties during this period of time and frequently could not attend our meetings. As a result, with the encouragement of McNamara, Bundy, and Ball, the conversations were completely uninhibited and unrestricted. Everyone had an equal opportunity to express himself and to be heard directly. It was a tremendously advantageous procedure that does not frequently occur within the executive branch of government, where rank is often so important.

"It was now up to one single man"

We met all day Friday and Friday night. Then again early Saturday morning we were back at the State Department. I talked to the President several times on Friday. He was hoping to be able to meet with us early enough to decide on a course of action and then broadcast it to the nation Sunday night. Saturday morning at 10 o'clock I called the President at the Blackstone Hotel in Chicago and told him we were ready to meet with him. It was now up to one single man. No committee was going to make this decision. He canceled his trip and returned to Washington.

As he was returning to Washington, our armed forces across the world were put on alert. Telephoning from our meeting in the State Department, Secretary McNamara ordered four tactical air squadrons placed at readiness for an air strike, in case the President decided to accept that recommendation.

The President arrived back at the White House at 1:40 P.M. and went for a swim. I sat on the side of the pool, and we talked. At 2:30 we walked up to the Oval Room.

The meeting went on until 10 minutes after five. Convened as a formal meeting of the National Security Council, it was a larger group of people who met, some of whom had not participated in the deliberations up to that time. Bob McNamara presented the arguments for the blockade; others presented the arguments for the military attack.

The President made his decision that afternoon in favor of the blockade. There was one final meeting the next morning, with General Walter C. Sweeney, Jr., Commander in Chief of the Tactical Air Command, who told the President that even a major surprise air attack could not be certain of destroying all the missile sites and nuclear weapons in Cuba. That ended the small, lingering doubt that might still have remained in his mind. It had worried him that a blockade would not remove the missiles—now it was clear that an attack could not accomplish that task completely, either.

The strongest argument against the all-out military attack, and one no one could answer to his satisfaction, was that a surprise attack would erode if not destroy the moral position of the United States throughout the world.

Adlai Stevenson had come from New York to attend the meeting Saturday afternoon, as he had attended several of the Ex Comm meetings. He had always been dubious about the air strike, but at the Saturday meeting he strongly advocated what he had only tentatively suggested to me a few days before—namely, that we make it clear to the Soviet Union that if it withdrew its missiles from Cuba, we would be willing to withdraw our missiles from Turkey and Italy and give up our naval base at Guantanamo Bay.

There was an extremely strong reaction from some of the participants to his suggestion, and several sharp exchanges followed. The President, although he rejected Stevenson's suggestion, pointed out that he had for a long period held

reservations about the value of Jupiter missiles in Turkey and Italy and some time ago had asked the State Department to conduct negotiations for their removal; but now, he said, was not the appropriate time to suggest this action, and we could not abandon Guantanamo Bay under threat from the Russians.

Stevenson has since been criticized publicly for the position he took at this meeting. I think it should be emphasized that he was presenting a point of view from a different perspective than the others, one which was therefore important for the President to consider. Although I disagreed strongly with his recommendations, I thought he was courageous to make them, and I might add they made as much sense as some others considered during that period of time.

The President's speech was now scheduled for Monday evening. Under the direction of George Ball, Alex Johnson, and Ed Martin, a detailed hour-to-hour program was arranged to inform our allies, prepare for the meeting of the OAS, inform the ambassadors stationed in Washington, and prepare for them and others in written form the legal justification on which our action was predicated. More and more government officials were brought into the discussions, and finally word began to seep through to the press that a serious crisis was imminent. Through the personal intervention of the President with several newspapers, the only stories written Monday morning were reports that a major speech was to be given by the President and that the country faced a serious crisis.

During this same period, military preparations went forward. Missile crews were placed on maximum alert. Troops were moved into Florida and the southeastern part of the United States. Late Saturday night, the First Armored Division began to move out of Texas into Georgia, and five more divisions were placed on alert. The base at Guantanamo Bay was strengthened.

The Navy deployed 180 ships to the Caribbean. The Strategic Air Command was dispersed to civilian landing fields around the country to lessen its vulnerability in case of attack. The B-52 bomber

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An hour before the President's speech, Secretary Rusk called in Ambassador Dobrynin and told him of the speech. The newspapers reported that Dobrynin left the Secretary's office looking considerably shaken.

On that Monday afternoon, before his speech and after lunch with Jackie, the President held several meetings. At the first, he formally constituted our committee—which up until that time had been called "the group" or "war council"—under National Security Council Action Memorandum Number 196 as the Executive Committee of the National Security Council, "for the purpose of effective conduct of the operations of the executive branch in the current crisis." The President became the official chairman, and until further notice we were to meet with him every morning at 10:00 A.M.

Shortly thereafter, the President met with the members of the Cabinet and informed them for the first time of the crisis. Then, not long before the broadcast, he met with the leaders of Congress. This was the most difficult meeting. I did not attend, but I know from seeing him afterward that it was a tremendous strain.

Many Congressional leaders were sharp in their criticism. They felt that the President should take more forceful action, a military attack or invasion, and that the blockade was far too weak a response. Senator Richard B. Russell of Georgia said he could not live with himself if he did not say in the strongest possible terms how important it was that we act with greater strength than the President was contemplating.

Senator J. William Fulbright of Arkansas also strongly advised military action rather than such a weak step as the blockade. Others said they were skeptical but would remain publicly silent, only because it was such a dangerous hour for the country.

The President, after listening to the frequently emotional criticism, explained that he would take whatever steps were necessary to protect the security of the United States, but that he did not feel greater military action was warranted initially. Because it was possible that the matter could be resolved without a devastating war, he had decided on the course he had outlined. Perhaps in the end, he said, direct military action would be necessary, but that course should not be followed lightly. In the meantime, he assured them, he had taken measures to prepare our military forces and place them in a position to move.

He reminded them that once an attack began our adversaries could respond with a missile barrage from which many millions of Americans would be killed. That was a gamble he was not willing to take until he had finally and forcefully exhausted all other possibilities. He told them this was an extremely hazardous undertaking and that everyone should understand the risks involved.

He was upset by the time the meeting ended. When we discussed it later he was more philosophical, pointing out that the Congressional leaders' reaction to what we should do, although more militant than his, was much the same as our first reaction when we first heard about the missiles the previous Tuesday.

At 7 o'clock, he went on television to the nation to explain the situation in Cuba and the reasons for the quarantine. He was calm and confident that he had selected the right course.