THE AMERICAN POLITICAL DISCOURSE ON THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines and critiques the American political discourse on the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. The event itself is past, yet words used to describe and explain the missile crisis capture and give meaning to the experience. The meaning of the crisis begins in a basic sense, then, with the discourse. The increasing availability of material evidence has reinvigorated the discourse on the missile crisis. Where relevant, recent evidence will be employed to critique previous and recent interpretations of the this seminal event.

Consensus and debate are both to be found in the discourse on the Cuban crisis. First, there is a large body of shared understanding, or conventional wisdom, on the crisis. Secondly, there is disagreement as to the meaning of the crisis in recent manifestations of the discourse. The essay will use a propaganda model to examine the politically necessary mythology embodied in the conventional wisdom. This thesis will use a tendency analysis approach to organize the debate on the missile crisis, along the lines of ideological schools of thought, and within the context of a larger American nuclear debate. The propaganda and the tendency analysis models complement the general approach of discourse. These models have been developed specifically for the study of politics, yet the methodology of each is statement analysis; as such, these models are rooted in language, and so conform with the general discourse approach.

Security is the common referent of both the conventional wisdom and the current debate. In particular, the President, as the custodian of nuclear weapons, is the principle actor responsible for national security. The powerful image of the President dominates the conventional wisdom, and
retains significance in the contemporary ideological debate on the lessons of the missile crisis.

The nuclear arsenal at the disposal of the President endows him with great, but double-edged power. The paper concludes with some general observations on the special significance of Presidential leadership as represented in the discourse on the missile crisis, and as necessitated in confronting crises in general. First, in crisis, there is little time for the President to make difficult decisions. Secondly, there may be greater devolution of authority to the military forces deployed to convey the credibility of American deterrence. As such, the subordination of force to policy must remain sound. The image of the President is, of necessity, an image which combines prudence and strength. Manufactured images are not enough, however. Policy must be tested in terms of its alleged purpose. Likewise, doctrine must be evaluated in terms the purpose of the policy it is designed to support.
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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Although the Cuban missile crisis occurred nearly thirty years ago, its impact is still strong. The Cuban crisis is widely considered to have been a watershed event in international relations. Representing the highest postwar level of strategic alert for United States forces, the Cuban crisis encapsulates the most dramatic and frightening elements of the then-new problems of state-to-state relations in the nuclear era. For example, both sides had nuclear weapons. Because the security of the United States mainland was seen to be under vital and immediate threat, the leader of the United States was seen to be responsible for the fate of the planet. He held this responsibility because, thanks to nuclear weapons and US nuclear superiority vis a vis the Soviet Union, he possessed a tremendous concentration of authority and a comparatively free-hand for escalatory moves, but very little time in which to exercise judgement. It is not surprising, therefore, that within the American polity shock waves of this experience would reverberate. The event was so powerful that it generated a body of conventional wisdom that has now attained near-mythic stature.

At a conference of scholars and policy-makers reflecting on the Cuban crisis, Graham Allison, best known for his work on the subject, stated,

There are always dark, impenetrable corners to every event of this kind; and so, for the cottage industry of missile-crisis studies, may there always be dark corners.1

1 Graham T. Allison, whose research on the Cuban missile crisis is widely known in American political science, made the above comment in closing at a conference of scholars and policymakers held at Hawk's Cay Florida, March 5-8, 1987. Edited transcripts of the conference are available in James G. Blight and David A. Welch, On the Brink: Americans and Soviets Reexamine the Cuban Missile Crisis (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), pp. 21-111; cited hereafter as "Hawk's Cay," OTB. Allison was reflecting on John F. Kennedy's remark that "the essence of ultimate decision remains impenetrable to the observer, and even to the decider." See John F. Kennedy, Forward to Theodore C. Sorensen, Decision-Making in the White House (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), p.xi, cited in "Hawk's Cay," OTB p.111. Allison's commentary was not only ambiguous, but potentially misdirected as well. He
The Cuban crisis continues to serve as a reference point for discourse on strategy and as a metaphor of crisis decision-making. How can we account for the persistence of the crisis in strategic discourse?

The continuing debate regarding the lessons of the crisis is an important reason for its longevity. One might imagine that consensus would exist on the lessons of the crisis, given that it has been explored so thoroughly. On the contrary, the ongoing release of new information on the crisis, through document declassification and retrospective revelations by participants, has fueled a new cycle of debate. There are many different ways to look at this single historical event, just as there are various levels of analysis within the discipline of international relations and various different ideological perspectives within the American polity. The Cuban missile crisis has been explored in many different ways: as an exercise in determining causes and consequences; from the viewpoint of the international system of states, from individual foreign policy perspectives; and as a decision problem for political leadership.

There are a range of intellectual and ideological forces underlying the heated discourse on the crisis. Analysts of the crisis hold fundamentally antithetical values and analytical premises regarding what the world is like, how it works, and what constitutes legitimate goals for rational policy. The contemporary discourse on the Cuban crisis is thus the consequence of much more than the steady unearthing of new empirical data. The Cuban crisis discourse is a decades-old form of therapy for insecurities generated by the nuclear age. The true debate about the lessons of the Cuban crisis is a debate about the political values underlying strategic choice; while of implies that dark corners are desirable, when in fact, given the danger of nuclear crisis, understanding of this crucial event is imperative. And if the corners are impenetrable, what then, is the function of political scientists?
intrinsic importance to historians and political scientists, the discourse regarding the facts of the crisis, revealed by the accumulated body of evidence, is in some sense secondary to the underlying ideological currents revealed by debate. In other words, the debate is primarily ideological rather than empirical.

Contemporary understanding of nuclear crisis has been greatly informed by historical accounts of the Cuban missile crisis. Studies abound which seek to explain the crisis, and draw cause and effect inferences from historical accounts. The origins of debate are to be found in competing revelations of the history itself, revelations undertaken by observers with competing ideological frameworks through which the history is organized and interpreted. That is to say, competing schools of thought draw lessons of cause and effect based upon competing descriptions of the event itself. In a recent examination of the historical maxims drawn from the Cuban missile crisis, Davis Bobrow observed, "Revealing history is then not simply, or perhaps even primarily, a politically neutral act."³

Yet the Cuban missile crisis as revealed in recent release of new factual evidence has been imperfectly described in competing historical

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² The evidence is relevant, then, in that it serves the analytical frameworks which are directed by these value systems. In accommodating the role of evidence, then, one might presume to find bias in the employment of evidence by alternative sides in debate. Yet, bias is not an appropriate, but rather a pejorative term to use regarding the relationship of analysis to value. Priority allocation is more neutral and allows for the possibility that new information may lead analysis to change direction or, if it is recognized as sufficiently anomalous, even value allocation. For example, if upon analysis, one changes perceives a changed origin of threat, re-allocation of values may follow.

³ Davis B. Bobrow, "Stories Remembered and Forgotten," Journal of Conflict Resolution, Vol.33 No.2 (June 1989), 187-209; p.205; cited hereafter as Bobrow, "Stories." Bobrow argues in this piece that the assumptions of many studies on the crisis were unduly optimistic. He concludes that "we should entertain grave uncertainties and inconsistencies about evaluation, narrative completeness and accuracy, maxim compatibility, cause and effect inferences, and research tractability." (p.206)
accounts. If interpretation is ideologically driven, then one expects the new evidence to have made little impact on debate over the lessons of the crisis. This is because one expects that new information is placed into a pre-existing conceptual matrix based on ideological belief systems.

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The central purpose of this thesis is to examine the origins, the character, and the significance of the discourse on the Cuban missile crisis. It is not the intention of this thesis to construct a definitive history of the Cuban missile crisis. Instead, this thesis is intended to describe the major ideological and doctrinal systems and the narratives on the Cuban missile crisis with which they correspond. As it is the pre-occupation of social scientists to explain as well as to describe, this thesis will study the generation of the discourse on the crisis. Using the work of Michel Foucault to illustrate how it is that events may be placed into a pre-determined matrix, one may establish a context for the event as it is found in discourse. Foucault's argument is intuitively pleasing. He argues simply that experience, such as that of the Cuban crisis, is structured in the process of documenting history.

Chapter II begins with a review of the perceptions and premises, or myths, that have persisted in popular understanding of the crisis and which are not informed by recent revelations. So many possess some degree of familiarity with the Cuban crisis that one may easily say that a pre-existing framework of knowledge exists, that which we call conventional wisdom. Briefly, the conventional wisdom is the foundation of the conservative interpretation of the crisis. It portrays the crisis in black and white terms. It shows Kennedy to have been a hero and Khrushchev to have been blindly
opportunistic. The essential element of the conventional wisdom is an emphasis on the alleged strength and prudence of the US leadership in confrontation with the Soviet threat. This image of the crisis was later challenged by Graham Allison and others who questioned the decision-making of Kennedy and his team. Allison's essay, "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis," was a seminal piece in political science that would itself serve to establish a parallel body of conventional wisdom within the academic community. This chapter will also present some of the recently published evidence in order to better establish the distinction between reality and rhetoric in the mythology of the crisis.

Voices from the far right of the American political spectrum have criticized Kennedy for failing to take advantage of an opportunity to invade Cuba. Conversely, voices from the left side of the spectrum have criticized him for instigating the crisis in the first place through provocative arms deployments. The left would further criticize Kennedy for making a life and death issue of weapons which were not seen by them to be a significant threat to the US. Clearly, there is controversy in the discourse.

Chapter III defines competing schools of academic and policy elite thought on the crisis. This chapter will identify the underlying values governing the interpretation and analysis of each school, and discuss the narrative, or interpretation of the crisis as it is told by each school. Chapter IV examines the elements or themes shared by the schools, and makes some concluding observations on the contribution of each. Finally, this thesis will conclude with some general observations on the discourse, and will address the larger significance of the crisis in increasing our understanding of international relations, and in particular, the behaviour of the American foreign policy elite.
Because even a cursory glance at the literature on the Cuban missile crisis suggests that the subject matter offers more than is immediately ascertainable from traditional approaches of foreign policy analysis, this thesis will approach the subject from the broader perspective of the discourse on it. The next section of this chapter presents the theoretical perspective of discourse. Because the theory of discourse is rooted in language, this approach is congenial to understanding the way in which political images are shaped and correspondingly shape common understanding. Because the manufacture of images is central to the generation of conventional wisdom, this thesis will present aspects of a propaganda model based upon the discourse approach in the introduction to Chapter II. Before delineating the different schools of thought, Chapter III of this thesis will present a model of tendency analysis which serves to organize and analyze policy debate along ideological lines. In that this theory is also based upon analysis of statements, tendency analysis is compatible with the discourse approach.

THEORY OF DISCOURSE
The theoretical focus of this section is the nature of political and policy discourse on the crisis. Because the continuing process of re-interpretation of the crisis constantly shifts the state of knowledge about it, the significance of the discourse in a basic sense creates the significance of the crisis.

Any serious examination of the origins, character and direction of 'conventional wisdom' on the crisis reveals how Americans have used the crisis to help define the national policy discourse in the Cold War period, particularly in light of rapidly developing Soviet capabilities. Discourse as an activity is social, and so a discourse relating to a particular historical event
such as the Cuban missile crisis serves a social purpose. So that the discourse may better serve its given purpose, to some extent it is manipulated. According to Foucault, "in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures."  

Discourse Control
The notion that society can control, select, and organize discourse is acceptable to anyone familiar with the hegemony of the conservative, anti-communist ideology of the 1950s and early 1960s. The procedural aspects of such selection can be explicitly defined, as in the structural format of policy papers or the New York Times front page for example, or implicitly understood as in the taboo against public discussion of Kennedy's willingness to offer an exchange of Jupiter missiles in Turkey for the Soviet missiles in Cuba.

Language is the currency of discourse. An important way in which discourse is controlled is through selective use of vocabulary. One observes that along ideological lines, there are identifiable conservative and liberal lexicons. Christopher Hitchens noted when reporting on a conference of the 'neo-conservative' Committee for the Free World:

It is not unfair to say that their politics have mainly consisted of key words and phrases, uttered with the proper sneer: 'Finlandization,' 'disinformation,' 'dupe,' 'ripe fruit,' 'choke point,' 'fellow traveler,' 'strategic lifeline,' 'fifth columnist,' 'dagger pointed at the heart of,' 'gullible,' 'useful idiot,' 'satellite state,' 'infiltration,' 'Chamberlain's

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Hitchen’s piece is an expose of the power of political lexicon. For example, Jeane Kirkpatrick’s rise to the post of United Nations Ambassador for the Reagan Administration can plausibly be attributed to the power of the distinction (for the promotion of which she is credited,) between ‘authoritarian’ nations (like South Africa) and ‘totalitarian’ nations (who compose the Soviet bloc).

A selective lexicon helps to define the parameters of discourse. Hitchens argues that the neo-conservative movement controlled their strategic discourse by selective attribution of meaning. This practice served them well:

. . . by attributing the global design to the ‘totalitarian’ foe (‘arc of crisis,’ ‘soft underbelly,’ ‘Southern flank’) the Cold War propagandists were able to remain indirect and even defensive about a plan of their own. It was an axiom of ‘containment’ that no part of the known world could be considered neutral.

According to theories of discourse, what is not discussed may be as significant as what is discussed. For example, members of the ideological school Hitchens calls neo-conservative are reticent to discuss the astonishing events of the last year throughout Eastern Europe.

The Gorbachev revolution of 1989 dealt a severe blow to the ‘neo-conservative’ movement, precisely because it calls into question the use of "the neocon Ur-word, the echt word: ‘totalitarian.” Hitchens explains:


6 Hitchens, “Neoconservatives,” p.68.

7 Hitchens, “Neoconservatives,” p.66.

8 Hitchens, "Neoconservatives," p.65 italics in original.
Either the Soviet Union had metamorphosed from a 'totalitarian' to an 'authoritarian' state, impossible according to Kirkpatrick's theory, or 'totalitarianism' had never been what it was thought to be; either way, the neo-conservative movement was now robbed of its theoretical undergirding — was an intellectual and moral shambles.

When the lexicon of the movement became obsolete, Hitchens implies, so too did the movement itself. The power of the lexicon in defining discourse is such that what had been used to such advantage by the neo-conservatives in the past now trapped them and left them unable to communicate with the rest of the world.

*From Event to Discourse*

The discourse on the Cuban missile crisis is a discourse about closeness to thermonuclear war. Because the United States was seen to be so close to nuclear conflict with the Soviet Union in 1962, its national security (and thus the security of each citizen) was in peril. This is sufficient reason for selectiveness in the discourse on the Cuban missile crisis. According to Foucault, one role of discourse control is to cope with chance events. Foucault introduced a concept called the *materiality* of event. This concept will strike a familiar chord to anyone who has studied the historical shock wave of events as significant as the assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand or the crisis in Cuba. The awesome materiality of the closeness to war in 1962 is the fundamental reason for the discourse on the Cuban missile crisis.

*History, as documentation or craft, is an agent of knowledge accumulation. It is here, through the history of the event, that one may begin to identify the imposition of structure:*

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History does not turn its back on events; on the contrary, it is continually enlarging the field of events constantly discovering new layers...What is significant is that history does not consider an event without defining the series to which it belongs, without specifying the method of analysis used, without seeking out the regularity of phenomena and the probable limits of their occurrence, without enquiring about variations, inflexions and the slope of the curve, without desiring to know the conditions on which these depend.

The names by which the discourse is organized, in the US, the 'Cuban missile crisis,' in the USSR, the 'Caribbean crisis,' identify the event as belonging to a set or series of events, actions and communications that together are labelled as 'crisis.' There is a certain amount, a crucial amount, of shared memory underlying the common use of the term 'crisis.' Because policy-makers, social scientists and others are greatly concerned about crisis, which above all, signifies a closeness to war, greater understanding regarding the occurrence of this phenomenon is has been doggedly pursued. Analytical methods themselves follow structural patterns to improve understanding. Analyses based upon the premise of the state as a unitary actor would have a logical structure different from that of analyses which examine the role of sub-systemic forces in the determination of policy. Furthermore, studies of the Cuban missile crisis are almost always concerned with a larger, intricate web of corresponding analysis, regarding arms race stability, escalation dominance, crisis decision-making, etcaetera. The persistence of academic and policy interest in these related analyses helps to explain the persistence of academic and policy interest in the Cuban missile crisis.

10 Hitchens, "Neoconservatives," p.230

11 Theorists of war have long been seeking the appropriate blend of diplomacy and nuclear coercion. Practical matters in the nuclear age are complex, and policy-makers have a need to understand and manage strategic problems. Academics in this sense have been working to fill a policy void. The reasons for the prominence of the Cuban case are not hard to find.
It should be understood that events not only serve in the making of history; they, too, are often discovered or rediscovered through history. As noted earlier, knowledge is not static, so one may expect no less from history. With the Cuban missile crisis, as in the case of any retrospective, the past can only be viewed and interpreted from a succession of changing present contexts:

...historical descriptions are necessarily ordered by the present state of knowledge, they increase with every transformation and never cease, in turn, to break with themselves.12

The use of history in the policy sphere and, perhaps less obviously but more importantly in decision literature, implicitly endorses that given historical interpretation. Davis Bobrow is a political scientist interested in the discourse on the Cuban crisis as it relates to his interest in the use of historical maxims. First, he noted that use of historical maxims in analysis of international security matters is a controversial practice.13 Second, the use of history in this way is of special significance because

memory as embodied in a 'mental structure' based upon past experience pervasively influences what is recalled and indeed noticed. Conveyed history, like that of the Cuban missile crisis, is then both shaped by that structure and shaping what people attend to in new situations.14

12 Foucault, Archaeology, p.5.


14 Bobrow, "Stories," p.188. Italics added.
Bobrow points explicitly to decision study on the crisis, and the implicit belief in the importance of history by "creators of the new decision technologies as applied to international affairs." Bobrow offers this warning:

Warranted reliance on these decision technologies demands confidence in the standards for the use of history followed by their developers.15

The integrity of some decision studies on the Cuban crisis is already an issue, thanks to alternative interpretations of data and methodological criteria.16


16 David Welch has entered into debate with Gregory Herek, Irving Janis and Paul Huth regarding the integrity of the latter authors' study of the Cuban crisis. See David A. Welch, "Crisis Decision Making Reconsidered," and Gregory M. Herek, Irving L. Janis, and Paul Huth, "Quality of U.S. Decision Making During the Cuban Missile Crisis: Major Errors in Welch's Reassessment," in Journal of Conflict Resolution Vol.33, No. 3 (September 1989), pp.430-445 and 446-459, respectively. Some disagreement about the facts is evident in the dialogue between these authors, but the substance of their dispute relates to the implications of the evidence for the criterion of the Herek et. al. study. See also Bruce J. Allyn, James G. Blight and David Welch, "Essence of Revision: Moscow, Havana, and the Cuban Missile Crisis," International Security Vol.14, No.3 (Winter 1989/90), pp.201-222.
Discourse Disrupted

Harmony in the discourse on the crisis was disrupted long before recent evidence was introduced. This can be attributed to two factors. First, some American academics studying the crisis had an agenda different from the reminiscing crisis participants who had begun publishing memoirs. These academics are responsible for what can be considered a second phase of conventional wisdom. A different face of the crisis was exposed to a relatively limited audience in the academic and policy spheres.¹⁷

In its criticism of the Kennedy decision-making during the crisis, Graham Allison's "Conceptual Models" broke with the narrative tradition of the Kennedy team memoirs, and even with the concept of the state as a unitary actor. Allison argued that Kennedy's abilities as a rational actor in the crisis were mitigated by the 'non-rational' forces of bureaucratic politics and the operational selectiveness of organizational systems. A host of other decision studies also undertook the task of questioning the conduct of the Kennedy team. Allison's empirical work, based mostly on interviews of Kennedy's team, became an encyclopaedia of information for Cuban crisis analysts.¹⁸

¹⁷ Kennedy was much appreciated by Harvard academic, many of whom he had included in the Administration. The White House, nicknamed "Camelot," became a meeting ground for great intellects. See David Halberstam, The Best and the Brightest (New York: Random House, 1969). Scholars and practitioners intermingled to the extent that today some of the most renowned scholars on the crisis, for example Robert McNamara and Raymond Garthoff, were themselves practitioners during the crisis.

Secondly, an evolving state of knowledge about management of nuclear/military forces that may not have included information specifically on the Cuban case may have led some analysts to look again at the Cuban crisis for evidence in support of recent findings. As the Americans and Soviets 'hardened' their nuclear forces, by placing them in concrete silos resistant to pre-emptive strike, or placing them on difficult-to-target submarines, for example, there was growing concern that the US would become vulnerable to a pre-emptive strike against its command, control and communications (C³). Analysts, such as John Steinbruner, looked to the dispersal of strategic (nuclear) forces during the Cuban missile crisis as an example of a situation unconducive to effective C³. Calling the Cuban case forward in this respect may lead to further examination of the history by analysts disputing or amending recent claims, even if the original topic as such was not the Cuban crisis.

In a more general sense, there have been in the intervening years larger debates on American security policy. In particular, one can point to a resurrection of the anti-nuclear movement in response to the fear of nuclear war associated with the early years of the Reagan presidency. Such ideological polarization in the larger debate would increase ideological polarization on the lessons of Cuba as the competing camps used the Cuban metaphor to support their cases.

In the course of more than twenty-five years, historical interpretations of the Cuban missile crisis have quite naturally acquired more and more dimensions. Chapter II will review the conventional wisdom on the crisis and follow with an exploration of the expansion of knowledge to the

present. Chapter III will examine the policy debate so that the empirical facts can be assessed in light of the ideological frameworks of competing interpretations of the crisis.
CHAPTER 11: CONVENTIONAL WISDOM

This chapter discusses the political necessity of myths and illusions and describes the set of perceptions and premises which have become known as conventional wisdom on the Cuban crisis. The mythology of the conventional wisdom promotes trust in the President as the custodian of nuclear weapons. For most, the discourse on the Cuban missile crisis does not expand beyond the conventional wisdom. This chapter will explain how the conventional wisdom came to be generated, describe its major principles and estimate their implications. In the years since the crisis occurred, academic and foreign policy specialists have expanded the discourse on and mythology of the crisis. This chapter will also examine the re-interpretation of the crisis widely circulated in academic and policy circles, an interpretation which might be called a second body of conventional wisdom. This interpretation was produced by a paradigm shift within political science which re-oriented retrospective analysis of the decision-making of the Kennedy team.

Decision theory focuses upon political process, not evaluation of outcome. Graham Allison's seminal analysis suggested that "irrational" forces, including the limited ability to perceive options because of the constraints of bureaucratic operational procedures, hindered the effectiveness of Kennedy's decision-making. This body of conventional wisdom, upon examination, contains myths which are similar to, although rather more sophisticated than, the original conventional wisdom. Whereas the conventional wisdom promotes the notion that the United States survived the Cuban missile crisis because of the system, the analyses by Graham Allison and others argued that the United States survived the Cuban missile crisis in spite of it. This type of study is ultimately system-
reinforcing: such analysis implicitly suggests that while the political process may require reformation, it should not be abandoned altogether.

Finally, this chapter will discuss recent information on the which challenges reigning myths about the crisis. As a body of politically necessary myths, conventional wisdom can not accommodate that which contradicts its essentially conservative purpose. New evidence has therefore been interpreted restrictively and selectively so as to reconcile its critique of the American foreign policy system with an implicit mandate of preserving it.

The discourse on the missile crisis has expanded because the elite debate on arms policy became increasingly polarized as the US and Soviet military systems modernized their respective strategic forces. The arms race of the 1970s and 1980s helped provoke an increasing polarization in the debate on the 'lessons' of the Cuban crisis. The theory of discourse presented in Chapter I indicated that, as historical interpretation is bounded by ideological structures, ongoing revelations of history will also be correspondingly structured. Different beliefs about how best to achieve security have led lead to various factions in the debate on arms policy in the United States to interpret the crisis selectively. Chapter III introduces the ideological debate on the crisis and illustrates the way in which evidence has been interpreted in conformity with belief systems.

The limitations of the scholarly discourse in incorporating the new evidence indicate that while there is an ostensibly flourishing debate, such debate takes place within the confines of structurally necessary consensus: specifically, it should be noted that no one in the mainstream debate has ever advocated removing nuclear weapons from the control of the President.
THE POLITICAL NECESSITY OF MYTH

The manufacture of a broad-based consensus is necessary to the governance of any large society. Opinions vary as to the degree to which conformity is required (or actually imposed) in order to run a democracy, but most will agree that some minimum structure of consensus is necessary. Noam Chomsky argued in Necessary Illusions that the construction of political mythology is an important way in which the attentive public achieves a common (and appropriate) understanding of events. For example, "the yearning to see American style democracy duplicated throughout the world is a persistent theme in American foreign policy," as is the "crucial, doctrine, standard throughout history... that the state is adopting a defensive stance, resisting challenges to order and to its noble principles." According to Chomsky's theory, these images of the United States subtly guide the direction of foreign policy discourse.

Chomsky differentiated elites from masses, and argued that the masses are subject to manipulation. For example, having observed that the democratic process is not always efficient, Chomsky, (notorious for his critical approach), drew pessimistic conclusions about what happens to the public when a nation is in crisis and has no time for the democratic process:

the general public must be reduced to its traditional apathy and obedience, and driven from the arena of political debate and action, if democracy is to survive.3

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1 Neil Lewis, New York Times, Aug. 6, 1987. Cited in Noam Chomsky, Necessary Illusions: Thought Control in Democratic Societies. (Montreal:CBC Enterprises, 1989); hereafter cited as Chomsky, Necessary Illusions p.49. Lewis was a New York Times diplomatic correspondent commenting, ironically, on the Haitian elections which the "US-backed military government suppressed...by violence, widely predicted to be the likely consequence of US support for the junta. These sad events, he [Lewis] observed, are 'the latest reminder of the difficulty American policy-makers face in trying to work their will, no matter how benevolent, on other nations'" Chomsky, Necessary Illusions p.49.

2 Chomsky, Necessary Illusions, p.49.
John F. Kennedy announced the discovery of the Soviet missile sites in Cuba in a dramatic address to his nation. Clearly, he was not attempting to promote public apathy. The fear of nuclear war is not something one invokes to create apathy. Instead, he implicitly called upon public obedience. His dramatic speech provoked an emotional response within his audience. This response served him well in silencing critics and establishing a consensus (based upon fear) that was necessary to promote an image of unity and resolve that was essential for US credibility. In short, Kennedy needed to promote the perception that the nation was with him and to demonstrate his resolve to act decisively.

The visceral aspects of the crisis, politically exploited so, played an important role in the crisis itself, and in the creation of the conventional wisdom that would govern later recollections. The entire nation lived through the crisis. As such, this led to mass discourse on the event. It is natural that those who experienced the crisis, whether as bystanders or active participants, would seek to reconcile the passing danger with a need for reassurance that there is a basis for belief in the security of their state. The conventional wisdom on the missile crisis both accommodates the felt need to believe in US security, but also permits expression of a range of visceral responses to the nuclear terror of October 1962.

3 Chomsky, Necessary Illusions, p.3.

4 In order to respond emotionally, as so many did to the crisis, one must have internalized the experience. Thus, the crisis touched individuals. Individuals, however, live in society. The experience was shared in the sense that the danger of nuclear war was a crisis for the nation as a whole. As Foucault's theory explains, that which was subjective in initial sensation (individual, emotional response) may become intersubjective (acquire shared meaning), because individuals in society share a language through which understanding is not only expressed, but structured and deepened. Hence, the generation of discourse on the crisis: The internalization of experience is a basic proposition in the larger theory of how discourse on the crisis came into being. Emotion is a personal expression and as such, one may safely assume it is the product of an internal construction. It is true that one may express an
Over a period of twenty years an historical but politically charged discourse developed on the crisis. The language of the discourse is far from neutral. The structural system of presidential control is the beginning point of the discourse. Carnes Lord, in his reflections on presidential management of national security, observed that the President is in a unique situation because "the President alone is in a position to exercise strategic leadership of the nation."\(^5\) He continued:

It goes without saying that the requirements of strategic leadership vary according to circumstances and the purposes of individual presidents. These requirements are most exigent in time of war. Yet their character, deriving as it does from the constitutional and customary functions of the presidency itself, remain fundamentally constant over time.\(^6\)

Conventional wisdom created a mythical image of the President which served a political purpose. The discourse is bounded, constructed in such a way as to build trust in the political leadership of the United States. The conventional wisdom serves to reconcile the danger of the crisis felt by the electorate with their need to feel secure. It accomplishes this by portraying Kennedy as a capable and strong leader who 'stood the Soviets down' in the zero-sum game of nuclear blackmail. Flexing of American military muscle and the compelling use of television enabled John F. Kennedy to turn crisis into political opportunity. Even a cursory glance at the conventional emotion, such as anger, without actually feeling it, but it is safe to assume that the experience of the missile crisis provoked a genuine emotional response among those who experienced it.

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6 Lord, The Presidency, p.32. Lord is a former Reagan Administration official reacting in part to the Iran Contra Scandal. Lord concludes the "It can not be reasonably expected -- or indeed would be desirable -- for the President to exercise command of the bureaucracy in the sense in which he exercises command of the armed forces in wartime," but "the President is in need of greater resources to counterbalance the power of the bureaucracy, and a different approach to managing it." (p.33).
wisdom on the crisis reinforces the thesis that crisis may shift power to the executive. Lord affirmed that crisis concentrates power in the presidency:

That crisis management is preeminently a White House or NSC (National Security Council) function has been generally recognized at least since the Cuban missile crisis of 1962.

Lord credits "the rapidity of modern communications and their effect on the pace of world events, the domestic political pressures on the White House to react immediately to developing international crises, and the ineffectiveness of normal bureaucratic routines under such circumstances" as having "together made sustained presidential involvement in crises virtually unavoidable." Because coordination of the government is of paramount importance in crisis, "only the President or a proximate representative can ensure that this will occur. Moreover, where the use of military force by the United States is imminent or possible, the President is directly involved in his capacity as commander-in-chief, and his relationship to the bureaucracy in general shifts perceptibly toward a stance of command."

In a fundamental, visceral sense, the President, as custodian of nuclear weapons, is the custodian of the nation's security. As Franz Schurmann persuasively argued,

Security does not come from being surrounded by a Maginot Line of ramparts but from the knowledge that someone in society is competently dealing with public safety...In the case of nuclear power, the sense of security comes from the President.

7 Franz Schurmann, The Logic of World Power p.21; cited hereafter as Schurman, Logic. Schurmann's larger argument is that crisis leads to increased power to the president who then may pursue visionary policies, leading to further crisis.

8 Lord, The Presidency p.64.

9 Lord, The Presidency p.64
The personal success of President Kennedy in 1962 was all the more remarkable given that his starting point was a dangerous dilemma. When he found himself confronted with the presence of Soviet nuclear weapons in Cuba, he began from a position of having to choose between two evils: either appearing weak against Soviet adventurism or taking excessive risks of causing war. While Soviet advances would have been politically damaging to the President, he could not risk war because US conventional unpreparedness to fight the Soviets left him with the cold comfort of the nuclear threat. Because nuclear weapons were too destructive to use, extreme caution was required by the President. In short, nuclear weapons create insecurity and the President creates security. However, the myth of the missile gap illustrates that the insecurity created by nuclear weapons was politically useful to the President.

The Illusion of Insecurity: The Missile Gap Myth

To a large extent, President Kennedy himself created the myth of insecurity which preceded the missile crisis. He had been elected on a platform promise to eliminate the "missile gap," the alleged inferiority of US strategic forces vis a vis Soviet strategic forces. His administration had recently expanded the defence budget with public support. This permissive attitude toward defense spending indicates that there was a strong sense of

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10 Schurmann, Logic, p.11. Schurmann said, "If the public feels insecure, (or is made to feel insecure), it will support virtually any level of expenditure to get back its sense of security. The man in the most decisive position to influence the public's sense of security is the President. If the man who alone has his finger on the nuclear trigger tells the country it is safe or it is threatened, the mood of the country will be correspondingly affected....A sense of security is somewhat like religious faith in its belief that there is a higher being with the power, knowledge, and presence to protect people in a threatening world constantly in turmoil...the essence of faith from which a sense of security derives is that there is a supreme being at the apex of the political system who is the fountainhead of that faith." In short, said Schurmann, "Nuclear Power has therefore created the need for a god." (p.12)
public insecurity preceding the crisis, because defence expenditures are increased only when the public feels insecure or is made to feel insecure.

Certainly the Soviet launching of Sputnik created the perception that the Soviets, having beaten the United States into space, were significantly ahead in the arms race as well. McGeorge Bundy blames the Soviets for exploiting this perception and fueling American insecurity. He accused the Soviets of deliberately leading the Americans to believe that Soviet forces were superior when indeed, they were not:

Certainly the Soviet leader attempted a large-scale deception as to the lever and quality of his own nuclear strength. He made no precise numerical claims, but in his rhetoric he played strongly to the Western readiness to believe that his head start with Sputnik implied a massive advantage in nuclear missiles. In reality, as we have seen, there was never a missile gap, and by the fall of 1961 the new American administration had full confidence in its strategic strength.\(^{11}\)

The alleged missile gap, an important issue in the 1960 Presidential elections, was, in the truest sense of the word, a myth. Nevertheless, this was a politically useful myth. Possible deception by the Soviets aside, Bundy could not overlook the fact that Kennedy had exploited the perception of a missile gap in the Presidential election,\(^{12}\) contributing at least as much as the Soviets to the generation of public insecurity.

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\(^{11}\) Bundy, *Danger and Survival*, p.381. Here Bundy conformed to Graham Allison's analysis, that "in attempting to offer an explanation -- particularly in cases where a prediction derived from a basic model has failed -- the notion of a 'mistake' is invoked. Thus, the failure in the prediction of a 'missile gap' is written off as a Soviet mistake in not taking advantage of their opportunity (to pursue full scale modernization of their forces)." Allison, "Conceptual Models," p.696.

\(^{12}\) Bundy believes that "it became entirely clear as the campaign ended that the most respected voice in the country on foreign issues still belonged to Eisenhower." With the benefit of hindsight, Bundy proclaimed Eisenhower the winner of the missile gap debate, because Eisenhower "played down" Soviet achievement. Nevertheless, he believed that Eisenhower had hurt himself politically "to have begun by pooh-poohing Sputnik. It was a sign of weakness, not strength. . .to say that the Administration had no interest in getting a high score in an outer space game." Kennedy's most successful foreign policy position, according to Bundy, "was the general claim that America had been losing prestige in the
Ironically, "the 'missile gap' as a public threat began with Sputnik and ended with American satellite reconnaissance." The US had itself developed a desperately needed technology, namely satellite reconnaissance,\(^\text{14}\) and had determined from the results of the first satellite that the missile gap was a fiction. Reconnaissance in 1960 and 1961 "persuasively demonstrated the absence of any large Soviet deployment [of Inter-Continental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs)]."\(^\text{15}\) Thus, a short time after entering office, Kennedy was to learn that the first generation of Soviet Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) were far outnumbered by US forces, and in practice more likely to be dangerous to their crews than to their designated targets. US intelligence agencies had over-estimated the deployment of Soviet SS-6 ICBMs, which the Kremlin had cut in favor of concentration upon development of the next generation of weapons. As a consequence, the Soviets were in a position of strategic military inferiority. The US had at least a four to one advantage in ICBMs in October of 1962.\(^\text{16}\)

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\(^\text{13}\) Bundy, Danger p.350.

\(^\text{14}\) Bundy said, "Probably the fact that the Soviets were the first to fly satellites, and also the first to use them for photography, helped to establish for this method of reconnaissance a level of international acceptance that was never achieved, to put it mildly, by the U-2 airplane."\(^\text{Danger (p.350).}\)

\(^\text{15}\) Bundy, Danger p.350. Discussion of the explosion of the missile gap myth is on pages 350-352.

\(^\text{16}\) Colt D. Blacker, Reluctant Warriors: The United States, the Soviet Union, and Arms Control (New York: WH Freeman and Co., 1987), p.31; cited hereafter as Blacker, Warriors. At the time of the crisis, the US was well-equipped: "By the end of the crisis the SAC systems alone ready to execute the SIOP [Single Integrated Operating Plan], irrespective of navy and other air force weapons, included almost 2,000 launchers and over 7,000 megatons – more than the total explosive power in the US arsenal today."\(^\text{Richard K. Betts, Nuclear Blackmail and Nuclear Balance. (Brookings Institution, 1987,) p.118; cited hereafter as Betts, Nuclear Blackmail.}\)
Although Kennedy learned of Soviet nuclear inferiority early in his term, Bundy concedes that "Kennedy was reluctant to admit that his campaign attack had been mistaken," and waited [until October 1961] to publicly bury the missile gap myth. It is worth noting that, in his book, Bundy speaks of waiting to publicly bury the myth, because he wrote earlier that "[former President] Eisenhower had learned enough from the first satellite to be able to say with confidence in his last State of the Union Message that the 'missile gap' showed every sign of being a fiction." Eisenhower's speech was a prominent forum, so the public was adequately informed. However, Bundy's comment suggests that Kennedy, as President of the United States, sought to control of the mythology, and the "conclusive" announcement of US superiority would come from him.

The Illusion of Security: Nuclear Superiority

In keeping with the theory of necessary myths, Kennedy waited to dispel the missile gap myth because it was still useful to the administration in building public support for funding the administration's space and defence programs. However, the administration did not want the Soviets to believe themselves superior to the US. Kennedy therefore made a point to reveal, through a speech by Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric, that the Americans were aware of the Soviet nuclear inferiority. In this way, the

17 Bundy, Danger p.352. One might think of a tangential comparison with the image of the new President Ronald Reagan greeting the returning American hostages from Iran after former President Jimmy Carter had agonized over the hostage crisis and his administration had been the one to effect their release.

18 Bundy, Danger, p.350.

19 Bundy, Danger, p.381. Gilpatric's speech was delivered on October 21, 1961, to the Business Council. Gilpatric "himself put the argument together, with staff help inside the Pentagon. But it was also an administration statement, encouraged by the president, and
missile gap myth was dispelled among those for whom it was desirable to dispel it, namely, the political elites in both the United States and the Soviet Union.

A speech to the American Business Association, however, was not the prominent forum (for dispelling the missile gap myth) that the Presidential campaign had been for promoting the myth. Public understanding of the nuclear balance almost certainly lagged behind elite understanding. Some of the attentive public may have noted the results of the satellite reconnaissance, but most probably became aware of US superiority only at the time of the missile crisis. In his televised announcement, the President presented the US as bargaining from a position of not only moral, but nuclear strength. For US military planners, the optimum impression to have made upon the general public was as follows: while the US held nuclear superiority (the President was strong), the Soviets were in a competitive position (the President’s policies must be supported to further strengthen the US). Therefore, in twisted logic, it followed that there was no missile gap because of a strong President.

The image of Kennedy which emerged from the crisis was that of a powerful but prudent leader, capable of employing the destructive power of the US but judicious in determining when to do so. A paradoxical aspect of nuclear weapons is that, given the other side also possesses them, ‘superiority’ is an asset only until used.

Gilibatric reviewed his text in advance in separate face-to-face meetings with [Secretary of State Dean] Rusk, with [Secretary of Defense Robert] McNamara, and with me [special assistant for national security affairs, McGeorge Bundy]. This speech included exposition of the measures taken ‘to improve the Western tactical position in Berlin,’ but its central theme was a sober affirmation of American nuclear strength, indeed superiority.” (p.381).

20 Kennedy may have made the announcement quietly in difference to Soviet sensitivity on the matter.
The dangers of retaliation and planetary destruction loom large. The President therefore must maintain a critical balance: first, he must appear determined to use them if truly vital interests are in peril and all other options are exhausted; secondly, he must appear determined not to use them unless absolutely necessary. Kennedy summarized what was required of him rather succinctly when he addressed the nation on October 22, 1962:

We will not prematurely or unnecessarily risk the costs of worldwide nuclear war in which even the fruits of victory would be ashes in our mouth -- but neither will we shrink from that risk at any time it must be faced.

The Elite Discourse

The importance of maintaining the balance of prudence and strength, and therefore the importance of managing the strategic forces in crisis, was evident after October 1962. A second body of conventional wisdom was created by specialists who explored in some detail the operations of government at the time.

Once the crisis ended, the American polity in general went on with their lives and were not concerned on a daily basis with nuclear weapons or the nuclear balance. Consequently, their conventional wisdom was somewhat frozen in time. However, resolution of the crisis did not bring about an end to public discourse in the arms debate. Politicians, military

21 Khrushchev himself made this point to Kennedy in private correspondence during the crisis.

22 The potential destructiveness of those very weapons was enough to make anyone reluctant to contemplate their use. The attentive public was comprised of many who had been shocked by the consequences of those weapons for Hiroshima and Nagasaki. To a large number, nuclear superiority was probably of marginal relevance.

personnel and academics continued to be concerned with the changing balance of US and Soviet nuclear forces. These elites continued to define and redefine the missile crisis in order to increase their understanding of the event, to assess and interpret its consequences, and to draw lessons from it.

Certainly, the diversity in the specialists' discourse on the crisis is important. As Robert Levine said in his discussion of the arms debate in the US, "the failure to debate can lead to a failure of democracy." The positive function of debate is to establish common direction, or consensus. However, stemming from the very fact that its purpose is to establish consensus, debates have parameters. Like the general discourse, the discourse of the elites is also bounded. Elites use the same currency of discourse (language). They, too, share myths, and as part of society they are not exempt from the need to contribute to the formation of a consensus. To the contrary, discourse at the elite level is an important mechanism for the creation of consent in liberal-democratic societies. According to Chomsky, elites are the most important targets of propaganda.

The primary targets of the manufacture of consent are those who regard themselves as 'the more thoughtful members of the community,' the 'intellectuals,' the 'opinion leaders.' An official of the Truman administration remarked that 'It doesn't make too much difference to the general public what the details of a program are. What counts is how the plan is viewed by the leaders of the community;' he who 'mobilizes the elite, mobilizes the public,' one scholarly study of public opinion concludes.

24 Levine, *Arms Debate* pp.1

25 C. Wright Mills, for example, argued in *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press 1956), that military policy is determined by elites who dominate the government system. The converse analysis, that those who are radicals are so because they are outside of the system, might also apply. Such an application suggests that radicals are outside the policy-determining discourse. To some extent this is true, in that the majority of those making national security recommendations do not advocate systemic change, but the voices from the far right and left continue to be heard by those in the middle.

One need not accept all of Chomsky’s conclusions about the manipulation of discourse in America to find valid insights in his observations. The discourse on the Cuban crisis, even among elites — perhaps especially among elites — reflects a system-reinforcing structure.

And yet, as Chapter III will show in greater detail, the Cuban missile crisis is at the center of debate within the the American strategic community. Ostensibly, debate indicates an absence of consensus and is not system-reinforcing. Held within bounds, however, debate among the elites does not abrogate the consensus, but in fact reinforces it:

Debate cannot be stilled, and indeed, in a properly functioning system of propaganda, it should not be, because it has a system-reinforcing character if constrained within proper bounds. What is essential is to set the bounds firmly. Controversy may rage as long as it adheres to the presuppositions that define the consensus of elites, and it should furthermore be encouraged within these bounds, thus helping to establish these doctrines as the very condition of thinkable thought while reinforcing the belief that freedom reigns.27

The next section presents the major themes of the conventional wisdom. Following is a discussion of the prevailing academic approach which, like the conventional wisdom, leads to conclusions about the importance of judicious presidential control of nuclear forces. Recent evidence on the crisis reveals military planning by the US which the American public may not have accepted as legitimate. Revelation of this planning may thus challenge the conventional wisdom profoundly. Furthermore, Kennedy’s consideration (and acceptance) of ‘the missile trade,’ the withdrawal of US Jupiter missiles from Turkey in exchange for the withdrawal of Soviet missiles from Cuba, suggests he was ‘a dove’ after all. Most importantly, the evidence of the ExComm transcripts shows that the Kennedy team was not so clearly divided among ‘hawks’ and ‘doves’ as the

27 Chomsky, Necessary Illusions p.48.
leading example of decision analysis has suggested. What some construed as premature foreclosure of options now appears more plausibly as a quickly achieved consensus.\textsuperscript{28}

The limitations of the debate demonstrated in this chapter are therefore less indicative of irrationality than they are indicative of an underlying policy consensus. The hawks and doves distinction, following Chomsky's theory, may have represented an artificial construct of debate which gives the illusion of free discourse.

\textsuperscript{28} Kennedy exhibited the behavior of an uncommitted thinker, which encouraged debate within the ExComm. See John D. Steinbruner, \textit{The Cybernetic Theory of Decision}. He also absented himself from many of the meetings, so the problem of groupthink was not present. See Janis, \textit{Victims of Groupthink} (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972). Interestingly, however, he tape recorded conversations in any case.
CONVENTIONAL WISDOM

The conventional wisdom contains a number of principles which revolve around three central themes: the missile threat; the President; and the outcome. This section will first present, and then explain and critique, the major principles.

The Missile Threat

Danger is part of the essence of crisis. Nuclear missiles in Cuba, according to the conventional wisdom, created a more dangerous world than ever before known. Two threats intermingled: the threat of nuclear attack on the United States, and the threat of advancing Soviet communism in the Western hemisphere.

The Cuban Missile Crisis was one of the most intense periods of tension between the superpowers; the two sides, it is commonly perceived, have never been closer to war.

This is the most pervasive element of the conventional wisdom. The crisis was a dramatic turn of events. To some, the issue of the secrecy of the missile placement and surprise of their discovery made the issue alarming and dramatic.29

The world held its breath as Soviet naval forces approached the blockade, (referred to by Kennedy as a "quarantine"), of the island.30 Western Allies became uneasy. The stockmarket dropped.31 Once a

29 At first the ExComm meetings were held in secret. This was understandable, given the Kennedy Administration's earlier denial that the possibility of missile placement in Cuba existed.

30 It now appears that the more likely catalyst to a shooting war was the challenge to US surveillance of the missile sites, following the shoot-down of an American U2 by a Soviet-controlled surface-to-air missile (SAM).
shooting war erupted, the Soviet capabilities in the Caribbean were questionable. It was thus feared by the Kennedy team that vertical escalation to nuclear conflict or horizontal escalation in another theatre would become very real dangers.

Both leaders had some interest in portraying the situation as having come close to war. For Kennedy, who appeared the victor of the conflict, the impression of having been close to war promoted the President as the nation's savior. Likewise, Khrushchev "has a very strong rhetorical interest in depicting the situation as being just hours away from war," according to Arnold Horelick, because "he's got to justify caving in." Recent evidence that a missile trade did indeed take place, (discussed in detail below), raises questions as to the completeness of Khrushchev's defeat and the willingness of Kennedy to go to war.

The Soviet move represented an open challenge in the Western hemisphere.

The Cuban crisis has retained notoriety also because the threat to US national security in an area regarded as being within the US sphere of influence. The US reaction to the Cuban-Soviet partnership illustrates a great-power response to a violation of its sphere of influence -- a direct attack on its prestige. Americans have believed for years that Latin America is an important part of the US sphere of influence. This belief dates from the Monroe doctrine and its warning to European powers to stay out of


32 Horelick, "Hawk's Cay," *OTB* p.67. It is curious to note that the US withdrawal of missiles in Turkey might make it appear Khrushchev was the victor, that he accomplished what he originally intended (the removal of the Jupiters). Nevertheless, even under Gorbachev, Soviets continue to refer to the crisis as having brought the superpowers close to war. See "Cambridge Conference," pp.225-317 *OTB*. 
American affairs. Cuba, resting as it does not far from the Florida coast, surely falls within the US sphere of influence.

While this point is axiomatic to many, others might note that the Soviets might have had a similar response to the stationing of American nuclear weapons, such as those which were at the time in Turkey, close to the Soviet Union. Conversely, the Cuban regime was friendly to the Soviets and perhaps more reasonably counted in the Soviet sphere of influence. Furthermore, others might reject the notion that domination of the Western hemisphere is a God-given right of Americans. The Soviets themselves questioned the perceived legitimacy of the US "right to rule" as follows:

By what right and by what law does the US government organize and direct aggression against another country accusing it of having established a social system and a state different from what the US wanted? ...If the US threatens Cuba, then let it draw conclusions regarding countries where American military bases are located.\(^\text{33}\)

Soviet behavior was illegitimate.

The Soviets have, for their part, been portrayed as 'dirty players,' 'secretive,' and 'breakers of promises.' Their only wisdom was in backing down. The term legitimacy acquires special meaning in this context, because the Soviets and others may well have questioned US authority to determine what was and was not legitimate.

Perhaps the most salient aspect of the legitimacy argument revolves around implicit understandings between the superpower leaders. Soviet Premier Khrushchev, in placing the missiles in Cuba, had in this view not played by the rules of the game. He violated the US sphere of influence. Kennedy had seemingly relied upon Khrushchev's promise that he would

not place missiles in Cuba. and so was embarrassed for his reliance on that promise. Paul Nitze said this in 1989:

...I was frankly annoyed at [Soviet foreign minister Andrei] Gromyko having outrageously lied about this. It was a question of the character of the opposition, so typical of the way in which the Soviets handle themselves; I thought that to knuckle under to this kind of thing was unacceptable. That’s my recollection of it.\(^\text{34}\)

The Soviets were secretive about placing the MRBMs. Americans are particularly sensitive to secretive military operations; the memory of Pearl Harbor lingers. In the classic perspective of realpolitik, however, Soviet secrecy is not surprising. It is naive to assume that the Soviets should ask permission to undertake strategic deployments from their American rivals. In a turn-around, Soviets have pointed to the American covert operations aimed at Cuba, and the naval exercise Philbriglex 62 in the Caribbean. The naval presence was ostensibly a practice run which, it just so happened, involved invading the island of ‘Vieques’ and deposing a Caribbean dictator ‘Ortsac,’ (or ‘Castro' spelled backwards).\(^\text{35}\) Philbriglex 62 included 7,500 US Marines, four aircraft carriers, twenty destroyers, four carrier task force groups, and fifteen troop carriers.\(^\text{36}\) If the covert operation had been pursued aggressively, the naval exercise might have been an important player in a major military move.

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\(^{34}\) "Nitze Interview," \textit{OTB}, p.141. Following the discovery of the missile sites, Kennedy interviewed Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko who, Kennedy hoped, would admit to the deployment. Gromyko said nothing. The Kennedy team interpreted this as ‘lying.’ Gromyko responds, however, by saying that Kennedy did not directly ask him if Soviet missiles were in Cuba, and therefore he had no opportunity to lie. See Andrei Gromyko, \textit{Memories: From Stalin to Khrushchev} (London:Arrow Books, 1989), pp.228-232.

\(^{35}\) Raymond Garthoff noted at Hawk’s Cay that three operational plans, prepared in 1961, included an airstrike, an invasion, and an invasion using tactical nuclear weapons. See "Hawk’s Cay," \textit{OTB} p.250.

\(^{36}\) Eli Abel, \textit{The Missile Crisis} pp.102-103.
Clearly, the lesson here is that communication between the superpowers can help to stabilize their rivalry. The absence of communication can lead to worst-case hypothesis regarding adversarial intentions. Leaders do not always, however, find potentially marginal stabilizations preferable to freedom of maneuver. Whether it would have made a difference in the course of events if the Americans had been warned by the Soviets that the missile deployment was planned is difficult to know, and can be only the subject of speculation.

Soviet nuclear weapons in Cuba created an intolerable security threat to the United States.

Notwithstanding the Soviet argument that the US had no right to challenge Castro’s actions, the unacceptability of the missiles is the implicit foundation of conventional wisdom on the crisis. If the missiles had been tolerable, there would have been no crisis.

The weapons were perceived by Americans as offensive in nature, meaning they were perceived to be for intended use in a first strike against the US. Labelling the missiles as offensive weapons, an ambiguous distinction at best, would, it was thought, have provided room for diplomatic maneuver. The strategy backfired when the Soviets claimed the missiles were deployed for the defense of Cuba, and hence, defensive weapons. At

37 This subject will be introduced again in Chapter III. There is one critique of Kennedy’s performance as being overly influenced by his public position. Kennedy said he would tolerate no missiles in Cuba, according to Theodore Sorensen, a Kennedy aide, because he believed the Soviets would not deploy any missiles. Sorensen implies that Kennedy would have "drawn the line," publicly, where he thought the Soviets would be. If Kennedy knew or thought that the Soviets might deploy forty missiles, for example, he might have said the US would tolerate no more than forty missiles. In this case, prior warning would have made a difference. See "Hawk’s Cay," OTB p.43.
the Hawk's Cay Conference, Abraham Chayes, the Kennedy legal advisor, was asked:

Why did the President refer to offensive missiles as intolerable in his September speech [in which the President warned the Soviets against Cuban missile deployment]. By doing so, he gave the Soviets room to dicker on semantics. Why didn't he just say that the United States would not tolerate the presence of surface-to-surface MRBMs and IRBMs?

Chayes responded:

Well, first, to back up a bit...our legal problem was that their action wasn't illegal...

The offensive/defensive distinction grew out of a legal memo written by Norbert Schlei [Assistant Attorney General, Office of Legal Counsel] in response to the question: What can we do if the Soviets put missiles in Cuba? The answer was - nothing, if the missiles are defensive in nature. That's why the President chose to speak of "offensive" missiles in his September 4 statement, which I believe was chosen because we were anticipating a legal basis for a response just in case the Soviets did deploy missiles in Cuba.38

Because Soviet forces were incapable of surviving a suppressive attack, the American assumption was plausible.39 The move was therefore readily interpreted by Americans as an arms race escalation. The Soviet placement of offensive weapons in Cuba was therefore interpreted as a provocative move which affected the strategic context.

Geo-strategic considerations were seen to clearly mean that the missiles could not remain in Cuba. Due to their closeness, the missiles in Cuba were seen to represent a more vital threat than those in Europe. The Soviets held the capability to destroy American cities. The threats of war and death were now much more closely intertwined, and reached the streets of America in an immediate sense. The image of fireblast of the kind seen in Europe during the Second World War became the image of


39 The SS-4s and SS-5s were liquid fuelled, but required a long preparation time. They appeared to be only useful for first strike attack.
Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In place of planes with deadly cargo, destruction was now carried by missiles. The public insecurity created by the missiles meant that there would have been tremendous political costs to the US Administration if nothing was done.

The Kennedy team quickly determined that the missiles were not acceptable. Rather than debating the option of doing nothing regarding the missiles, and acting as though they were not a threat, the Kennedy team instead enumerated the reasons these weapons were unacceptable. The assumption was critical, because it related the Kennedy response to the perceived need of the American people to eradicate the security threat created by the missiles.

The President
Kennedy was able to turn the missile crisis into a public relations competition with the Soviets and a personal triumph for himself domestically. He used the media to present a propaganda campaign promoting the above conceptions of Soviet behavior and motivations, and promoting his own actions as according to the norms of legitimate behavior in the international community. The Kennedy team did not closely consult with other nations about strategy, however. The concern of the ExComm was with US international prestige and leadership of the Western Alliance, not the devolution of crisis management to any other authority. Kennedy's image in the conventional wisdom is one of the President of the dominant superpower grappling with impending global conflict alone. The US penchant for unilateralism was thus reinforced by the crisis.
The crisis was a test of the President.

Many have argued that Chairman Nikita Khrushchev was unimpressed with Kennedy following what was seen to have been a poor Kennedy performance at the Vienna summit, and therefore felt empowered to make such a bold move in the Caribbean:

At Vienna and later, Khrushchev had sized up Kennedy as a weakling, given to strong talk and timorous action. The U.S. itself, he told poet Robert Frost, was "too liberal to fight." Now, in the Caribbean, he intended to prove his point.

Arnold Horelick suggested shortly after the crisis a number of reasons that may have been led Khrushchev to believe that he could successfully deploy the missiles in Cuba. One of those reasons was that the Bay of Pigs fiasco had shown U.S. reluctance to use military force against Cuba. Another reason he suggested was that the U.S. might hesitate to act against Cuba because of fear of a "horizontal" response against Berlin.

A series of conflicts regarding Berlin, another Cold War flashpoint, were very important precursors to the crisis in the Caribbean. The fate of West Berlin was of great symbolic importance. In the days prior to the discovery of the missile placement in Cuba, possible Soviet aggression in Berlin was the subject of media interest. Paul Nitze maintains today, "I thought their minimum objective was to trade their missiles for a US

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41 In simplified terms, there are considered to be two types of escalation: horizontal and vertical. When a nation that is attacked responds by attacking in another theatre, the escalation is said to be horizontal. When a nation that is attacked responds by attacking with greater force, as in responding to a deep strike attack on one's heavy artillery with tactical nuclear weapons upon incoming infantry, the escalation is said to be vertical.

42 Arnold Horelick, "The Cuban Missile Crisis: An Analysis of Soviet Calculations and Behavior," World Politics, pp.378-83; cited hereafter as Horelick, "Cuban Missile Crisis." See also the excellent general discussion in OTB, Chapter Six.
concession concerning Berlin." During the crisis itself, Kennedy and his men spoke of a possible Soviet horizontal move against Berlin in the scenario of a shooting war. The Cuban crisis has thus been spoken of as "the fourth Berlin crisis."

Also subsumed in the idea that the crisis was a personal test of the president is the notion that the US needed a success to offset previous failure in Cuba, particularly the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion. The Communist regime in Cuba survived US attempts to curtail its nationalization of American industries there. Sponsorship of the failed Bay of Pigs invasion was seen by many as a weak attempt to re-assert US will to rule. This failure brought terrible embarrassment. The US appeared unable to assert its will to rule in the region. The Soviet placement of nuclear weapons in Cuba represented an intolerable further loss of US influence and prestige.

Kennedy was careful to portray himself as negotiating from a position of strength.

His success was owed in part to his ability to convince his audiences that he was "right." Another reason for his success was that the US was conventionally superior in the Caribbean and furthermore, had more nuclear

43 "Nitze Interview," OTB, p.140.

44 Richard Betts called the Cuban missile crisis "the fourth Berlin crisis." See Betts, Nuclear Blackmail. At the Hawk’s Cay conference "the Berlin gambit" was considered as a possible motivation for the Soviet missile deployment. Under this scenario, Khrushchev was looking for a way to divert US "attention away from Berlin, and either provoke the US, into taking some military action which would justify a seizure of Berlin or present the US, with a hemispheric-threat serious enough to force a quid pro quo in which a favorable Berlin settlement would be the Soviet payoff." ("Hawk's Cay," OTB, p.117) Interestingly enough, the scholars all dismissed the Berlin theory at Hawk’s Cay. Blight and Welch acknowledge, however, that "the President, many members of the ExComm, many prominent American scholars, and much of the American public interpreted the Cuban move as part of a larger scheme involving the status of Berlin." (p.296). Blight and Welch refer to their interview with Nitze (p.140) the transcripts, Horelick, "The Cuban Missile Crisis," p.377.
missiles than did the Soviets. Although the military strength strengthened his image considerably, the conventional wisdom emphasizes the moral superiority of the president (the Soviets should have known they are not allowed in the Western hemisphere).

In comparison with more prolonged and devastating encounters between hegemonic powers, the Cuban Missile Crisis was distinctive in that it was to some extent fought on television. The Kennedy Administration employed television and radio as tools of communication and diplomacy. It was very important to Kennedy that he have the support of his domestic constituency, and the media served him well in achieving this objective.

The release of photographic evidence to the world, when it came on October 22, was powerful – as it was meant to be. The entire continent was now exposed to the tension which the ExComm had experienced in secret since October 16. Whether or not the missiles in Cuba were a military threat, the presence of such weapons so close to the US created an almost tangible sense of menace. Yet Kennedy was also concerned with "diplomatic initiative," and that he have the support of international as well as domestic as well as international opinion.

45 The US had something like 3,000 warheads to the Soviet's 250. See OTB p.250.

46 Perhaps due to the importance of media strategy, Kennedy's press secretary was included in the ExComm deliberations.

47 John F. Kennedy himself made the crisis memorable. His was a figure to capture imagination, with or without his performance at the October 22 briefing. "The Kennedy mystique" was powerful. He was young, handsome, and a hero. A generation of young Americans looked to him as their hope for the future. J.F.K. was a dramatic president, and the Cuban Missile Crisis was his great drama. The Kennedy mystique has of course been disintegrating in the years since his death. His image has suffered exposure of his promiscuity, his alleged affair with Marilyn Monroe and insinuations of indirect, perhaps, but implicit involvement in her death. Allegations regarding abuse of amphetamines and other drugs have also surrounded his memory. One may wonder if the mystique survives at all.
The media therefore was a diplomatic tool for the Kennedy Administration on both the domestic and international fronts. Through the Voice of America (VOA) Kennedy’s message was received throughout the world. His briefing was sent to Latin America in Spanish and Portuguese simultaneous to the US broadcast. The address was then translated into thirty-seven languages and broadcast globally at peak listening times. The US made its case against Cuba and the USSR in a large-scale propaganda campaign.

The Kennedy Administration sought to legitimize its actions against Cuba by referring to international law. Interviews with former officials indicate that their interest in the letter of international law was a function of interest. Like the use of the term ‘offensive weapons,’ the term ‘quarantine’ was also a legal manipulation, as revealed by Paul Nitze in this passage:

Nitze: ...Acheson stated his view unambiguously: ‘The hell with international law. International law gets made, it’s just a series of precedents and decisions that have been made in the past. But this is a unique situation and this is one in which one can, and should, make international law rather than just follow past precedents. And if you’re troubled with what the books say about the blockade, then change the name.’ And then somebody came up with ‘quarantine.’

Through such successful manipulation of images, including the military ‘quarantine,’ his own public persona, and the nature of the Soviets, Kennedy thus successfully passed the test of October 1962.

48 US allies were initially supportive, as the US had caught the Soviets “red handed” and had photographs to prove it. Furthermore, Kennedy’s statements were carefully worded to include allied nations in the US nuclear umbrella.


50 “Nitze Interview” OTB, p.143.
The Outcome

The Cuban missile crisis served to strengthen the President personally, by virtue of his successful maintenance of the US security position. It showed the seriousness of the nuclear weapons threat and the dangerous nature of superpower brinksmanship.

Deterrence worked.

The Americans implemented the highest ever level of nuclear alert. Defense Condition (DEFCON) 3 was in effect from October 22 until November 20, 1962. SAC was placed on DEFCON 2.51 Scott Sagan describes the SAC preparations:

1. Battle staffs were placed on 24-hour alert duty.
2. All leaves canceled and personnel recalled.
3. 183 F-47 bombers were dispersed to 33 preselected civilian and military airfields.
4. The B-52 airborne alert training program was expanded so that 1/8th of the force was airborne in a continuous series of 24-hour flights, with an immediate replacement for every bomber that landed. Fifty-seven bombers and 61 tankers were airborne. Forty-nine of the B-52s, with 182 nuclear weapons aboard, were on station, ready for execution orders.
5. Additional B-52 and B-47 bombers and tankers were placed on enhanced ground runway alert. The ground alert force totaled 672 bombers and 381 tankers, with a total of 1627 nuclear weapons on board.
6. Ninety Atlas and Titan ICBMs were placed at a heightened state of readiness.52

51 There are five gradations of DEFCON status, the lowest of which is DEFCON 5 or peacetime alert. Strategic Air Command (SAC) is however routinely kept at DEFCON 4. Likewise, "forces located close to areas of intense combat are often also kept at higher levels of alert." Scott Sagan, "Nuclear Alerts and Crisis Management," International Security vol.9 no.4 (Spring 1985) p.101; cited hereafter as Sagan, "Nuclear Alerts".

Marc Trachtenberg noted that the United States indeed made "very serious preparations for nuclear conflict," and referred to General Burchinal's comments on the visibility of the alert:

We had SAC bombers on alert with weapons in the bomb-bays on civilian airfields all over the US. We dispersed the air defense force, with nuclear weapons, also on civilian airports all over the country...all these moves were signals the Soviets could see and we knew they could see them. We got everything we had, in the strategic forces, nuclear forces, counted down and ready and aimed and we made damn sure they saw it without anybody saying a word about it.\footnote{Trachtenberg, Marc, "The Influence of Nuclear Weapons in the Cuban Missile Crisis," International Security, (Summer 1985), p.157; cited hereafter as Trachtenberg, "Influence."}

The Kennedy broadcast of October 22 sealed the US commitment to the Caribbean. The deterrent power of US forces were evoked to defend the entire Western hemisphere from the Cuban nuclear threat. Kennedy declared that the Soviets would themselves be targeted. US policy would be:

\begin{quote}
\textit{to regard any nuclear missile launched from Cuba against any nation in the Western Hemisphere as an attack by the Soviet Union on the United States requiring full retaliatory response upon the Soviet Union.}\footnote{New York Times, October 23, 1962, cited in Horelick, "The Cuban Missile Crisis," p.370; emphasis added.}
\end{quote}

There is little doubt that many were left with the impression that the US display of military might left Khrushchev with little choice but to acquiesce. The Cuban crisis is described as a deterrence success in the sense that the US display, and underlying nuclear superiority, prevented Khrushchev from using the missiles in Cuba to blackmail the United States. However, some analysts of coercive diplomacy may credit Kennedy with only a short term success but a longer term failure:

Here a short-term success in removing a Cuban-based military threat to the US homeland would be juxtaposed against a longer-term...
Cuban-based threat (Soviet Bear bombers, advanced MIGs, and nuclear-associated naval capabilities).  

The Soviets capitulated.

Khrushchev was quick to reassure Kennedy. Although the first official statement from the Soviets on October 23 continued to deny the existence of offensive nuclear weapons in Cuba, it also offered the following:

Nuclear weapons, which have been created by the Soviet people and which are in the hands of the people, will never be used for the purpose of aggression.\(^{55}\)

United Nations Secretary General U Thant proposed on October 24 a simultaneous suspension of Soviet arms shipments and the US blockade. Khrushchev had accepted the proposal the same day.\(^{57}\) The US however, held firm. Cessation of the shipments was not guaranteed to eradicate the missile threat. Kennedy gave the Soviets a time limit:

On October 26, Robert Kennedy told Ambassador Dobrynin that the President could delay action no more than two days. Meanwhile, anti-aircraft missiles were being moved into Key West [Florida].\(^{58}\)

The cause and effect inferences about Soviet capitulation are curious. The crisis ended (effect). Therefore, the condition of mutual fear, coupled with US superiority and a firm ultimatum (cause) must have achieved its objective. Recent revelations discuss the removal of US Jupiter missiles in Turkey (effect) shortly after the crisis, as related to the Soviet proposal to trade missiles (cause). These revelations will be discussed further below. It should be noted here, however, that the conventional wisdom, (that under no circumstances would Kennedy have brokered a deal), has been dispelled.


\(^{57}\) Leighton, The Cuban Missile Crisis, p.33.

\(^{58}\) Leighton, The Cuban Missile Crisis, p.34.
This evidence suggests that the desired effect (an end to the crisis), was caused by an independent variable which is very different from nuclear coercion. Furthermore, if Khrushchev did receive the concession of Jupiter withdrawal, than his capitulation was not complete. Nor was Kennedy’s victory.

Nuclear weapons acknowledged as the currency of superpower blackmail.  

Because it has been regarded as the first real, and most significant crisis in the nuclear era, the Cuban case has achieved the status World War I had previously held as the pre-eminent case study of crisis. The United States in 1962 was a nation still learning to deal with the difficulty of nuclear weapons management. Americans, perceiving a vital interest to be under threat, were well aware that their strategic doctrine relied on nuclear deterrence. The Kennedy Administration communicated US reliance on nuclear superiority to the Soviet, international and domestic audiences in very real terms. Because many laypersons think of superpower conflict in terms of an immediate use of nuclear weapons, the sense of security some find in US reliance on nuclear threats was a two-edged sword. Thinking

59 Nuclear deterrence as a factor in crisis has made its way into the conventional wisdom on the cmc in such a way as to reinforce the doctrine of deterrence without necessarily communicating to the American people what the Soviets may (or may not have) known all too well -- that US nuclear forces were vastly superior to those of the USSR.

60 Other crises, such as Eisenhower’s Quemoy-Matsu crisis and the several Berlin crises are less represented in the literature as representative of crisis in the nuclear era.

61 Irrational behavior in crisis had been dealt with at a cultural level, for example, in the highly successful film Dr. Strangelove. Among the political elite, the management of nuclear forces was a growing concern, particularly with respect to the difficulties in achieving an optimum blend of civilian and military control of those forces. Robert McNamara disagreed with some prominent thinking about targeting Soviet military forces and possibly fighting a nuclear war with the objective of ‘prevailing.’
about superpower conflict in terms of nuclear war also reinforces within the conventional retrospective the seriousness of the Cuban crisis.

The recognition that nuclear weapons are the currency of superpower blackmail also reaffirms that the essence of the superpower relationship is a bipolar management of nuclear weapons. The rest of the world could only watch helplessly as the two strongest nations seemed to approach a war that, it was feared, would be of greater devastation than ever before known. The President of the United States thus acquires greater authority, not only as commander in chief of the armed forces, but as the top negotiator with the rival power. The leaders of both nations acquired greater importance as arbiters of the planet's peace.

The crisis marked a turning point in superpower relations.62

The argument that the Cuban missile crisis was a watershed event in international relations is perhaps the greatest myth about the crisis. It implies that the crisis was a catalyst to change; after the crisis the world was a significantly different place than it was before.

The installment of the superpower Hot Line, the signing of the Nonproliferation and the Limited Test Ban Treaties have been cited in support of this myth. Within political science the crisis inspired
ground-

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62 Among other reasons, it makes intuitive sense that the proximity of Soviet missiles and apprehension about a military conflict between the superpowers would provide motivation for the leaders of the two sides to seek better relations. P. Terence Hopmann and Timothy D. King argued this point effectively in 1967 when they asserted that the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty was a direct, and positive, outgrowth of the Cuban Crisis and superpower awakening to the horror of nuclear conflict. See "From Cold War to Detente: The Role of the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty," in Ole Holsti, Randolph Silverson and Alexander George (eds.) Change in the International System, (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1967) pp.163-188.
breaking study in the application of decision analysis, suggesting a paradigm shift.

However, examination of the superpower rivalry before and after the crisis reveals that in the larger picture the world was not a remarkably different place. Spheres of influence were not changed but reaffirmed following the Cuban challenge. Soviet strategic inferiority was also reinforced. Arms Control efforts had begun before the crisis and continued after. Although the causal connection is a bit thin, it has been argued that Americans misinterpreted the lessons of Cuba and became embroiled in the Vietnam conflict on the basis of renewed belief in the domino theory and the importance of strategic superiority.63

It is clear that strategic modernization of both sides' forces did not come to a dramatic halt:

The limited Test Ban Treaty, the Nonproliferation Treaty, and several other agreements brought some progress along these [arms control] lines, while SALT I put a ceiling on [sic] offensive missiles and stopped the deployment of ABM systems. But MIRVs, cruise missiles, and accurate warheads were not forestalled, as they might have been by agreements to ban their testing. The Vladivostok accords set offensive force ceilings quite high. The promise of an early SALT II agreement evaporated in delays, and when it was finally signed at the end of the 1970s it was not ratified by the US Senate.64

In many ways, then, the consequence of the Cuban missile crisis was not change, but reinforcement of existing trends. In particular, elite management of national security matters in the US was seen to acquire even more importance following the crisis. Like the mythology of the conventional wisdom, the body of decision study on the crisis is testimony to that fact.


THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM II

Graham Allison's examination of the decision-making of the Kennedy team has become legend in American political science. This work, which served as the foundation of many other writings on the crisis, is very familiar to most of the American academic and policy elite. This section will first introduce recent evidence to critique the principles of the specialist's conventional wisdom. Secondly, the methodological approach itself contributed to the structure of discourse on the crisis.

Although Allison's work promoted deeper inquiry into the facts of the crisis, it was first and foremost a theoretical exercise. "Improved understanding of the crisis depends in part on more information and more probing analyses of available evidence," he said. "But here the missile crisis serves primarily as a grist for a more general investigation." Allison's methodology deserves comment here. As he himself suggested, selective use of models produces selective conclusions:

Conceptual models both fix the nets that the analyst drags through the material in order to explain a particular action or decision and direct him to cast his net in certain ponds, at certain depths, in order to catch the fish he is after.

The process oriented approach taken by Allison was itself a methodological trend that structured some ensuing inquiries. This approach will be assessed for conformity to the mythological purpose of the discourse,

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namely, the promotion of the Executive, specifically the President, as arbiter of US national security.

Principles of the New Conventional Wisdom

Allison’s work presented a number of principles which became part of the specialists’ conventional wisdom on the crisis. These principles include the following: First, that the Executive Committee of the National Security Problem was divided between hawks and doves; secondly, that Kennedy was strongly influenced by moral considerations, and finally, that the actions taken by the Administration reflected considerations of domestic politics.

The Executive Committee was divided between Hawks and Doves

When confronted with the evidence of missiles in Cuba, the initial Kennedy Administration choice was said to have been between pursuing diplomatic avenues and doing nothing. The latter option was based upon Robert McNamara’s analysis that “a missile is a missile.” When it became clear to his advisors that Kennedy felt he must do something, the options were modified to have been between pursuing diplomatic avenues and responding militarily. The decision-makers had to conduct a value trade-off of the two. The military option, (specifically, an air strike against Cuba as promoted by ‘the hawks,’ the Joint Chiefs of Staff, McCon, Rusk, Nitze and Acheson), could remain on standby; the diplomatic option could not be exercised simultaneously with a military option. ‘The doves,’ McNamara, Robert Kennedy and Sorensen, feared that once a military action was taken,


68 McNamara saw that the closing of the missile gap was inevitable. His analysis followed that it would eventually make no difference in any case whether the missiles are coming from the continental USSR or from Cuba. See Allison, “Conceptual Models,” p.714.
conflict with the Soviets became much more probable. Competition between Kennedy's advisors is said to have influenced the outcome of the compromise, "Who supported the air strike... as much as how they supported it, counted." According to Allison, a coalition was formed around the idea of a naval blockade:

A coalition, including the President, thus emerged from the President's initial decision that something had to be done; McNamara, Robert Kennedy, and Sorensen's resistance to the air strike; incompatibility between the President and the air strike advocates; and an inaccurate piece of information [that an air strike against Cuba could not be surgical].

The naval blockade of Cuba has been presented, then, as a compromise between the hawks and doves. The blockade had the effect of sending a clear signal to the USSR without eliminating the opportunity for talks. Meanwhile, the blockade did not negate opportunities for further military force.

Allison's original conception of the options as an air strike, a blockade, or diplomatic efforts seems misplaced. The options disappeared in this form early on in the deliberations, as the synthesis of the blockade (with options) emerged. The blockade enabled the Administration to pursue a two-track strategy of military and diplomatic options. In this sense, it was a maximizing strategy that was seen to put off the value trade-off.

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70 Allison, "Conceptual Models," p.715. The "inaccurate information" will be discussed further in Chapter III.

71 Graham Allison, James Blight, Joseph Nye and David Welch

One would be hasty to conclude, however, that the blockade was a non-military option on the basis of the argument that the hawks did not succeed in their promotion of an air strike. Allison's delineation of the reasons the blockade was preferred to the air strike were as follows:

1) It was a middle course between inaction and attack, aggressive enough to communicate firmness of intention, but nevertheless not so precipitous as a strike;
2) It placed on Khrushchev the burden of choice concerning the next step. He could avoid a direct military clash by keeping his ships away. His was the last clear chance;
3) No possible military confrontation could be more acceptable to the US than a naval engagement in the Caribbean;
4) This move permitted the US, by flexing its conventional muscle, to exploit the threat of subsequent non-nuclear steps in each of which the US would have significant superiority.73

Something that seems hidden in the language of the discourse, (but implicit in the notion of political control), is the strategic thrust of reason numbers three and four. That the US had decisive advantage should there be engagement of forces was an important factor. As Graham Allison later claimed, naval engagement in the Caribbean would be, to US planners, the most 'acceptable' of all possible military confrontation.74 Reason number four speaks of escalation steps, "in each of which the US would have significant superiority."75 A strategy of 'escalation dominance,'76 widely attributed to be a preference of hawks, shows itself to have been an important preference of the "coalition," or the ExComm as a whole.

Two other reasons should be added to this list, however. First, the Kennedy Administration did not know whether or not the warheads were on

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the, missiles, in which case they may have been "operable" and able to launch under a US air force attack.

...as Nitze maintained, when starting down the path that might lead to war, any man with a responsible regard for the lives of American citizens had to distinguish sharply between the consequences of war before and after those missiles became operable.

Furthermore, they supposedly did not know whether the missiles were in Cuba.78 The blockade allowed the US to monitor incoming shipments to Cuba.79

Recently released CIA reports indicate that there were missiles operable by October 19, and by the 21st the President had been told that 8-12 MRBMs were ready for firing.80 Richard Ned Lebow thus concludes,

As far as the White House could ascertain, it never had a "window of opportunity," about to be closed by missiles coming on line. The situation was rather one of gradually diminishing advantage because at least some missiles were presumed to be operational from almost the beginning of the crisis.81

77 Leighton, The Cuban Missile Crisis, p.33.

78 It has recently come to light that CIA reports had indicated that some of the missiles in Cuba were operable, as early as the 15th of October, although they could not be sure whether or not there were warheads on them. Richard Ned Lebow, "The Role of Time Pressure," excerpt from forthcoming work on Cuban Missile Crisis -- personal communication -- 1988; cited hereafter as Lebow, "The Role of Time Pressure." Lebow's source is the unedited, recorded notes by David Welch at the Hawk's Cay Conference, pp.71-78.

79 Closer analysis of the conventional option reveals--that it was not without its problems. Conventional conflict threatened to erupt over US surveillance of the missile sites, demonstrating the dangers of escalation at lower levels of conflict. Because the continuance of activity at the missile sites was troubling to the Administration, the US continued surveillance overflights by U-2s. On October-27 the ExComm was informed that a Soviet surface to air missile (SAM) had shot down an unarmed U-2 flown by Major Rudolf Anderson, Jr. As the prospects for continued surveillance were diminishing, nuclear deterrence to acquire less immediate relevance, given the sense of impending conventional conflict.


81 Lebow, "The Role of Time Pressure."
This could explain Kennedy’s reluctance to cease the blockade in return for a Soviet suspension of shipments to Cuba -- such a deal would have been insufficient.

Secondly, the conventional option was probably attractive to the Kennedy Administration, which was trying to promote the doctrine of flexible response. This doctrine was intended to give the President more options than the general US war plan, or SIOP [Single Integrated Operational Plan] which called for massive US nuclear use against the Soviet Union and China. Flexible response offered the President more leverage in terms of superpower brinksmanship. Allison confirmed:

For the President, the problem was to pace and manage events in such a way that the Soviet leaders would have time to see, think, and blink.

Allison’s above statement again reinforces the myth of a President ‘in control,’ or at least trying to become so.

The blockade also conforms to an approach to Presidential control of conflict in which escalation is controlled so that the conflict may be addressed in political terms (as opposed to military) as long as possible. Robert McNamara would later say of his attempts to politically control the military blockade,

The point was that our quarantine was intended to be a political signal, not a textbook military operation, and trying to get that across to the military caused us all a lot of headaches. For twelve days I lived in the Pentagon, from the 16th to the 27th, because I feared that they might not understand that this was a communications exercise, not a military operation.

82 See Desmond Ball and Robert C. Toth, "Revising the SIOP: Taking War-Fighting to Dangerous Extremes," International Security Vol.14 No.4 (Spring 1990); pp.65-92. Flexible response also contained some controversial nuclear options which, while important, are not immediately relevant.

In conformity with the desire to assert Presidential authority, the Kennedy team preferred the blockade to an option such as invasion or air strike, which required more devolution of control to the military.\(^{85}\)

Kennedy was governed by moral considerations.

The portrayal of Kennedy as a leader influenced by moral considerations is an important part of the general conventional wisdom and was discussed at length in the previous section. Allison re-affirmed that impression of the President when he discussed Kennedy's dislike of the air strike option:

> Could the President of the United States, with his memory of Pearl Harbor and his vision of future US responsibility, order a "Pearl Harbor in reverse"? For 175 years, unannounced Sunday morning attacks had been an anathema to our tradition.\(^{86}\)

The image of Pearl Harbor masked Kennedy's dislike of the air strike option, a dislike just as easily rooted in his desire to manage military affairs (as noted above) as in his desire to conform to a general moral standard.

Morality has also been said to have also influenced the President's dislike of the air strike option because of the dangerous condition of nuclear

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84 McNamara, "Hawks Cay Conference," *OTB*, p.63. McNamara was discussing his legendary encounter with Admiral Anderson, the Chief of Naval Operations, in the Navy Flag Plot. McNamara asked Anderson what would happen when US and Soviet vessels came into direct contact. Anderson reportedly waved a Manual of Navy Regulations and said, "It's all in there." According to Abel, McNamara said, "I don't give a damn what John Paul Jones would have done; I want to know what you are going to do, now." When McNamara left, Anderson is said to have told him, "Now, Mr. Secretary, if you and your Deputy will go back to your office the Navy will run the blockade." See Elie Abel, *The Missile Crisis* (New York, 1966), p.156.

85 The hawks and doves distinction here indicates a deeper ideological approach, discussed further in the ensuing chapters. Liberals, while emphasizing the importance of Presidential control, may prefer to characterize the President as the political leader of the nation. Conservatives, who also emphasize the importance of Presidential control, might prefer to characterize the President as the commander in chief of the armed forces.

86 Allison, "Conceptual Models," p.697. In a footnote, Allison modifies his statement, and reveals the mythology: "Though this was the formulation of the argument, the facts are not strictly accurate. Our tradition against surprise attack was rather younger than 175 years. For example, President Roosevelt applauded Japan's attack on Russia in 1904." (p.697, fn.37).
standoff between the superpowers. Allison listed the danger of nuclear weapons as the first reason Kennedy formed a coalition with the doves:

McNamara's vision of holocaust set him [Kennedy] firmly against the air strike. His [McNamara's] initial attempt to frame the issue in strategic terms struck Kennedy as particularly inappropriate.87

Furthermore, this view of aggressive action has been attributed to all of the doves in the ExComm, especially Robert Kennedy. Thus, the myth of the United States as striking out militarily, only in the case of self-defense (also sometimes known as "in defense of noble principles") has been perpetuated, even in the specialist's conventional wisdom on the crisis.

Domestic politics created strategic blindness.

The creation of illusions, such as the moral force argument, would not be necessary without an audience to influence. The fundamental proposition of Kennedy's audience problem was this:

Kennedy had staked his full Presidential authority on the assertion that the Soviets would not place offensive weapons in Cuba.88

Previous to the crisis, his administration had asserted that "there is no present evidence, ...and no present likelihood that the Cuban government and the Soviet government would, in combination, attempt to install a major offensive capability."89 Republican critics had warned of the dangers that could come from the Cuban-Soviet relationship. Kennedy, his naivete

87 Allison, "Conceptual Models," p.714. Allison continued, "Once McNamara realized that the name of the game was a strong response, however, he and his deputy Gilpatric chose the blockade as a fallback."


89 McGeorge Bundy, "ABC's Issues and Answers," transcript, October 14, 1968 cited by Bundy himself in Danger and Survival p.395. Bundy commented in a footnote, "This statement may not have seemed remarkable to the people in the Soviet Embassy, because at the time they knew as little about the Cuban missile sites as I did." (p.684, fn.4).
revealed, had comparatively failed in his leadership of the nation. Hence, the oft-cited remark by Robert Kennedy to his brother, "If you hadn’t acted, you would have been impeached." The missiles in Cuba were a "domestic political problem."

Graham Allison’s analysis suggested that the consequences of domestic politics were first, insufficient consideration of intelligence, and secondly, premature closure of options. First, because the Administration had the official position that the Soviets would not dare deploy missiles in Cuba, CIA director John McCone’s warnings were dismissed as "the suspicion of a hawk." Kennedy was not informed of the missile sites in a more timely manner because "What the President least wanted to hear, the CIA was most hesitant to say plainly." In short, the CIA was aware of Kennedy’s audience problem.

Secondly, Allison accounted for early closure on the ‘do nothing’ option as stemming from his audience problem. However, it is important to note Allison’s construction of the problem. It begins with Kennedy’s emotional response to the betrayal by Khrushchev. Allison said:

... Khrushchev had assured the President through the most direct and personal channels that he was aware of the President’s domestic political problem and that nothing would be done to exacerbate this problem. The Chairman had lied to the President. Kennedy’s initial reaction entailed action.

90 Robert Kennedy, Thirteen Days p.67.
91 McNamara, "October 16."
94 Allison, "Conceptual Models," p.713. According to Gromyko, Kennedy told the Soviets that the Bay of Pigs had been a mistake, and that he was trying to restrain the aggressive tendencies of the hawks. The Soviets, likewise, felt they had made an "unambiguous communication" that they would not deploy missiles as long as the US removed the threat to
The universal moral principles violated in Khrushchev's alleged deceit are revealed to have been less significant than the superpower-leader-compendium principles violated; namely, Khrushchev made Kennedy look bad to his domestic constituency. Following the above description, Allison's next sentence was "The missiles must be removed." Allison concluded:

The alternatives of 'doing nothing' or 'taking a diplomatic approach' could not have been less relevant to his [Kennedy's domestic political] problem.

Allison's analytical construction is of special significance. First, he did not dwell on the specific negative consequences of early closure. He merely implied that Kennedy was governed by domestic political constraints. The way in which Kennedy weighed out his values, then, indicates that his domestic political problem was dominant. The 'do something' approach provided 'higher values than any alternative,' namely, 'do nothing,' when he looked to possible future outcomes of his actions.

McGeorge Bundy would later say, "The question would be political, of course, but in every sense of that encompassing word." Allison's analyses, in effect, isolated the influences of logic and politics. For this reason, his categories of analysis are unsatisfying. Lawrence Freedman called this the "logic politics dichotomy." Reducing Allison's premise to, "in the absence of logic, politics must have been at work," Freedman rightly criticizes such an artificially narrowed definition of politics. Allison and others have "mistaken the superficialities of the moment for the essence of Cuba. Their interpretation, clearly, was that the US threat was not removed. See Andrei Gromyko, Memories (London:Arrow Books, 1989), pp.226-30.


96 See Levine's discussion of policy dominance in The Arms Debate p.42.

97 Bundy Danger and Survival p.394.
Freedman challenges the sociological school to demonstrate where logic ends and politics begins, for: 

The dominance of certain perspectives and procedures in the policy-making process represents, as likely as not, a political success rather than a triumph of the rationality of a determined logician...What is controversial and what is consensual at any moment does not allow us to distinguish the political from the rational areas of policy-making. Politics may not always be manifest but it is latent wherever the possibility exists for choice in human organizations.

Not only is 'politics' inherent in those areas where 'logic' appears to prevail, but there is also 'logic' informing 'politics.'

It is at the individual level that the dichotomy breaks down. According to Freedman, "in the perception of actors personal needs are likely to be harmoniously linked with those of the country." The variable which requires operationalization is more fundamental than can be identified in an isolated decision study. Somehow, there was a bottom-line consensus within the United States that Soviet missiles in Cuba simply were not tolerable.

McGeorge Bundy defended Kennedy's commitment to do something on the basis of domestic politics. His argument was eloquent:

It is natural and understandable that, when people look back across twenty-five years of relatively tranquil if distempered coexistence both with Cuba and with hundreds of Soviet-based missiles that can reach the United States, some should find it hard to understand all this fuss about missiles in Cuba. But I do not think I exaggerate the consequences of inaction or ineffective protest in 1962. It is true that they are, in one sense, domestic political consequences...It is a cardinal error to suppose that respect for the real political consequences of a foreign policy decision is unworthy. It is true that short-run popularity is often a poor guide to action, but a decent respect for the convictions of one's own people is different...[Kennedy] was never prepared to accept the destructive and

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99 Freedman, "Logic, Politics." 445-446.

100 Freedman, "Logic, Politics." 445-446.
enduring consequences for his country of ineffective diplomatic
palaver when effective action had been so plainly promised. If the
missiles did not come out, no one would be able to conduct a sensible
American foreign policy for years to come.\textsuperscript{101}

Careful study shows that Allison himself does not really challenge the
President's actions. The implications of analysis are that the US survived the
crisis in spite of the system. (For example, the intelligence failure was
attributed to the CIA, for their reluctance to make hard decisions.) But the
implications are deeper than that: Kennedy himself survived the crisis in
spite of the system.

The notion that the President was trying to control the domestic
political problem is especially present in Allison's discussion of the blockade.
Kennedy was grouped with a coalition of doves who sought the judicious
course of blockade to mediate domestic politics. Kennedy, in the end,
comes across as the successful arbiter of the domestic politics problem.

\textbf{NEW EVIDENCE}

Re-thinking the conventional wisdom on the Crisis is now in progress, aided
by the increasing availability of evidence on the crisis. The historical record
is growing with the declassification of security documents. Most
significantly, Cuban crisis analysts have been undergoing analysis of the
recently revealed and published taped proceedings of Kennedy's Executive
Committee meetings -- startling empirical evidence heretofore unavailable.

\textsuperscript{101} Bundy, \textit{Danger and Survival} p.412. Italics added.

\textsuperscript{102}The "sanitized" transcripts are available from the Kennedy Library. Excerpts have been
published in \textit{International Security}. "White House Tapes and Minutes of the Cuban Missile
Crisis," (Summer 1985), offers a transcription of the proceedings of October 16; in Winter
1987/88 McGeorge Bundy's transcription appears, "October 27, 1962: Transcripts of the
Meetings of the ExComm." The verbatim transcripts offer opportunity for more reliable
application of some of the decision modeling which has often centered around dubious and
sometimes blatantly erroneous comments from interviews or imputations from the modeler.
Paul Anderson's study, for example, is regarded as a seminal piece in Administrative Science
The body of work devoted to the Cuban Crisis will likely continue to grow. Increasing openness by Soviets regarding their perspectives on the crisis offers promise of advancement in communication between the superpowers and in the accuracy of the historical record.

Because the Cuban case has been so prominent within literature on crisis and crisis decision-making, the results of renewed analysis of the crisis may be very significant. Changing the 'facts' in narratives on the crisis may affect the assumptions of analyses and profoundly alter the results of methodological studies.

The conventional wisdom is further revealed as mythology by recent evidence. For example, the proposed use of tactical nuclear weapons in an air attack on Cuba105 would raise doubts as to how prudent the President but based as it was upon secondary source materials it necessitates another look following the release of the transcripts. See Paul Anderson, "Decision-making by Objection and the Cuban Missile Crisis," Administrative Science Quarterly, Vol.28 (1983).


104 See Leonard Bushkoff, "Khrushchev just wasn't-thinking," Christian Science-Monitor. (October 19-25 1987); Richard Bemstein, "Soviets in Cuban Missile Crisis: New Perception is Emerging," New York Times (October 14, 1987). This information suggests that the Cuban adventure was a whimsical move by the Soviets with unexpected and potentially dangerous repercussions. Bushkoff says the following conclusion was a consensual one based upon the scholar's analysis of crisis management as a guarantor of peace: "the unpredictable factors of misjudgement, miscalculation and misinformation are likely to undercut rational calculations...the only true solution lies in sweeping arms reductions."

105 Cornell Professor Richard Ned Lebow is the reference for this information, which is so recently revealed. April 19, 1988 Professor Lebow spoke before students and faculty of political science at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C. Canada. General Maxwell Taylor (Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff) did, in fact, favor quick use of great force against Cuba so as to mitigate any retaliatory potential (in case the Cuban missiles were operable). The planned use of tactical nuclear weapons is probably not inconsistent with the military's reasoning. Nevertheless, doubt remains that such weapons would have been used
was, especially as the use of nuclear weapons is portrayed as an option of last resort in the conventional wisdom. Within the discourse on the crisis, the planned use of tactical nuclear weapons is easily dismissed as something that could have been. The moral propositions underlying the presence of this option in the war plans are left for others.

Similarly, the declassification of documents reveals that an invasion plan was constructed, and a covert operation called Mongoose was underway as the crisis occurred. The cloak of legitimacy surrounding Kennedy's actions may not, in the minds of many, weather the revelation of sabotage and subterfuge. Conversely, one might stretch the mythology of the US as a defensive nation and exonerate the President for exercising the options that he had no choice to pursue "in the nation's interest." In any case, while such evidence is intriguing, and deserving of later discussion, much more powerful evidence follows.

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106 This would involve some elaborate manipulation of the discourse, because many will not accept national interest to mean use of tactical nuclear weapons.

107 Chapter III expands upon the implications of these revelations.
Discovery: The ExComm Transcripts

Unbeknownst to all in his decision team — except perhaps his brother Robert — John F. Kennedy taped the secret deliberations on the Cuban Crisis. The transcripts of those meetings reveal inconsistencies between what policy-makers said after the fact of the crisis and what they said at the actual meetings.108

The transcripts also reveal that the distinctions between the so-called 'hawks' and 'doves' in the ExComm were not so clearly defined. For example, Marc Trachtenberg points out that Robert Kennedy, who was considered a 'moral force' and a dove from the beginning, was in fact an early advocate of invasion:

At one point he even asked whether the United States might be able to engineer some pretext for war against Cuba — whether we could 'sink the Maine or something.'109

Similarly, some positions may have changed. Robert McNamara today argues very much a dovish line but comes across as being somewhat hawkish in reading the transcripts. He may have considered the missiles of negligible significance to the strategic balance, but he discussed readiness to conduct an air strike, national mobilization, and national emergency on the 16th of October.110 Again, on the 27th, McNamara made this recommendation:

...I believe we should issue an order tonight calling up the twenty-four air reserve squadrons, roughly 300 troop carrier transports, which are


required for an invasion, and this would be a strong preparatory move, and also a strong indication of what lies ahead...

Marc Trachtenberg notes that "as late as November 12, Secretary McNamara opposed any relaxation of the extraordinary US alert level, saying that 'any reduction in the state of readiness of US forces would be a sign to the Soviet Union.'" 112

Military men are often assumed to be more 'hawkish' than civilians. The validity of such an assumption is dubious. Furthermore, the transcripts show that individuals within the ExComm were not irrevocably committed to either a militaristic or pacific view of things or course of action. Based upon the transcripts, Blight and Welch note that "the only military man present," [Maxwell Taylor,] "did not argue a hawkish line throughout." 113

The Missile Trade

A major inconsistency in conventional accounts of the Cuban Crisis and new information concerns the Soviet proposal for a missile which would see the removal of Soviet missiles in Cuba in return for the withdrawal of US Jupiter missiles in Turkey. The transcripts reveal that this proposal was given much more consideration by the ExComm -- especially the President -- than has been acknowledged in standard literature on the crisis. Recent Soviet statements and the ExComm transcripts confirm that the US Jupiter missiles in Turkey were a contentious issue for the Soviets. On the 26th of October Khrushchev proposed withdrawal of the Soviet missiles from Cuba in return

for a non-invasion pledge by the US. A missile trade was proposed by a Soviet committee on the 27th of October.114

The transcripts reveal that of all the ExComm members, the President was the most willing to consider the trade proposal, about which he observed: "to any rational man at the United Nations or any other rational man it will look like a fair trade."115 Yet, traditional accounts of the crisis have held that Kennedy did not accede to Soviet demands -- under no circumstances would he have brokered a deal. This myth was supported with the evidence of Robert Kennedy’s treatment of Adlai Stevenson who had proposed that the US “ought to be willing to pay some price for the neutralization of Cuba if that meant getting the Russians out, along with their missiles.” Conventional accounts have held that this view was so unpopular with the Kennedys that Stevenson was punished for his conduct during the crisis:

It was after this encounter that Robert Kennedy decided Stevenson lacked the toughness to deal effectively with the Russians at the United Nations in liquidating the missiles crisis...John McCloy got [his] job.116

Kennedy saw enough merit in the trade proposal to dispatch a secret letter to Andrew Cordier at Columbia University, who was to dictate a letter to U Thant, Secretary General of the United Nations. Thant was then supposed to suggest that the two sides trade. Thus, Kennedy himself would

114 This placed the ExComm in a confusing situation. The terms of the proposal of the 26th were more favorable to the US than those of the 27th, and yet Kennedy preferred the terms of the 27th because he felt that they were more "legitimate" -- more likely to resolve the crisis.

115 “October 27...” p.36.

116 Elie Abel, The Missile Crisis (New York: Bantam, 1966) p.96 John McCloy was "a Republican lawyer with banking connections" who had requested that the President take "drastic action" against Cuba by the President on October 16, according to Abel (p.45). It is more likely, the Kennedy’s used this incident as a convenient excuse to replace Stevenson.
not be seen as proposing a compromise. This letter was a secret kept by former Secretary of State Dean Rusk for twenty-five years.

McGeorge Bundy asserts that the new evidence shows Kennedy was "prepared to go the extra mile to avoid conflict, and to absorb whatever political costs that may have entailed." This may overstate the recognition by Kennedy that peaceful resolution of the conflict would augment his reputation more meaningfully than petty political posturing. He nevertheless did not wish to go any unnecessary extra political miles. Very deliberately, Administration officials were careful to avoid drawing parallels between the Turkish and Cuban missiles in public comments. Details of the trade remained secret for quite some time.

Kennedy himself argued in the ExComm that the trade proposal was a reasonable one. First, it was argued in the ExComm that the Turkish missiles were not militarily significant. Kennedy had requested their removal previous to the outset of the crisis. Secondly, it would soon be possible to place Polaris submarines off the coast of Turkey to cover the targets left by the Jupiter removal. Third, Kennedy felt that world opinion would support the US if a trade took place, saying that "most people would regard this as not an unreasonable proposal..."

Some important information was negatively related to the trade, however. First, McGeorge Bundy raised the 'audience' problem when he

117 Lukas, "Class Reunion," p.58
zsked "But what most people, Mr. President?"—meaning that the Turks may not see the connection between their missiles and the ones in Cuba. Secondly, NATO ministers might also miss the connection as the missiles were in Turkey under NATO authority and therefore not subject to unilateral removal by the US. Third, Bundy suggested that the entire NATO basing system might appear to be exposed to negotiation if the Jupiters were traded.

Kennedy refused to close the trade option as a contingency plan. The ExComm then needed to devote a great deal of attention to working out the details of how to approach NATO and the Turks about the benefits of the trade. Expecting NATO to reject the trade, Kennedy exclaimed,

They don't realize that in two or three days we may have a military strike which could bring perhaps the seizure of Berlin or a strike on Turkey in which case they'll say, By God, we should have taken it.

Robert McNamara, in an interesting demonstration of creative thinking, incorporated the pursuit of diplomatic and military options. He presented a case for ignoring the trade proposal, and accepting the more favorable terms of the previous letter. Nevertheless, he argued, the US should withdraw the Jupiters. In this way, the Administration could reduce the risk of Soviet retaliation when the US moved against Cuba:

121 "White House Tapes and Minutes," [October 27 transcripts], p.37.

122 The US could, however, argue that the 'negotiable' Jupiters in Turkey were distinct from the 'non-negotiable' IRBMs in Italy and the UK. Because the latter weapons offered some modest warning of attack to the Soviets, it would be more 'reasonable,' (less destabilizing to the strategic balance) for them to remain in place.


124 This would later become known as the 'Trollope Ploy,' so named for the heroines of romantic novels who interpreted propositions as marriage proposals.
We might be able to either shift the area in which they would apply their military force or give them no excuse to apply military force by taking out the Jupiter before we decide to attack Cuba.

In the second place, if we're willing to decide to do that, we're in a much better position to present this whole thing to NATO. Presidential Counsel Theodore Sorensen argued for a deferral of the withdrawal decision for twenty-four hours, so that the Administration would not have "broken up NATO over something that never would have come to NATO" in case the Soviets accepted the favorable terms.

Even so, JFK hedged his bets: at 7:45 pm on October 27, Robert Kennedy met with Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin. He delivered a letter promising non-aggression towards Cuba in return for removal of the missiles there (the terms of the first proposal). Significantly, he also accepted the terms of the second letter:

When pressed about the Jupiter trade, Robert Kennedy reportedly gave private assurances that the missiles in Turkey would shortly be withdrawn, but refused to consummate a public deal to that effect.

David Welch and James Blight illustrate that Kennedy's consideration of the trade was a large hole in the pre-transcript literature:

Perhaps what is most remarkable about the recollections [of the crisis by ExComm members], in the light of this transcript, is the absence of mention that there was still the ace-in-the-hole, the missile trade. Perhaps this is because it was only the President who expressed any enthusiasm for the merits of the trade. On the evidence of this transcript, one guesses that if President Kennedy had lived to write his own memoir of the crisis, it would have differed considerably from those of his brother and other close associates...He would not go to war.

125 "White House Tapes and Minutes," October 27 transcripts) p.52. This McNamara 'war plan' has received astonishing little attention in the literature. He clearly was thinking several steps up the escalation ladder.


The revelation of the missile trade may suggest that the true audience problem Kennedy faced was inside his own government. Air Force General Curtis LeMay, even after the crisis, did not believe the missiles in Turkey should be removed. In 1969 he said, "We should have left them in place. If President Kennedy had negotiated a quid pro quo with Chairman Khrushchev for getting Soviet missiles out of Cuba, I did not know about it."

The policy option of the blockade looked to be a maximizing course because Kennedy ostensibly avoided the value trade-off of extreme aggression or simple inaction. The missile trade, in contrast, was an optimizing solution, because Kennedy compromised in order to prevent war. The missiles in Turkey were not worthy, in Kennedy's mind, of causus belli. The fact that the trade was a secret for twenty-five years, however, indicates that where measures could be taken to avoid damaging his image, Kennedy would take them.

CONCLUSIONS ON THE MYTHOLOGY
The preceeding discussion examined the way in which the Kennedy Administration utilized myths to establish the public support he needed to deal effectively with the foreign policy problem confronting him. The conventional wisdom is easily revealed to be a body of myths, many of which are questionable when tested in the cold light of present knowledge on the crisis. Many are questionable on their own merits. The dominant themes of American foreign policy mythology present the US as promoting

128 Curtis Le May *America is in Danger* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1968) p.140. LeMay, who was a firm believer in maintaining US superiority, suggests elsewhere that Kennedy would have been foolish to offer a concession to Khrushchev.
democracy and freedom, and attacking only in defense. Once these themes are no longer a beginning point of analysis, much of the mythology of the Cuban crisis can be revealed.

The theme reinforced most in the mythology of the Cuban crisis surrounds the role of the President as custodian of nuclear weapons and US national security. Even the critical analysis of Graham Allison does not seriously damage the image of the President. Instead, Allison’s analysis probes into the process so that, one assumes, it may be reformed.

In defending Kennedy as a responsible representative of national consensus, McGeorge Bundy implicitly defended the system of governance which places such a burden upon the president. True, presidential image is important, enough so that Presidents are often said to be elected on the basis of their images. Skeptics like Chomsky might find this a perversion of democracy. An optimist like Robert Levine, however, would argue differently. He has said,

> If the general electorate is incapable of understanding all of the technical issues involved in arms policy today, the electorate is capable of choosing the candidate it likes best on the basis of his [or her] “image.” And it is not unreasonable to state that the image chosen is ordinarily that one which best represents a broad consensus of the partly conflicting and mostly inarticulate value systems of the voters. 

In conclusion, then, the President may in part shape the images or myth which underlie consensus in the discourse of the electorate. This was seen by Kennedy’s manipulation of the missile gap and in his portrayal of the Soviets as illegitimate. However, the President is also governed by his commitment to an image that was chosen by the electorate, an image preferred because it represented some form of consensus on values.

129 Levine, *Arms Debate*, p.18, emphasis added.
The President must pursue a course which in some way resolves conflicting values of his electorate. He is then, bound to be as conflicted as his heterogeneous electorate. To some extent, this forces the President to move away from extreme positions and pursue a middle path, so as to maintain support from the largest body of his electorate.

Two conclusions follow: first, "conflicts of values among different persons are resolved in the United States by some sort of political process"; and secondly, "American presidential politics do, in fact, aid in such resolution." If the electorate were so polarized that a middle path were impossible, the system of governance would be in danger. As will be seen in Chapter III, the discourse on the Cuban missile crisis contains great diversity. However, the major voices in the debate all seek to influence the direction of the President's policy course. The option of a completely different course, conducting a war against the Soviet Union or dismantling the US nuclear arsenal, are outside the mainstream debate.

The evidence of the transcripts significantly modifies the myth of the hawks and doves. In keeping with Chomsky's prediction, it appears that the debate among elites has been exaggerated to offer an illusion of greater choice than was actually present. The range of options quickly disappeared because of the nature of the institutions. In crisis, power shifts to the President. In order to maintain his image, the President must pursue a middle course and screen out private interest groups whose recommendations are extreme. In the end, it was a moderate, and

130 Levine, Arms Debate, p.19.

131 The first option would require the president to integrate with the military and the anti-war values of many would be compromised. Conversely, complete unilateral disarmament would require the President to, in effect, disarm the military vis a vis their prime strategic opponent, and the anti-communist values of many would be compromised.
consensual decision that the missiles were intolerable. Accounting for this
decision as an outcome of domestic politics does not mitigate the
significance of the consensus. The differentiation of hawks and doves looks,
in retrospect, to be of greater significance among those looking back upon
the crisis than it was among the ExComm members at the time.132

The release of evidence such as the declassified documents and, most
importantly, the ExComm transcripts in the last part of the 1980s
precipitated another wave of Cuban missile crisis analysis. It is interesting to
note the way in which new evidence has influenced more recent narratives
on the crisis. Much of the conventional wisdom is resilient, however, and
many analysts of the Cuban crisis refused to form a consensus around a
revisionist interpretation. The next chapter examines the contrasting
narratives of the various voices in the debate on the Cuban missile crisis,
and examines the ideological influences underlying the interpretations. Is
this debate, like that of the hawks and doves, masking an underlying
consensus? Chapter IV examines the important concerns which link the
schools and their different approaches to resolving them.

132 In retrospect, as will be seen in Chapter III, some doves would later emphasize the
unimportance of the missiles. As Bundy suggested above, however, this position is informed
by a present condition of Soviet capability.
CHAPTER III: CURRENTS OF INTERPRETATION

Because of the lasting nature of certain problems that came to the fore in 1962, the Cuban case is an archive of historical evidence upon which analysts of strategic problems continue to draw. The first general principle was, and remains, an assessment of threat. In the Cuban case, the decision to regard or disregard the presence of offensive missiles in Cuba was crucial. Second, there was and is the relevance of force structure. In the Cuban case, various military options, both nuclear and non-nuclear, were considered under the new flexible response doctrine.

Finally, there is the ongoing dilemma of nuclear deterrence, and the specific role of nuclear weapons in crisis: the resolution of the Cuban crisis is used by some as an empirical verification of the usefulness of nuclear deterrence, and by others as an example of the danger of faith in nuclear deterrence. To illustrate, in 1987, the surviving members of President John F. Kennedy's 'best and brightest' reunited to recount and reflect upon their experience of the Cuban missile crisis. It was soon clear that there was still no consensus, even amongst them, regarding its lessons. Some said deterrence failed, others that it succeeded. Some argued the two sides had

1 Flexible response was just coming into being at the time of the crisis. Its inception is largely due to McNamara's repulsion with the nuclear weapons role in the existing SIOP-62. See Robert S. McNamara, "The Military Role of Nuclear Weapons," Foreign Affairs, vol.62 no.1. (Fall 1983), pp.59-80.

2 Members of Kennedy's Executive Committee of the National Security Council (the ExComm) met with academics who have studied the crisis at Hawk's Cay Florida. An unedited transcript of the Hawk's Cay Conference is available from the Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard University. (David A. Welch, ed., Proceedings of the Hawk's Cay Conference on the Cuban Missile Crisis, March 5-8, 1987, CSIA Working Paper, cited hereafter as "Welch's notes."). James G. Blight and David A. Welch published an edited transcript of the proceedings as Chapter 1, "The Hawk's Cay Conference," in On the Brink: Americans and Soviets Reexamine the Cuban Missile Crisis (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989); cited hereafter as "Hawk's Cay," OTB.
come 'dangerously close to war,' but others firmly said that due to US nuclear superiority, Soviet capitulation was inevitable? For 'some, the crisis demonstrated that salvation lies in arms control agreements, while for others the crisis was said to show that superiority is the only language the Soviets understand. Those who perceive the Cuban case as empirically verifying the principles of nuclear deterrence use the Cuban example to lobby US policy makers to secure nuclear superiority over the Soviets. Others argue that the Cuban experience holds lessons about the danger of reliance on nuclear deterrence, and lobby current policy makers to end arms build-ups which may provoke dangerous crisis situations.

As the parameters of the historical record expand with the release of new evidence on the Cuban missile crisis, the failure by analysts to reach a consensus on its lessons seems striking. This is especially so if one assumes that the debate has been fueled by insufficient facts and false assumptions about the events surrounding the crisis. However, this thesis argues that debate over the lessons of the crisis has been fueled by diverging normative stands, or schools of thought, over larger issues such as the nature of the threat of communism, the deployment of nuclear weapons, (and whether such deployment enhances security through projection of strength or degrades security through provocative escalation), and the role of nuclear brinksmanship in crisis. In turn, these schools of thought selectively determined what were the facts of the event. Therefore, it is this thesis' contention that it is not at all surprising consensus is absent.

3 General Burchinal, at the time of the crisis with the US Strategic Air Command, although not a participant at the conference, said that due to US nuclear superiority, "We were never further from war than at the time of Cuba, never further." See his interview with Richard Kohn and Joseph Harahan, (eds.) "US Strategic Air Power, 1948-1962" International Security Vol. 12, No. 4 (Spring 1988) p.95.
J. Anthony Lukas, reporting on the reunion of ExComm members for The New York Times Magazine, noted that the "subtext dancing beneath the surface" of the debate may be found in the contemporary policy preferences of these men:

McNamara, Sorensen and Schlesinger are all strong opponents of the Reagan Administration's nuclear policies, all vocal advocates of measured steps toward arms control, and, ultimately, nuclear disarmament.

Douglas Dillon...is a member of the Committee on the Present Danger, a group of neo-conservative intellectuals and former government officials who support increased defense spending and greater vigilance toward the Soviet threat...Dillon and his colleagues in the Committee vigorously support the need to maintain a powerful nuclear deterrent, if not outright nuclear superiority.4

In the same vein, Richard Betts recently observed that , "the crisis was about the nuclear balance."5 So, too, is the principle division in the American policy debate.

This chapter uses an approach called tendency analysis to emphasize the differences between ideological schools of thought on the Cuban missile crisis. The significance attached in different analyses to the Soviet deployment in Cuba and the consequence of the crisis can be seen to be contingent upon fundamental beliefs about 1) the nature of the threat to US national security posed by the Soviets and 2) the nature of nuclear weapons, and their role in national security policy. Absence of consensus regarding these fundamental beliefs is responsible for the absence of consensus on the meaning and lessons of the crisis.

The first section of this chapter presents the theoretical approach of tendency analysis which serves to organize the debate on the missile crisis.

4 Lukas, "Class Reunion," Paul Nitze, who was included in Kennedy's team, has served as chairman of the Committee on the Present Danger.

5 Betts, Nuclear Blackmail, p.118.
Three following sections present the major schools of thought. In this way, the logical structures of the diverging interpretations of the crisis are more easily reconstructed. While this chapter extrapolates the differences of the three schools, Chapter IV will examine the shared understanding which underlies the debate.
ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK: TENDENCY ANALYSIS

The function of the tendency analysis approach is to divide the discourse into 'schools of thought' along the lines of divergence regarding the lessons of the crisis. Three schools, which this thesis will call conservative, liberal, and neo-liberal will be presented. They will be defined according to their ideological views, which this thesis will call values and analyses. The way in which each school tells and interprets the Cuban missile crisis story will be termed narratives. The narratives differ among the schools because, depending on their values, the schools selectively incorporate both existing and emerging evidence into their respective frameworks.

The model of tendency analysis was developed by Robert Levine in his 1963 study The Arms Debate. Levine studied the debate over American nuclear weapons policy. He developed the tendency analysis model based upon analysis of the logical structures of the various policy positions taken by speakers in the arms debate. He argued that policy recommendations reflected a given system of analysis as to how the world works, and a given set of values as to how the world should be. According to him, two values

6 The merit of the schools of thought approach is that it draws out and facilitates analysis of currents in the larger body of American strategic thought. Attention is drawn to statements, then, as opposed to individuals. In that they are complex, individuals do not often conform precisely to one particular school. It should be acknowledged that the-schools of thought approach, by design, tends to generate broad generalizations. Its purpose is to heighten self-awareness regarding the parameters of discourse, to demonstrate internal coherence of the principal ideological and doctrinal positions in the debate, and to clarify key aspects of factual and normative disagreement. See Robert Levine, Arms Debate. For other work in this vein see also the approaches of Shurmann, Logic; Allison, Camesale and Nye, Hawks Doves and Owls. An application of Levine's theory to the arms debate of the 1980s is found in Francis Furtado "American Strategic Nuclear Weapons Policy, 1975-87: A Critique of the Conservative Perspective." Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of British Columbia, August 1988.

7 The current state of knowledge on the crisis, although enlightened by the availability of new evidence, might be said to be one of flux. This is in fact useful to my study because debates regarding whether the new evidence reveals particular facts, (for example, whether there were warheads on the missiles), show these issues to be 1) of concern now, and 2) relevant to alternative analyses of the Kennedy situation in 1962.
predominated, anti-communism (the desirability of Soviet defeat), and anti-war (the desirability of war avoidance based upon fear of nuclear war). Policy prescriptions of speaker’s in the debate are formed in compatibility with a speaker’s values, (either primarily anti-communist or anti-war) and accompanying analysis of how the world works. Levine grouped the arms-policy debate into the following three categories:

1. those whose main objective, apparent both in their recommendations and in the reasoning by which these recommendations are reached, is to decrease the probability of war, particularly thermonuclear war;
2. those whose primary objective is to stem and/or reverse the advance of Communism; and
3. those, in some sense in the middle, who can be best characterized by the fact that they do not fit comfortably into either of the other two groups because their recommendations do not appear to put one of these two objectives clearly above the other.

Lessons drawn from the Cuban missile crisis tend to be consistent with these logical structures. The conservative (crisis-as-opportunity) school draws from a primarily anti-communist perspective to yield notably different lessons than those of the liberal (crisis-avoidance) school, which draws from a primarily anti-war perspective. Levine also identified two middle schools composed of those whose prescriptions represent a blend of anti-communist and anti-war values. Within the debate on the Cuban missile crisis, there does seem to be a middle school, one in which the primacy of either value is difficult to ascertain. This third school, the neo-liberal (crisis-
management) school, does not confront contentious issues of current policy debate. This school, however, debates about the criteria for the behaviour of a rational actor. Such debates often begin with the Cuban case study, and are debates about instrumentality; the "how to" as opposed to the "what to" of decision-making. This school has contributed most to understanding of international relations in its discourse on the Cuban crisis through the generation of questions about the psychodynamics of crisis.

Levine further differentiated the groups according to the degree of change in existing policy proposed in their recommendations. Marginal changes are small adjustments in existing policy. Systemic recommendations involve changes "on so large a scale that they pervade entire military or political systems; they may, in fact, effectively mean the scrapping of old systems and the adoption of new." The systemists represent the

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11 In 1985, the same year in which *International Security* published the October 16 transcripts of the ExComm deliberations, Graham Allison collaborated with Joseph Nye and Albert Carnesale -- all of Harvard University -- on the project Hawks, Doves and Owls: an agenda for avoiding nuclear war Norton:1986. The differentiation made by these editors with regard to hawks and doves is similar to the Levine framework. Their effort is a collection of essays with particular emphasis upon prevention of accidental nuclear war -- the owlish view. Graham Allison, Albert Carnesale and Joseph Nye are probably the most notable employers of the terms "hawks" "doves" and "owls." These terms, which are widely used in the international security field today, are said by Blight and Welch to have originated in an article about the crisis called "In Time of Crisis," by Stewart Alsop and Charles Bartlett, *The Saturday Evening Post* (December 8, 1962); in OTB p.341 fn1. The terms were not new ones. During the ExComm deliberations, Vice President Lyndon Baynes Johnson at one point said to a couple of his colleagues, "You warhawks ought to get together." Welch, David, and James Blight, "An Introduction to the ExComm Transcripts," *International Security*, Vol.12 No.3, Winter 1987/88. The allegorical reference may date at least as far back as the Spanish American War. It is important to qualify terms such as "hawk," "dove," "conservative," "liberal," etc., with the notification that they represent perspectives more so than people.

12 There is no doubt an implicit value assumption to be made when determining whether or not an actor was rational. One might contrast, for example, the positive evaluation given to the Kennedy team's decision-making by Ole Holsti, and the more critical evaluation it received from Graham Allison. For a direct debate about the criteria for a rational actor, see Welch vs. Herek, et.al, *Journal of Conflict Resolution* Vol.33 No.3, (1987/88)

extremes of a spectrum which, paradoxically, resemble one another more closely than the middle elements. Levine says,

The systemic anti-Communists... correspond more closely to mirror-images of the anti-war systemists. The anti-Communists would answer the "Red or Dead" question, if put, "Better dead," just as the anti-war systemists would answer it, if put, "better Red." But [in general] the anti-Communists, like their opposite numbers in the anti-war school, believe that their policies will avoid the ultimate putting of the question.14

This thesis will draw mostly from Levine's typology of the anti-communist, anti-war, and middle marginalists, primarily because it is the marginalists who dominate the debate and therefore require definition. In accordance with Chomsky's prediction, Levine found that the debate on arms policy is bounded. "Systemists," he said, "have never been in or even close to power."15 However, while marginalists do not make systemic recommendations, or recommendations for revolutionary change, systemists often make marginal recommendations, and their statements enter into the mainstream debate.16

The theory presented in Chapter II suggested that it is necessary for the Executive to represent, and manufacture, societal consensus. Levine

14 Levine, Arms Debate p.310.
15 The Furtado study of the Reagan Administration, however, suggested that anti-communist systemists did indeed acquire greater influence in the 1980s. See Francis Furtado, "American Strategic Nuclear Weapons Policy, 1975-87: A Critique of the Conservative Perspective," Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of British Columbia, August 1988. Further inquiry into the ideological forces behind American foreign policy could benefit from the use of Levine's model. Once the systemic versus marginalist distinction has been established, one might identify their respective influence: (for example, as their policy recommendations are manifested in security directives or they figured into compromises in policy goals), in an historical study of other administrations. This subject is for later work, however, and will not be developed in detail here.
16 Levine, Arms Debate p. 51. When systemists do make marginal recommendations, Levine said, it is so they may "continue quickly and unconditionally to the next objectives [of systemic change]." p.52.
proposed that marginalists have "almost always...been in the decision-making positions of authority." He explained:

In order to be chosen as decision-makers in a socially heterogeneous but stable democracy, individuals and parties must of necessity balance competing ideological and political considerations. Whatever the view of the systemists, [the middle] majority is far from the belief that the objective reality of either the arms race or world communism requires revolutionary change.

In effect, Levine indicated that the debate on arms policy is bounded by the systemic constraints. Revolutionary change is not a mainstream possibility, and so systemic recommendations are in a sense, outside the discourse. The President, because he must balance the competing considerations of his constituency, must work within the system mandate of marginal change.

THE CONSERVATIVE SCHOOL

This thesis defines as crisis a situation in which there is a perceived threat to US national security, against which there is some limitation on the time available to act. Soviet adventurism in the Western hemisphere with a view to possible gains in Berlin, and a strategic threat to US retaliatory capability were, in the conservative analysis, the problems posed by the Soviet missiles in Cuba in October 1962. A negative image of the Soviet Union and an emphasis upon escalation dominance (nuclear and conventional superiority for deterrence and melioration of war should it occur) factored into the conservative interpretation of the crisis and into the lessons that experience holds for conservative recommendations today.

17 Levine, Arms Debate p.58.

Conservative Values and Analysis

According to Levine's typology, the primary values of the anti-communists are "Defense of freedom against Communism," and "Forcing Communist retreat." The logical structure of the conservative view is consistent, says Levine, with a view of the USSR as "implacably aggressive and out to bury us, with no sign of change." Many conservatives argued well into the late 1980s that fundamental ideological and geopolitical struggle between the superpowers is an inherent and persistent aspect of international relations. Ray Cline neatly summarizes the conservative perspective on the East-West rivalry:

> The Superpowers still are fundamentally different societies, geopolitically and geographically confronting one another across the gulf of the deep difference between a totally state-owned economy under a one-party dictatorship and a pluralist democratic market economy. The systemic conflict and geopolitical proximity are the reason the military weapons exist, not vice versa.

Other conservative values include "Melioration of war; Prevention of war; Power-as-a-value." The metaphor of the stick best describes the conservative perception of power-as-a-tool. Conservatives are more likely to advocate the use of force, coercion, and will power.

Under Levine's typology, conservative analysis consists of the following basic elements:

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20 Ray S. Cline, "Commentary: Cuban Missile Crisis," *Foreign Affairs* Vol.68 No.4, (Fall 1989) p.193; cited hereafter as Cline, "Commentary." Cline continues to say that the Tiananmen Square massacre should remind the West not to slight the "inherent contradictions between cultures embedded in centralized autocracy and democratic respect for individual and minority rights."


22 Levine, *Arms Debate* p.214
War is a spectrum; Weapons are political instruments; War starts primarily for political reasons; Nuclear weapons dominate war and conventional forces are important mainly for "psychology"; The arms—race can be exploited.23

Conservatives believe that security requires strength. In order to prevent the Soviet Union from expanding its influence, the US must secure a favorable correlation of forces. The relative geographic isolation of the US, namely, the expanse of ocean which distances the US from both its allies and potential targets, makes this task more difficult.

Because conservatives view war as a spectrum, they must be concerned with theatre as well as strategic operations. The logistical aspects of military operations are therefore also of concern to conservative analysts. This is consistent with their desire to dominate the opponent on each level of the escalation ladder. First, by so doing, they are more likely to prevent the Soviets from escalating the conflict. Secondly, the US should be prepared to meliorate the effects of war should it occur.

Conservatives view strategy as the pursuit of positively valued outcomes. With this in mind, the Cuban crisis must be assessed for its net gain and judged either to have been a successful exercise of US influence by the President and his men, or a failure to acquire all possible gain vis a vis the Soviet Union. Conservative analysis tends to focus on the international system in the sense that local conflicts are seen to reflect the larger superpower rivalry. Such analyses may focus particular attention upon international power and prestige, or how other nations, particularly allies, will evaluate US international leadership based upon its performance in conflict.

Assumptions of the Conservative View

The success of nuclear deterrence, as portrayed by the conservative interpretation of the crisis, requires that the US possess and exploit theatre and strategic superiority; that the US communicate resolve; and that the Soviets understand and respond rationally to the US communication:

To avoid war, and nuclear war in particular, Hawks believe we must make our commitments and interests clear and establish a position of superior military strength. . . by making it clear to Soviet or other leaders that we can not be beaten at any level of violence (an escalation ladder), we insure that they will never calculate that war would serve any rational goal.24

It is ironic that the school most suspicious of the Soviet Union is also the school most confident of Soviet rationality.25 Douglas Dillon has said, "The Russians are rational. They're not like Khomeini or Qaddafi."26 In his retrospective analysis of the crisis, Maxwell Taylor expressed confidence in the rationality of Soviet leaders. He extended this thinking so far as to assert in a taped interview with Richard Neustadt, that if Khrushchev was not rational, his colleagues would "take care of him."

Neustadt: Was [the final] outcome [of the crisis] unexpected to you?

Taylor: I was so sure we had 'em over a barrel, I never worried much about the final outcome, but what might happen in between.

... Neustadt: Now some civilians do recall worries about the time of that second Saturday; worries that really run to two or three steps up the ladder of escalation. The Soviets don't accept our demand; there follows an airstrike; the Soviets feel impelled to strike the missiles in Turkey; the Turks call in NATO for support; we feel we have to do something in Europe; the Soviets launch


25 Conservatives consider themselves to be more familiar than liberals with Soviet doctrine. Conservative understanding of the Soviets is facilitated by the similarities in their doctrines which both stress the importance of the nuclear balance.

26 Blight and Welch, OTB, p.170. Blight and Welch remarked, "This attitude was a controlling influence on the hawks, who felt that Khrushchev was playing with a set of rules that were well understood -- or should have been -- on both sides." p.348.
a nuclear exchange -- something like that was in their minds. I take it not in yours?

Taylor:...It's the nature of some people that if they can't have a legitimate worry they create them...

Neustadt: In your mind, there was no legitimacy in this worry?

Taylor: Not in the slightest.

Neustadt: Because Khrushchev could look up that ladder...

Taylor: If he was rational. If he was irrational, I still expected his colleagues to look after him.27

Conservatives maintain that the prime strategic rival was and remains the Soviet Union, and that nuclear weapons were in 1962 and are now necessary to US mitigation of the threat posed by that rival. The quintessential conservative belief is, not that nuclear weapons in general were threatening, but that Soviet nuclear weapons in Cuba were threatening.

27 Televised interview shown to participants of the Hawks Cay Conference, in "Hawk's Cay", OTB, p.174.
The Conservative Narrative

The conservative narrative on the Cuban missile crisis conforms very closely to the conventional wisdom. There is, however, one notable exception to this observation. Conservative analysts of the crisis argue that due to US nuclear superiority, the Cuban missile crisis did not bring the superpowers close to nuclear war. Conservatives wish to promote their position that US nuclear superiority in 1962 ensured stability. Therefore, the assertion that the world was close to war would not only contradict the conservative analysis, it would undermine the conservative policy recommendations for maintaining superiority.

Confronted with an onslaught of new evidence on the crisis and ensuing revisionist interpretations, conservatives are now in the position of having to defend their interpretation of the crisis. For example, the Soviets, who have been increasingly open about their experience of the crisis, recently revealed that twenty nuclear warheads were in Cuba before the blockade. This revelation ostensibly supports the classic liberal argument that the crisis was terribly dangerous because nuclear weapons create an unnecessarily dangerous world. Ray Cline, in defense of the conservative interpretation, appears to be engaging in an empirical debate when he questions the Soviet revelations about the warheads. The way in which Cline structures his argument, however, reveals something deeper than an empirical debate.

Despite Cline's admiration for Raymond Garthoff, "the best qualified expert on the crisis," he disagrees with Garthoff's "hedged willingness to accept Soviet claims on this point." Cline argues, "No Soviet expert active during the crisis gave any concrete evidence to substantiate this new Soviet assertion." Even as he disputes the Soviet revelation, Cline expresses
discomfort with the empirical debate itself. Something deeper is troubling him:

There is an ideological motive for featuring this assertion about nose cones [warheads], whether true or not. It is obviously very much part of the Soviet agenda to persuade American participants that the two nations were on the brink of nuclear war and that Khrushchev’s reasonable flexibility narrowly averted the destruction of civilization. The thought that nuclear warheads were actually present makes this danger much more palpable.28

Gorbachev, Cline seems to be saying, is rewriting the history of the Cuban missile crisis in a propaganda campaign designed to disarm the United States:

Now that Gorbachev recognizes that his predecessors starved the Soviet economy to pay for the nuclear weapons that Leonid Brezhnev bought in the 1960s and 1970s, the USSR wants us all to believe that nuclear weapons keep the superpowers perilously close to war. Gorbachev insists that removing these weapons will guarantee peace rather than facilitate conventional arms conflicts, and that Soviet gestures at detente eliminate the need for modern American defense forces at any substantial level.29

Conservatives need to downplay the closeness to war in 1962 because fear of nuclear war may translate into fear of nuclear weapons and anti-nuclear hysteria. These weapons are seen by conservatives to be of continuing importance to the US bargaining position vis-a-vis the Soviet Union. The conservative values of war prevention and melioration of war should it occur require a credible nuclear deterrent and a war-fighting capacity. Cline’s suspicions of Gorbachev’s interpretation of the crisis are based upon concern that fear of nuclear war within the American electorate will impede programs necessary to deterrence and war-fighting.

Because their values are primarily anti-communist, conservatives emphasize the context of 1962, namely, the Cold War, and the ensuing

28 Cline, "Commentary," p.192.

American priorities. Although the Soviet adversary has a very different face in 1989, this is not sufficient to revise history. Furthermore, many conservatives are sceptical about the "new Soviet Union." The oral history provided by Soviet participants in conferences on the crisis is discounted by persistent cold-warriors, in part because of their fundamental belief that the nature of Soviet society will never change. The differences between conservatives and liberals in this regard are revealed in their debate. Ray Cline, easily identifiable as holding strongly conservative views, patronizingly notes what he perceives to be gullibility on the part of some of his more liberal colleagues. There is, he says,

a genial wish on the part of many of the reminiscing original participants in the 'Thirteen Days of October' to demonstrate fairness and balanced judgement about the Soviet Union, deferring politely to what Soviet officials are saying in this extraordinary age of selective glasnost.30

Conservatives blame liberals for perpetuating war malaise. Douglas Dillon at Hawk's Cay spoke of Robert McNamara's "feeling that nuclear war was always just around the corner." He attributes McNamara's lack of success in Vietnam to this malaise:

I draw basically the same conclusion in each case -- Cuba and Vietnam. Because McNamara and people like him were so irrationally fearful of nuclear war, in each case we didn't come out nearly as well as we could have. And in Vietnam, of course, we were humiliated.31

Because they so strongly reject the conclusions of the liberal interpretation of the crisis, conservatives warn against accepting liberal

30 Cline, "Commentary," p.190. Cline warns that "Mikhail Gorbachev's team of official intellectuals is engaged in a program of historical revisionism serving Moscow's interest." Cline, "Commentary," p.190. Cline believes there are two basic fallacies the Soviets wish to promote: 1) that the Soviet move was defensive in nature, and 2) that the two sides were dangerously close to war. Cline's responses to these arguments help to illustrate the conservative view.

31 OTB p.170.
narratives on the crisis. Revisionist interpretations are discounted by conservatives for two reasons: first, revisionist interpretations have not reflected anti-communist values; and secondly, revisionist interpretations underestimate the role of US nuclear superiority in resolving the crisis on terms favorable to the United States.

Conservative interpretations revolve around three principles: assessment of threat, the importance of escalation dominance, and crisis as opportunity. While the liberal narrative focuses upon subsequent escalation of the arms race and the causes of the Soviet deployment in Cuba, the conservative narrative focuses upon its geo-strategic consequences, particularly the decline in the relative advantage of the US war-fighting capability. Liberal analysts discuss domestic political pressures on the president and the dangers of nuclear weapons and ask, "Did the President take excessive risk?" Conservative analysts discuss the advance of communism into the Western hemisphere and US theatre and strategic superiority and ask, "Did the President show undue caution?"

Threat Assessment

According to conservative narratives, the situation in Cuba in 1962 threatened US national security in two ways. First, there was the danger of communist expansion, particularly as the leading Soviet client state may have held nuclear weapons. Secondly, the missiles themselves were a politico-military threat.

Castro was a perceived enemy of the United States long before the Soviet missile deployment. W.W. Rostow, in a top secret memorandum on April 24, 1961, listed five threats to the United States represented by the Castro regime. Concerning Cuba, Rostow suggested that:
a) It might join with the USSR in setting up an offensive air or missile base.

b) It might build up sufficient conventional military strength to trigger an arms race in the hemisphere and threaten the independence of other Latin American nations.

c) It might develop its covert subversive network in ways which would threaten other Latin American nations from within.

d) Its ideological contours are amoral and political offense to us; and we are committed, by one means or another, to remove that offense, including our commitment to the Cuban refugees among us.

e) Its ideological contours and success may tend to inflame disruptive forces in the rest of Latin America, accentuating existing economic, social, and political tensions which we, in any case, confront.\(^3\)

Communist retreat, according to the conservative framework, is a priority objective of US foreign policy. This objective was not confined to the Republican Party, but widely shared throughout the American electorate at the time of the missile crisis. Republicans and Democrats both tried to position themselves as tough on communism in the presidential campaign of 1960 and the Congressional campaign of 1962. Kennedy's chief pollster advised him in early October to appease the strong anti-communist lobby as follows:

You can then state that if it came to it, we would stand by the freedom of West Berlin, even if we had to do it alone. And in Cuba let it be understood that this government will settle for no less than the obliteration of all vestiges of Communism in this hemisphere.\(^3\)

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32 Rostow memo, "Subject: Notes on Cuba Policy" from the John F. Kennedy Library.

33 Italicics added. Citation from Harris poll in Kennedy Library materials. Prior to the missile discovery, Kennedy's popularity was suffering from his perceived inaction on the Cuban question. The Harris memo told him, "Some of the edge has been taken off the Cuban issue by Mississippi, but tensions are still high on foreign policy. Majorities ranging from 70-80 percent are with you on Berlin. In Cuba, however, the balance is still 38-62 percent negative. In Michigan, within the past week, a majority of 82-18 percent wanted a blockade on Cuba, although a majority of 68-32 percent oppose going to war there." See also the discussion in Mantua Kern, Patricia W. Levering and Ralph B. Levering, *The Kennedy Crises: The Press, the Presidency, and Foreign Policy*. Chapel Hill NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983; cited hereafter as *The Kennedy Crises*. 
Conservatives interpreted the move to deploy missiles in Cuba as Soviet opportunism. Because conservatives retain a strongly negative image of the Soviet Union, conservative narratives emphasize the secrecy, and therefore, "deceitfulness," of the Cuban missile deployment. Paul Nitze clearly interpreted the Soviet move as more indication of their nature when he said "It was a question of the character of the opposition, so typical of the way in which the Soviets handle themselves."34

The conservative view of Soviet motivation for missile deployment did not allow for, nor would it be concerned with, the consideration that the US may have appeared to be taking an aggressive posture toward Cuba and that Khrushchev might be placing the missiles in a defensive move. The liberal school dwells on Soviet motivations in narratives on the crisis, but conservatives are relatively disinterested. They are more interested in the consequences of the deployment. Although conservatives may acknowledge that Khrushchev, aware of Soviet strategic inferiority, sought to redress the balance through the Cuban deployment,35 this does not make the deployment tolerable. It is reconcilable neither to the conservative value of power for its own sake, nor to the conservative analysis that massive superiority is necessary to deter the Soviets. Furthermore, had they been

34 "Nitze Interview" in OTB, p.141. The secrecy of the deployments, however, holds more merit as a propaganda issue than as a factor into the assessment of threat. Gromyko, in a rejoinder to statements made after the Cambridge Conference of Soviets and Americans, defended the secrecy of the deployment in the rhetoric of realism, or one who views the world as governed by the principles of power and interest. The USSR was simply pursuing strategy in a way that the Soviets saw to be in their own interest. American U-2 flights over the Soviet Union in the 1960s, certainly without Soviet permission, suggest that the US similarly acted in its own interest.

35 Douglas Dillon said at Hawk's Cay that the ExComm believed at the time that the Soviets "put the missiles in Cuba in order to beef up their strategic position, which was grossly inferior to ours." Dillon suggested that the Soviets "acted rationally, in a way" by putting the missiles in. See "Hawk's Cay," OTB pp.169-70.
allowed to stay, the missiles might have provided a deterrent cover for communist moves in the region, paralyzing the United States in the face of possible military aggression by Cuban or other communist forces.

Strategic Balance

In narratives on the Cuban crisis, conservatives have emphasized the effect of the Soviet missile deployment upon the strategic nuclear balance; this emphasis is parallel to the emphasis on the nuclear balance found in contemporary conservative policy prescriptions for American force modernization.36 The Cuban deployment had a two-dimensional effect upon the strategic balance, political and military. The political threat was that should the US decline to act, there would be an appearance of acquiescence to Soviet adventurism in the American sphere of influence. Not only could there be further losses to Soviet adventurism based upon this precedent, but it would be a blow to the US international image that could hurt its alliance leadership. Graham Allison noted that the conservatives within the ExComm were preoccupied with securing US leadership within the Western alliance:

Acheson, Nitze, Dillon and McCone formed a natural alliance. To them the overriding issues were two: the security of the US together with its position of leadership in the Western Hemisphere and Western Europe.37

Because the US, unlike the Soviets, has relied on a voluntarily-formed alliance, damage to US leadership held military costs.

36 It is interesting that the strategic military threat posed by the missiles continues to be a cornerstone of conservative analysis, even now that the Soviets have capabilities to attack the United States far greater than those gained by deploying missiles in Cuba.

In a more immediate sense, the military threat posed by the Cuban missiles was seen to stems from an augmented Soviet Capability to deliver warheads, a capability which was questionable previous to the Cuban deployment. The salient aspect of this threat was the way in which the missiles could target US forces that might be required to retaliate if the USSR should strike first. Because the missiles in Cuba could theoretically wipe out US nuclear forces in bombers on airfields in the Southern US, Soviet strategic capability thus appeared to have suddenly enhanced to include some element of counterforce. A memorandum written to the ExComm on the military significance of the missiles in Cuba noted that as Soviet weapons in Cuba held 40 percent of all American bombers within range, the Cuban missile were capable, in a theoretically successful first strike, of reducing the SIOP force of the United States by 30 percent.

Unlike liberal analysis, which questions Kennedy's refusal to tolerate the deployment, Conservative analysis might treat the missile unnaceptability as being axiomatic. Douglas Dillon said this in 1989:

38 See Douglas Dillon's Hawks Cay Conference comments in OTB p.30.

39 The SS-4 Sardal MRBM was semi-mobile and carried a one-megaton warhead. Twenty personnel, twelve vehicles were necessary to operate it, suggesting it was not intended for retaliatory strikes. It weighed 28,000 kilograms and had a range of 1800 kilometers. It was inertially guided but possibly radio guided (in which case accuracy would be greater if directed from an agent in the US). The Skean SS-5 IRBM had a range of 3,500 kilometers and was not mobile; it weighed 60,000 kilograms, and was inertially guided. See Bill Gunston, Rockets and Missiles (London and New York:Crescent-Salamander, 1979).

40 Raymond Garthoff, Special Assistant for Soviet Bloc, Office of Politico-Military Affairs, Department of State, "The Military Significance of the Soviet Missile Bases in Cuba," Top Secret Memorandum For the Executive Committee of the National Security Council, October 27, 1962, [Declassified November 20, 1981]. Garthoff also notes that "the United States does not have BMEWS [sic: Ballistic Missile Early Warning Systems] or other early warning radar on the southern approaches." Cited in Garthoff, Reflections, pp.138-39. See also the discussion in the Hawk's Cay Conference transcripts in OTB p.31. It is not insignificant that Washington was within the range of the missiles in Cuba, presenting a potential decapitation threat.
While everyone at our first ExComm meeting, specifically including the President, agreed that the emplacement of Soviet MRBMs and IRRBMs in Cuba was totally unacceptable and that they had to be gotten out one way or another, I do not recall any specific discussion then or at later meetings of the ExComm as to just why they were unacceptable. It just seemed obvious to all of us.41

Recent documentary evidence suggests that the arguments for action were enunciated in the ExComm. Notes taken from the ExComm meeting of October 22 record a summary made by the President of the reasons action was imperative. "We must reply," it says, "to those whose reaction to the blockade would be to ask what had changed in view of the fact that we had been living in the past years under a threat of a missile nuclear attack by the USSR." The reasons offered suggested that tolerating the Soviet missiles in Cuba would damage US credibility, convey an impression of insufficient US resolve, and create a shift in the "public" balance of power:

a) "In September we had said we would react if certain actions were taken in Cuba. We have to carry out commitments which we had made publicly at that time.

b) The secret deployment by the Russians of strategic missiles to Cuba was such a complete change in their previous policy of not deploying such missiles outside the USSR that if we took no action in this case, we would convey to the Russians an impression that we would never act, no matter what they did anywhere.

c) [CENSORED]

d) The effect in Latin America would be very harmful to our interests if by our failure to act, we gave the Latinos the impression that the Soviets were increasing their world position while ours was decreasing.42

41 From the record of the Hawk's Cay Conference OTB, p.49.

42 Kennedy Library materials. One can only speculate on the contents of the sanitized option. Perhaps it holds a reference to Kennedy's domestic political situation of, more likely, to commitments made to Cuban expatriot dissidents. It may be a reference to American covert efforts (i.e. Mongoose) already underway. Other possibilities include a direct assessment of US C3 vulnerability, or a reference to problems within NATO (for example, damaged US credibility with the French and British).
Like the conventional wisdom, the conservative narrative on the crisis portrays the President as placing a primary emphasis on maintaining US strategic superiority. It portrays him as willing to go to war in order to maintain that correlation of forces, especially because deterrent threats are empty without communicating resolve. It also portrays him as a defender of the entire free world, because another element which must be factored into the calculus of superiority is the US dependence on a cohesive alliance.

Theatre Operations

The conservative emphasis upon US strategic superiority during the crisis does not mean that conservative narratives find the conventional balance to have been irrelevant. The conventional correlation of forces, particularly the conduct of the blockade, would have been critical to melioration of war. The ideological bias of the hawks in the ExComm, so the argument goes, led them to narrowly focus upon military options. Certainly the ability to "prevail" is an important element in conservative doctrine. Conservatives are therefore often known as war-fighters. They are interested in the logistical aspects of implementated military policy. Nitze, for example, expressed his frustration with other members of the ExComm who, to his mind, were overly preoccupied with semantics. Nitze found semantics of little interest when the problem was how to fight a war:

Nitze: [Acheson] favored the air strike and I also favored the air strike. But I also favored the blockade. Then the question at issue was: How do you sort all this out? My recollection is that I was so annoyed at the failure of the main discussions to deal with who-does-

43 This portrayal is marked in the CBS News documentary Anatomy of a Crisis by Charles Collingwood. The show aired Sunday, October 28, 1962, the day the crisis was brought to an end. Blight and Welch (1989) offer a description of Collingwood's view in OTB, pp.21-22.
what-with-what-to-whom-when, it wasn't really a planning session, it seemed to me rather to be a sophomoric seminar.44

Because conservatives are concerned with the melioration of war should it occur, it has been very important in conservatives narratives to establish exactly when the missiles would have become operable. Conservative analysis continues to be attentive to new evidence as to whether the warheads were at the sites or not.45 The degree of operability of the missiles would make a crucial difference in the potential residual damage to the US in a scenario involving an American conventional airstrike and Soviet retaliation from Cuba.

Those who advocated the air strike option did so, however, in the belief that the Soviets would not respond with a nuclear attack on the US. Conservatives interpret Soviet doctrine as emphasizing the importance of the European theatre. Conservatives interpreted the missiles in Cuba, as affording the Soviets an opportunity to multiply the theatres from which they could attack, but this asset would be expendable as compared to European forces. The Soviet interest in Cuba was thus not seen to be vital to their minimum requirements for national security, certainly not vital enough to fight an assuredly losing battle against superior US forces.46

44 "Nitze Interview" OTB, p.143.
45 See Dillon's interview in OIB p.157; Nitze interview.
46 Conservatives may have felt compelled to take the initiative, as represented in the activated Defcon alert. The small size (20-40) of the IRBM and MRBM forces in Cuba would not significantly improve the Soviet second strike position. They could undercut the surprise attack ability of the US. It is very hard to time a simultaneous attack on Cuba and the USSR. This force would only be useful in a first strike. Illyshin IL-28 "Beagle" bombers (comparable to the 8-52 in speed) on one-way missions could have augmented this force. They were of the class of the British Canberra bomber, and could potentially have carried nuclear weapons. The IL-28 was the first light Soviet Bomber, deployed between 1955 and 1970. 10,000 were built. They had a wingspan of seventy feet, were fifty seven feet long, and were twenty-two feet high; consequently they had a significant radar signature. They had turbo jets and carried a maximum of 560 kilograms. They were capable of an 1100 kilometer return range with
Strategic and theatre superiority combined, in a world in which power and interest are everything, to give Douglas Dillon his sense of confidence:

...I did not believe that the Russians would respond to an air strike with a nuclear attack on the United States. I'll always recall the summer of 1960 when I was Under Secretary of State and the Russians shot down one of our reconnaissance planes in international waters. We didn't do anything about it, we just yelled a lot. They knew that they were in a similar situation in Cuba. Many of us felt that the missiles could only be removed by forceful action or in response to a serious threat of force; and, of course, that is what happened in the end.47

Conservatives interpreted Soviet strategy as focusing on Europe as the primary theatre. Missiles in Cuba would have been a peripheral asset that was not vital to their interest, meaning the defense of the Soviet Union. However, their presence was a potentially great asset to the Soviets in the sense that it complicated matters considerably for the US.

The Cuban Crisis holds implications for contemporary policy because it shows the importance of military superiority, particularly nuclear superiority, in bringing about a resolution to conflict on favorable terms, without war. Conservatives are uncomfortable with the mutual vulnerability inherent in assured destruction doctrines preferred by liberals. Conservatives prefer the security of war-avoidance based on brinksmanship and nuclear superiority. They seek to avoid war through strength. They advocate a geostrategic approach which includes the capacity to hit hardened targets and the capacity to impose highly unattractive escalatory options on the enemy. The Cuban missile crisis may be cited as a case in point. Superior forces, particularly nuclear forces, are a coercive tool which allowed the US to speak the language of the Soviets and stand them down payload. They were often used on maritime patrol. See Bill Sweetman and Bill Gunston, Soviet Air Power, (New York and London:Crescent-Salamander, 1978).

47 "Hawk's Cay Conference," OTB, p.50.
in crisis situations. Nuclear superiority is something which the United States held in 1962, has since lost, and which conservatives believe the US should attempt to regain.48

Crisis as Opportunity

As in a game, the conservative objective in superpower conflict is to win. Conservatives claim the Cuban missile crisis to have been cited as a game won by the United States, although the completeness of victory is subject to debate within the conservative school. Thomas Schelling, famous for his research into strategic games, has said that the Cuban missile crisis was "the best thing to happen to us since the Second World War." "Sometimes," he said, "the gambles you take pay off."49 His comments nicely capture the conservative perspective on crisis-as-opportunity. There exist shades of variation within the conservative school, distributed among those who see the crisis as an opportunity met (because of successful brinksmanship the missiles were taken out and a new understanding was reached with the Soviets); and those who see the crisis as an opportunity lost (because Kennedy failed to roll-back communism in the Western hemisphere).

The discovery of the missile sites in Cuba offered an opportunity many felt Kennedy should have been looking for. Thus Thomas Schelling's

48 The Reagan Administration's approach to arms control negotiations exemplifies an application of this reasoning. The use of arms build-ups in the establishment of a superior position -- the "negotiation from a position of strength" policy -- is accredited by this Administration with securing Soviet agreement on arms control treaties.

49 OTB p.104. Schelling argues that this view does not qualify him as a hawk, because, he says, "I worry enough about nuclear war that I am willing to take a one-shot risk to reduce the risks over the long run," This, of course, is a typical hawk attitude toward risk so Schelling will have to suffer the labelling.
recollection of a Harvard faculty gathering after Kennedy's speech on October 22, 1962:

I remember after the speech we were left with a sense of gloating; we just couldn't imagine how Khrushchev could have done such a dumb, blundering act, and we knew that we had him on this one and the only question was how bad a fall we were going to give him.50

Observers at the extreme conservative end of the ideological spectrum, it is perceived that Kennedy lacked the courage to acquire important possible gains from the crisis. Kennedy's failure to invade the island and depose Fidel Castro was seen as a major blunder. In 1972, Ronnald Reagan was quoted as saying,

We have seen an American President walk all the way to the barricade in the Cuban missile crisis and lack the will to take the final step to make it successful.51

The objective of removing Castro would have been greatly facilitated by an air strike and/or invasion of the island. From the conservative perspective, this option would have been an attractive one. Preferences are subject to rank ordering, however, and in the following passage Douglas Dillon demonstrates the way in which his preferences were manipulated during the crisis. He recalls being persuaded by the other members of the ExComm to postpone an air strike because of the possible propaganda leverage it would afford the Soviets, demonstrating that analysis could influence his preference schematic.

Because of this consideration, I concluded that it was probably worthwhile to give up the military benefits of the immediate air strike, but only if we were willing to commit ourselves to a course of action that might eventually end in an invasion of the island, the net result of which would be to get those missiles out of Cuba.52

50 "Hawk's Cay," OTB p.105.
Dillon at first offers to subordinate the air strike option to an invasion of the island as a desired objective. He then adds that the removal of the missiles should be the "net result," suggesting yet a higher-order objective which may or may not require the tactical moves of air-strike or invasion. He thereby demonstrates that desirable as an invasion may have seemed, this positive gain was not as important as removing the missile threat. Dillon, known as a conservative friendly to Kennedy, may thereby claim victory for the President. The missiles are gone. The net result is not the same as removing them through invasion, but the net result is at least the same or marginally better than the status quo ante.

American superiority, and the dangerous nature of nuclear war, both implied that the Soviets were quite wise to freeze in the face of the American alert. It would have been unreasonable for them to permit the crisis to escalate to war. Kennedy himself wondered on the 16th, "why would the Soviets permit nuclear war to begin under that sort of half-assed way?" For this reason,

interpretations of the Cuban Crisis written after the fact have tended to assess the outcome as inevitable. The Soviets simply had to swallow the fact that they had no choice but to capitulate to the American diktat.

The use of superiority for crisis-coercion is predicated on the assumption that decision-makers will be able to discern whether the problem is of sufficient import for the employment of nuclear alert in a deterrent capacity; Conservatives believe that US forces must be sufficiently superior for effective articulation of threat to the Soviets.

52 "Dillon Interview," OTB p.167.
54 Betts, Nuclear Blackmail p.114.
conservatives are usually concerned whether there is sufficient "positive" operational control by the professional military in nuclear crisis. It is assumed that the presence of these requirements is objectively determinable.
THE LIBERAL SCHOOL

The liberal, revisionist interpretation of the Cuban missile crisis draws a remarkably different picture of the subject. Liberal narratives portray the Cuban missile crisis as a failure in crisis avoidance. This analysis focuses upon American actions which may have threatened US national security. According to this interpretation, the United States, through provocative arms buildups and deployments and threatening gestures toward Cuba, caused the Soviets to deploy the missiles in Cuba. Furthermore, liberal analysis portrays the Soviet missile placement as an exaggerated threat. Anti-communist paranoia in the United States may have led Kennedy to over-react to a military deployment that did not approach a destabilization of the superior US nuclear position. The Cuban missile crisis was, according to this narrative, a very dangerous time indeed. However, the true danger in the Cuban missile crisis stems from nuclear weapons.

Liberal Values and Analysis

Liberal values are primarily anti-war. Consider Bertrand Russell’s reflections upon the nuclear arms race:

There is no conclusion possible in this march towards insane death except to turn right round and march, instead, towards sanity and life.55

Russell’s "march toward insane death" is the nuclear arms race, a dangerous competition which in itself undermines security. Those whom Allison, Carnesale and Nye call "doves" see engagement in a nuclear arms race as a self-destructive endeavor on the part of the United States. They portray a dangerous situation in which a conflict mentality creates an escalatory momentum to the occurrence of nuclear warfare. This mentality may seize

55 Quoted in Levine, Arms Debate p.288.
leaders, particularly in crisis. They summarize the concerns of this school as follows:

For Doves, the primary cause of war lies in arms races that become provocative and thus undermine deterrence. Doves worry about arms in themselves and the irresistible momentum of military preparations both because the psychology of arms races prevents conciliation and because threats that are intended to deter may instead provoke. Quantitative models of arms race escalation and psychological studies of crisis mentality en masse are enlisted to support the deterministic claims of this school.

Liberal policy recommendations advise against arms build-ups, deployments, or exercises which may be threatening the Soviet Union. This recommendation reflects a premise very different from the conservative premise, that the Soviets should be deterred from a position of strength. Instead, preferred liberal strategy is to increase Soviet security through tension-reduction initiatives and other measures, in order to reduce any perceived need for military escalation. Soviet actions that serve mainly to augment their retaliatory or 'second-strike' capability, are not viewed negatively by liberals. Robert McNamara, for example, said this at Hawk's Cay:

I remember very clearly later when we first started getting reports that the Soviets were beginning to harden-their silos, the story broke and I was quoted in print as saying that I was very glad to hear it. I was damn near lynched for saying it, but I thought it was a tremendous boost to crisis stability. It is very important to make sure that there are no incentives to launch, and the softness and vulnerability of the Soviet forces worried us for that reason.

McNamara's comment is instructive. Because there were no such "stabilizing" technologies available to the Soviets in 1962, Soviet narratives which portray Khrushchev as trying to extricate himself from a threatened

56 Allison, Carnesale and Nye, Hawk's Doves and Owls pp. 209-10.
position through a "quick fix" deployment in Cuba are more than a little plausible. The revisionist narrative on the crisis has gained ammunition from recent Soviet revelations. The Soviets support the arguments that Khrushchev "miscalculated," a danger to which liberal analysis is attentive. Their discussions in general support an interpretation of the crisis as a series of inadvertent and miscalculated moves and miscommunication.

Liberals believe that "the question posed by the missile crisis for today is: How do we create conditions where fear is not so dominating? How do we prevent crises, not manage them?" The liberal emphasis upon the importance of crisis avoidance is partly a consequence of their conclusions regarding the type of war which would result from a failure of crisis management or, more specifically, from deterrence. More significantly, perhaps, it is the result of liberal conclusions regarding the efficacy of crisis management. Liberals are not optimistic about the quality of control over crisis operations. Nor are they optimistic about the quality of communication between the major powers which is necessary for the effective exercise of nuclear deterrence. Levine summarizes the major liberal analysis as follows: "war will be thermonuclear"; "weapons are only to prevent war"; "war starts by irrationality, accident, miscalculation."

While the prevention of war is the primary objective of liberal foreign policy recommendations, many liberals argue that the Soviet threat has been

57 See Arnold Horelick's comments in "Hawk's Cay," OTB, pp.36-37.
59 Dean Rusk, "Interview" OTB p.200.
greatly distorted. In particular, American prejudices about the Soviet character have prevented a rational solution to the Cold War. An alternative view of the Soviet Union was presented by R.W. Malcomson:

Distorted perceptions of Soviet policy and outlook are regrettably commonplace in the West, and these misapprehensions work very much against efforts to formulate sensible policy and, in the end, they have dangerous implications for our common survival. We hear much of Soviet hostility but little about the official, long-standing Soviet policy of coexistence with the West. (Soviet doctrine holds that socialism will spread without war with the West.) We are often told about Soviet "expansionism," and there is no doubt that Russia has wanted and endeavored to spread its influence, as have all great powers, past and present, including the United States. (A desire to spread influence does not necessarily imply a plot to rule the world.) However, it is also clear that, since its take-over of much of eastern Europe at the end of the Second World War, the Soviet Union has, in terms of direct political control, expanded very little.61

The imminent psychologist Erich Fromm ascribed much more peaceful intentions to the Soviet Union, based upon his analysis of Soviet interests. It was Fromm’s assessment that

Khrushchev neither believes in the possibilities for revolution in the West, nor does he want it, nor does he need it for the development of his system. What he needs is peace, a reduction in the armaments burden, and unquestioned control over his system.62

Philip Tetlock observed that liberals "argue that Soviet motives are fundamentally defensive (driven by security concerns) and that the current geopolitical and military competition between the superpowers derives less from the incompatibility of the actual interests of the United States and the Soviet Union, and more from the propensity of each side to exaggerate the hostile intent of the other."63 The liberal strategy toward the Soviet Union

61 R.W. Malcomson, Nuclear Fallacies (Kingston, Ontario: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1985), p.84:

62 Quoted in Levine, Arms Debate p.290.

is to encourage peaceful elements and to set an example of moral leadership. Liberals worry less about the character of Soviet leaders than they worry about a momentum of events leading to military conflict.

Differences between the ideological schools are clear in regard to locus of threat. The conservative assessment of threat portrays the Soviets as the potential initiators of a war from which they might benefit. By demonstrating capability, credibility and resolve, the US may convince them that it would not be rational behavior on the part of the Soviets to launch a nuclear attack on the United States. The liberal assessment of threat, however, focuses upon the weapons themselves. It portrays the Soviets, and Americans alike, as human beings prone to human error and irrational behavior. For example, Dean Rusk reflected upon his fear that Khrushchev might initiate a full nuclear strike upon the United States. When asked if the strategic balance would not have deterred Khrushchev, Rusk replied:

Well, rationally, you might think so. But when a man is in that situation and he can't carry his own colleagues with him, what would he do? You had no ability to predict with certainty what a man would do in the circumstances in which he would find himself. I think we always have to leave open the unpredictability of what an actual living, breathing human being would do in a situation in which he finds himself.64

Whereas it is the conservative belief that failure to maintain capabilities contributes to the danger of war, the liberal belief is that arms races cause wars and therefore a persistent, obsessive quest for military superiority is a dangerous thing:

It is argued, to begin with, that military expansion is self-defeating, in that it is likely to provoke a similar countervailing expansion by the other side. Moreover, the mutual threat posed by such competitive military growth intensifies other conflicts and contentions among nations, leading to additional uncertainty and insecurity, further pressures for military expansion, and so on in a vicious, escalating

64 "Rusk Interview," OTB p.178.
circle. In short, the partisans of the "arms race" school do not see the competitive acquisition of military capability as a neutral instrument of policy, still less as a means to prevent war, but rather as a major link in the complex chain of events leading to armed conflict.  

Particularly since international security may quickly erode in crisis situations, nuclear weapons have become an dangerous burden for the US, and are seen to have been irrelevant, at best, to bringing about a resolution to the crisis. First, these weapons are seen to exist only for the purpose of preventing war. Former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara complained that at lower levels of conflict, nuclear weapons are ineffective:

Nuclear weapons serve no military purpose whatsoever. They are totally useless -- except only to deter one's opponent from using them.

Secondly, nuclear threats carry the risk of nuclear provocation. Nuclear coercion, liberals argue, guarantees not security, merely the production of more weapons by the adversary. Liberals maintain that the use of nuclear coercion leads to arms race escalation because each side of the superpower competition desires to hold coercive capacity.

On the far left, liberal policy recommendations may advocate complete unilateral disarmament. Levine notes that the more moderate members of his anti-war school, the anti-war marginalists, "reject unilateral disarmament because they recognize the constraint provided by the need to


66 Richard Ned Lebow has argued that deterrence may be self-defeating because it may stimulate fear and a subsequent hostile response. He advances this view in *Between Peace and War* and, with Jervis and Stein, in *Psychology and Deterrence*.

67 Robert McNamara, "The Military Role of Nuclear Weapons: Perceptions and Misperceptions," *Foreign Affairs*, vol.62 (Fall 1983); original held emphasis.
prevent the erosion of freedom."68 Most liberals, therefore, tend to favor minimum deterrence. They also prefer war avoidance to war planning. In contrast to conservatives who recommend the US maintain a war-fighting capability for melioration of war should it occur, liberals believe that "limited wars' escalate" and should not be considered.69 Control and melioration are not believed to be possible. Levine explains as follows:

whereas some other makers of arms recommendations try to meliorate war by channeling conflict toward "limited" wars, the anti-war marginalists fear the "escalation" of such little wars into big ones, and they generate small interest in meliorative substitution of "limited" war for the larger variety.70

They usually oppose civil defense programs, for example, because "even such a minor melioration of the terrors of nuclear war may make its coming more likely."71

In order to understand the conflicting analyses and recommendations of the conservative and liberal schools, one must recognize their conflicting assumptions about crisis decision. Both schools recognize that analytic

68 Levine, Arms Debate p.72. Levine notes that nevertheless, "when looking for positive arms recommendations to push, any possible favorable effect on freedom is secondary to the major search for an end to international violence." p.72.

69 The original distinction of hawks and doves in the Executive Committee was drawn on the basis of the member's advocacy of an air strike (the hawks) or a quarantine of the island (the doves). Because liberal analysis concludes that control and melioration of war are not possible, an air strike against Cuba was not an acceptable option to doves within the ExComm. An invasion of Cuba would be especially unpalatable because, as any veteran of the Pacific Theatre would know, even small islands can be very costly to take. Furthermore, the liberal perspective looks less favorably on actions that would degrade the moral credibility of the United States: "Now, we were aware of the high cost of an invasion of Cuba on the grounds that a large number of casualties would be inflicted there, particularly among Cubans, and that would leave scars on the hemisphere that would take generations to heal. And then there's always the enormous escalation if we started shooting Russians in Cuba. And so there was no appetite among several of us for an attack on Cuba." Dean Rusk, interview, OTB p.175.

70 Levine, Arms Debate p.73.

71 Levine, Arms Debate p.73.
consideration of the physical strategic environment is important to the formulation of policy, particularly one which relies on nuclear deterrence. The liberals, in questioning the assumption that decision-makers are always analytic in their considerations, draw conclusions that emphasize crisis avoidance. Conservatives, in contrast, may believe their perspective to have been more realistic at a time of expanding Soviet influence.

The Liberal Narrative

The danger of nuclear war resulting from the Cuban missile crisis is a cornerstone of the liberal narrative. Dean Rusk is one of many who have called the crisis "the most dangerous the world has ever seen," because the two nuclear superpowers were at each other's jugular veins and it was not easy to see a way out. With fumbling on either side, this could have resulted in nuclear war.72

The Cuban experience is used as a powerful example of the danger created by nuclear arms races and military brinkmanship.

The danger of nuclear war is portrayed in liberal recollections of the crisis as being so great that any risk of escalation was too great a risk of escalation. As in the famous case of Robert Kennedy's one in three chance of nuclear war, liberal retrospectives are likely to attribute high probabilities of conflict escalation. These probability attributions are, of course, subjective, and therefore indicative of the attributor's value-informed analysis. Robert McNamara recalls feeling there was a "fifty-fifty" chance of Soviet retaliation in Berlin or Turkey to a US attack on Cuba.73 This is a risk which McNamara indicates he was very unwilling to take.

72 "Rusk Interview," OTB p.179.
Liberals promote minimum deterrence as opposed to conservative escalation dominance in their policy recommendations. Counter-city targeting is all that is necessary to deter the Soviets from launching an attack. To aim US weapons at Soviet military installations only with the expectation that only US military installations will be targeted in response, is complete nonsense to liberals. It suggests that nuclear weapons may feasibly be used. Dean Rusk had this to say about such a policy:

The idea of a limited nuclear war is nonsense. The idea of a prolonged nuclear war from which one side can emerge with some sort of advantage is nonsense. And some of this nonsense is drawn into official discussion. For example, the counterforce strategy: the idea of that is that you aim your own nuclear weapons at their military targets, and that will send a message to their leaders to leave your cities alone...

[Rusk constructs a hypothetical phone conversation in which the US president tells the Soviet leader not to worry, he is only targeting Soviet military installations, but that the Soviet leader should go to his shelter.]

You're immediately in the world of the bizarre when you try to construct the message that you pretend to want to send in a counterforce strike. And so the truth is that if these weapons begin to fly, that's the end. And that simple fact has prevented the firing of these weapons so far.4

Minimum deterrence is compatible with the liberal analysis that nuclear weapons are effective only to prevent war if anything.75 The Cuban example is cited in support of the effectiveness of minimum deterrence.

According to liberal analysts of the crisis, the Cuban case demonstrates that deterrence works both ways, regardless of margin of

73 OTB, p.192. Because Turkey is a NATO ally, an attack on Turkey would mean, in Douglas Dillon's words, "an attack upon all. So NATO and the Warsaw Pact go to war. Inevitably, a move or two after that, we are in a nuclear holocaust." "Dillon Interview," OTB p.160.


75 See Levine's discussion, Arms Debate pp.72-74.
superiority in the nuclear balance. Just as the Soviets may have been deterred by massive US superiority, so too were the Americans deterred—even given Soviet inferiority. Several days into the Hawk's Cay conference, Abraham Chayes commented, "I'm convinced more than ever that a little deterrence goes a hell of a long way. Why, this little ragtail three-hundred-weapon arsenal of the Soviets' thoroughly deterred us." Robert McNamara agreed, and argued that any risk is too great a risk:

Abe [Chayes] is right. And that goes back to my point, that when there's even a small risk of total disaster, I'm significantly deterred and very anxious to avoid any risk in that direction if I can.76

Narratives on the crisis that are further to the left are woven by analysts less comfortable with the exercise of nuclear deterrence. Richard Ned Lebow has argued that the Cuban missile crisis, in any case, does not support conservative claims of deterrence success. Lebow argues that despite the clear publication by the US of its position on a potential Soviet deployment in Cuba, despite its military capability to enforce its position, and resolve to do so, the Soviets nevertheless deployed the missiles.77 Lebow discounts the argument that the deployment took place because Khrushchev held Kennedy to lack resolve, saying of this interpretation,

The academy has more or less accepted it uncritically because it sat so nicely with the entrenched "realist" gospel that questionable resolve invites challenge while firmness discourages. It was also the only interpretation consistent with deterrence theory.78

76 James Blight and Robert McNamara discussed Chayes' point in "McNamara's Interview" in OTB p.193. See also McNamara, "The Military Role of Nuclear Weapons."

77 The failure to deter the deployment seems relatively minor compared to the success in compelling their removal. Lebow's analysis demonstrates the literal emphasis on crisis prevention, however, and as such his position has merit.

78 Lebow, "Deterrence Failure Revisited," International Security Summer1987 (Vol.12, No.1) p.203; cited hereafter as Lebow, "Deterrence Failure".
To the contrary, says Lebow, Kennedy had made a strong impression on Khrushchev. Lebow cites Khrushchev's reflections on the Vienna summit, that Kennedy "rose in my estimation at once. ...He was, so to speak, both my partner and my adversary."  

Another explanation for the deployment, that the US was seen to lack credibility after the Bay of Pigs fiasco, is discounted by Lebow who says "It did not require an especially astute student of American politics to recognize that Kennedy could not afford a second Cuban fiasco and that because of this he was under the gun to honor his well-publicized commitment to keep Soviet missiles out of Cuba."  

Lebow concludes that deterrence did not fail because Kennedy executed it poorly, thus transferring the failure from the practitioner to deterrence itself.

In keeping with liberal analysis that views the Soviet Union as acting defensively, the revisionist narrative of the Cuban Crisis begins with the assessment that the US found itself confronted with Soviet missiles in Cuba because of its own provocative arms build-up and adventurous support for Cuban insurgents. US nuclear superiority provoked the USSR into placing the missiles in Cuba in the first place, according to liberals. They cite Khrushchev's own reflections on the US deployment of missiles in Turkey, about which he felt great unease.

Richard Ned Lebow points to the US deployment of missiles in Europe and Turkey as measures which increased Soviet insecurities.

79 The failure to deter the deployment seems relatively minor compared to the success in compelling their removal. Lebow's analysis demonstrates the liberal emphasis on crisis prevention, however, and as such his position has merit.

80 Lebow, "Deterrence Failure," p.205.

Furthermore, Kennedy's new programs to increase US strategic readiness added to Soviet perceptions of threat. In the context of its time, the Soviet deployment can in general be attributed to Soviet insecurities, including insecurities over a political resolution of the Berlin question. Lebow draws connections between the Berlin crises and the Cuban missile crisis, and argues that Khrushchev felt defeated in Berlin and needed a foreign policy success:

The action and reaction that linked Berlin and Cuba was part of [a] larger cycle of insecurity and exaggerated response that reached well back into the 1950s. Both Berlin crises were triggered by acute Soviet perceptions of threat arising from the frangibility of the Eastern bloc and NATO deployment of nuclear-tipped missiles aimed at the Soviet Union. Those missiles in turn were a response to Western insecurities about the conventional military balance in Central Europe, which had been made more acute by the creation of the Warsaw Pact in 1955.82

The "defense of Cuba" continues to be a main argument justifying the Soviet deployment that is used by Soviet participants in conferences on the crisis. New evidence has been released in the United States which has fueled the liberal-conservative debate over the merits of this defense. Declassified US government documents point to covert American moves against Cuba in an operation called Mongoose. The aim of Mongoose was to topple Castro by October 20, 1962. Pierre Salinger, press agent to Kennedy at the time of the crisis, wrote in 1989,

A document that Brig. Gen. Edward G. Lansdale handed to the President on Feb. 20, 1962, clearly indicates that Operation Mongoose brought together all the elements needed for a military overthrow of the Castro regime.83

This evidence has been used to support allegations that the US was planning to invade the island, and in support of Soviet claims that their chief

82 Lebow, "Provocative Deterrence: A New Look at the Cuban Missile Crisis," Arms Control Today (Vol.18, No.6) July/August 1988, p.16.

motivation in deploying the missiles was the defense of Cuba.\textsuperscript{84} Robert McNamara told Soviet analysts of the crisis at the Cambridge Conference, "We thought those covert operations were terribly ineffective, and you thought they were ominous. We saw them very differently."\textsuperscript{85}

Political or Strategic Decision?

Perhaps the most fundamental, and dramatic revisionism in liberal narratives regards the motives of US leaders, and therefore their ensuing ability to form rational strategic objectives during the crisis. Kennedy may have over-reacted to the Soviet deployment, according to revisionist analysis. A prime element of this position is that the missiles were not the threat they were portrayed to have been. Robert McNamara is at the forefront of those who claim that the missiles in Cuba had no effect upon the strategic balance, that their significance was entirely political.

The research for this thesis has found no documentary evidence that McNamara advocated a "do nothing" argument with any enthusiasm or persistence. James Blight and David Welch also conclude that "it is clear that no one in the ExComm argued that the missiles did not have to be removed from Cuba."\textsuperscript{86} McNamara's enthusiasm for the "do nothing" approach in his retrospectives on the crisis indicate a bit of historical editing on his part, with the desired aim of promoting this particular school of

\textsuperscript{84} In a contrasting interpretation of the evidence, Ray Cline asserts that the limited nature of Operation Mongoose shows US reluctance to take decisive action against Castro. See Cline, "Commentary."

\textsuperscript{85} "Cambridge Conference," \textit{OTB} p.249. McNamara said earlier, "Let me say that I had no plan to invade Cuba, and I would have opposed the idea strongly if it ever came up." Sorensen suggested he rephrase and McNamara then corrected himself to say "Okay, we had no intent."

\textsuperscript{86} Blight and Welch, "View from Washington," \textit{OTB} p.121.
thought in contemporary circles. McNamara comfortably joins many scholars who question the sagacity of the "do something" approach. Blight and Welch have summarized some of the major arguments:

while the deployment would have eased the Soviets' strategic nuclear predicament, it did not change the fundamental fact of American strategic nuclear superiority; the Americans had deployed nuclear missiles on the periphery of the Soviet Union, and there was no particular reason why the Soviets should not have been entitled to do the same with respect to the United States; there was nothing in international law which prohibited the Soviet action, though clearly the manner in which it was undertaken involved an unprecedented level of deceit on the part of the Soviets.87

Kennedy's willingness to risk war has therefore been an issue of contention in contemporary strategic circles. If the analyst concludes that the strategic threat to the United States was real, the use of nuclear alert early on in the crisis will likely be assessed as appropriate. If the analyst concludes that the strategic threat to the United States was marginal and did not generate any significant new risk, why did the Administration go as far as it did in the Crisis? Subjective forces, personal political pressures on the President, provide one possible explanation.

Liberal analysis may conclude that domestic political pressure facing leaders is a constraint upon their ability to act rationally. The President had committed himself to act against Cuba when he had chosen to exploit the issue in campaign addresses. Theodore Sorensen’s remarks that "...if we had known that the Soviets were putting forty missiles in Cuba, we might under this hypothesis have drawn the line at one hundred, and said with great fanfare that we would absolutely not tolerate the presence of more than one hundred missiles in Cuba," imply that Kennedy's public

87 Blight and Welch, "View from Washington," OTB p.121.

88 "Hawk's Cay," OTB p.43. Blight and Welch disagree with the implied analysis, but note that this is "the closest any of the former policy-makers at Hawk's Cay comes to conceding
commitments not to tolerate the missiles are the underlying reason for their unacceptability. JD Steinbruner had this assessment of the crisis:

Given the constellation of domestic politics of the time, the Soviet missiles in Cuba were a far more serious and compelling threat to the political career of the President than they were to the strategic objectives of the United States as a whole. Hence the significant risk of war entailed in their removal under the threat of force is more readily understood as a somewhat indirect result of the position taken by the politically threatened President than as the expected analytic reaction of a strategically threatened nation.89

Political, rather than strategic considerations are even said to have accounted for the time pressure facing the President. The impending readiness of the missiles has widely been attributed as a cause of time pressure, yet Robert McNamara argues that the significance of the missile readiness was only as a political expedient for the hawks who sought to justify quick military action. McNamara notes that "those who initially favored the air strike continued to favor it even after it became clear that the missiles were operational."90 Instead, according to Lebow, Kennedy's time pressure was internal pressure to choose between a missile trade and an air strike. He was under pressure from the various factions of the ExComm, which Lebow says was brought into being "less to make policy than to legitimate it,"91 and he was struggling to maintain a united front among of his advisors. Kennedy's desire to maintain ExComm unity and his realization that "he would soon have to make a choice" were the main sources for a sense of urgency:

the possibility that the Soviet deployment might not have been entirely unacceptable, at least under certain circumstances." OTB pp.337-38, fn.45.


90 "Hawk's Cay," OTB p.55. Italics in original.

91 According to Lebow, Kennedy wished to present a "united front" to impress other government officials and congressmen and "widen the scope of support for the President." Personal correspondence, "The Role of Time Pressure."
In short, Kennedy's painful decisional dilemma was a good part a function of the political constraints he faced.92

Narratives from this school often emphasize the dubious ability of decision makers to perform complex analytic calculations regarding ends and means. Decision-makers face a great deal of uncertainty in crisis and they may react in unpredictable and dangerous ways during periods of superpower tension. Soviet decision-makers can not always be expected to respond favorably to coercion, nor can US decision-makers always be expected to know with certainty that they will do so.

Lessons from the Crisis

Liberals say the moral of the Cuban Missile Crisis is "do not provoke." Rather than reacting to Soviet actions, this school advises US leaders to consider causes of those actions. This is particularly true if the US is at fault for provoking the Soviets, as liberals find from analysis of the Cuban Crisis.

Two negative repercussions of the crisis are cited by liberals as evidence against adopting a hawkish manner of crisis behavior. The first is an escalated arms race:

The Soviets responded to the US buildup and to their embarrassment in Cuba with increases in Soviet missile strength and deployment of missiles in submarines and hardened silos.93

Second is the effect on the domestic political scene. The US involvement in the Vietnam War, says Richard Ned Lebow, was "spurred on by some wrongly applied lessons of the Cuban Crisis."94

92 Lebow, "The Role of Time Pressure."


94 Lukas, "Class Reunion," p.61.
demonstrating resolve, American policy makers eventually met Vietnam, a
commitment beyond domestic tolerance and US responsibilities.

Liberals stress that policy-makers should focus upon mitigating Soviet
perceptions of need to enter into conflict. To liberals, the Cuban Crisis
should be regarded as a warning not to enter into crisis, as crisis may easily
lead into war. Liberals view the crisis as a failure in crisis avoidance. Rather
than blindly opposing communism, liberals argue that US leaders would be
better advised to avoid the adoption of crisis mentality.

THE NEO-LIBERAL SCHOOL
A third school of thought on the Cuban missile crisis, for lack of a better
title, will be called the neo-liberal school. Neo-liberal analysis of the Cuban
missile crisis can be found primarily in studies of crisis-management.
Studies consistent with the neo-liberal approach examine in some detail the
operations of the political and military machinery during the Cuban missile
crisis. The methodology of neo-liberal analyses is process-oriented, looking
to war plans and decision-making procedures. Consequently, the types of
lessons neo-liberals draw from the crisis are concerned with ways in which
the Kennedy Administration's handling of the affair could have been more
efficient, more rational, and less risk-laden.

Neo-Liberal Values and Analysis
In terms of values and analysis, this third school is much more difficult than
the others to define. First, values are a complex blend of anti-war and anti-
communism and, as Levine says of the 'middle marginalists,' "to get to the
middle one must utilize a complex structure of logic."95 There are two
ways to hold a middle view. First, one may balance anti-war and anti-communist values (these individuals are termed 'balanced-value middle marginalists'). Second, one may have values which are anti-war, but analyses that are anti-communist (and these are referred to as 'analytical middle marginalists'). Neo-liberals include these groups.

Levine’s middle marginalist schools holds "Prevention of war; and Melioration of war" as primary values, with the "analytical" middle school holding "defense of freedom against Communism" as highly valued. Their analysis is the same:

War tends to become thermonuclear; Weapons are primarily to deter war but we may have to strike (first or second); Rationality can exert substantial control over irrationality; accidental war requires both an accident and a wrong response...Escalation can be controlled though proper attention to tactical nuclear weapons, conventional forces, etc.; The arms race can perhaps be controlled; Control and melioration of war may be possible particularly in those cases where we strike first.

Levine’s middle schools believe that there exist real clashes of interest between the US and USSR, but are willing to believe the Soviets may change in the long-run. In thinking about conflict, the prime strategic is still defined as the Soviet Union. Following analysis that war tends to become thermonuclear, the prime strategic objective is the avoidance of accidental or inadvertent war, and the melioration of war should it occur.

It is the nature of superpower crisis that the short term is all-important. The arms-competition between the superpowers is something that conservatives may seek to win, liberals may seek to eradicate, but which neo-liberals seek to stabilize. As its name suggests, crisis-management

95 Levine, Arms Debate p.85.
96 Levine, Arms Debate pp.212-213.
97 Levine, Arms Debate p.213. It is instructive to note here that Levine constructed these schools in the 1960s, long before Perestroika and Glasnost.
implies the belief that crisis can be successfully managed once begun. The dominant concern of neo-liberals regarding crisis is that it "could create an environment for unintended nuclear war." Analysis of the Cuban missile crisis which fall into the middle may be especially slippery in terms of identifying the implicit assumptions regarding the Soviet Union and the goals of American strategy. The crisis-management approach appears to be relatively neutral ideologically.

In narratives on the Cuban missile crisis, the neo-liberals do not dwell on ways in which it could have been prevented, as liberal arms-race-escalation-crisis-provocation scenarios may. Nor do they bemoan, as conservatives do, the missed opportunity to achieve an outcome more favorable to the United States. Neo-liberal narratives concentrate on the management of political and military operations during the Cuban missile crisis.

The two major considerations of the middle approach are the way in which force technology is managed and the way in which the determination of policy is managed. Liberals draw supportive arguments from the findings of this school, because they may conclude that the difficulties in managing large and complex (i.e. warfighting) strategic forces make them dangerous to possess. The important distinction to be made here is that whereas liberals may speak of technical "impossibilities," neo-liberals write merely about technical "difficulties." Conservatives may take heart from neo-liberal analyses because from exposing the difficulties of technical management of strategic operations, the process of correction may begin. Those seeking a war-fighting posture might be interested looking at neo-liberal analysis in

98 Allison, Carnesale and Hye call this school the "owls" in their work Hawks Doves and Owls, An Agenda for Avoiding Nuclear War.
order to fine-tune a strategy to "prevail." Neo-liberal analysts may draw less-dramatic conclusions from their own work, and instead seek marginal adjustments to make the process of managing strategic operations more efficient.

Neo-liberals are trying to maintain a balance. The concept of strategic stability nicely typifies this approach. Following the development of nuclear weapons, and in a time in which Americans recognized the Soviets will eventually achieve something like parity, it was important that this concept be defined in order to determine appropriate numbers and types of weapons and delivery systems appropriate for the American strategic posture. Steinbruner notes that within the American strategic community, a consensus has developed with regard to the general concept of strategic stability. The guiding established principles are as follows:

Strategic nuclear attack on the population and industrial structure of the United States, which cannot be repulsed given the technology of our era is to be deterred by threatening potential enemies with such massive damage in retaliation that no matter what their political or psychological state might be, they will always choose not to attack. In order to avoid giving an enemy a rational incentive to initiate war in time of crisis, the strategic forces which carry the threat of retaliation must be sufficiently invulnerable to sudden destruction that the deterrent threat cannot be removed or sharply reduced by a preemptive attack aimed solely at those forces.

A critical aspect of strategic stability, and the archetypal concern of the neo-liberal school, pertains to the political control of strategic forces.

99 Steinbruner, "National Security and the Concept of Strategic Stability," Journal of Conflict Resolution Vol. 22, No. 3, September 1978, P. 413. Italics added. According to this definition, strategic missile submarines have become considered to be the most stable force element. Because they cannot be readily located and preempted, submarine forces provide a secure retaliatory capability. In contrast, fixed-site land-based missiles are less stable. Their greater accuracy, and payload, combined with their lesser vulnerability to attack, makes them possible preemptive weapons. Furthermore, because they are mobile, displaced and cannot move, they are more vulnerable to preemption themselves. See Steinbruner's discussion in "Strategic Stability," pp. 414-415.
Steinbruner warns that the conventional definition of strategic capability omits this critical dimension, namely, the physical and organizational arrangements for exercising deliberate command of strategic forces.\(^{100}\) Because of the vulnerability of central command, one must expect that flexibility of command in the form of devolution exists so that military forces may continue to function in conflict and without the express authority of a central command. There are disturbing political implications of such delegation. In any case, the numbers of theatre commanders and their subordinates are still few enough to be targeted. The onus of retaliation then shifts to more hardened forces, particularly submarines, which are the "most precarious link" in the communications network.\(^{101}\) The devolution of political authority is something which must be considered in contingency planning. Although Steinbruner acknowledges the implementation of procedures to prevent low-level military officers from initiating nuclear conflict, it is nevertheless reasonable to assume there is some system to devolve authority. Steinbruner concludes,

> In short, regardless of the flexibility embodied in individual force components, the precariousness of command channels probably means that nuclear war would be uncontrollable, as a practical matter.

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100 Steinbruner, "Strategic Stability," p. 417. The ironic result of the effort to make forces less vulnerable is that the command of these forces has become more vulnerable to disruption. There are two reasons for this. First, it is the nature of nuclear weapons that a central command authority in Washington be responsible for defense decision-making, and an attack upon Washington could theoretically neutralize the entire strategic arsenal.

Second, due also to the nature of nuclear weapons, the "maintenance of a clear distinction between political and military authority" is imperiled. Steinbruner, "Strategic Stability," p. 419.

101 Steinbruner, "Strategic Stability," pp. 422-423. Submarines do not communicate with the central authority in times of crisis in order to prevent disclosure of their position. They may become involved in tactical encounters with the enemy about which the command authority may have no knowledge.
shortly after the first tens of weapons are launched -- regardless of what calculations political leaders might make at the time.102

Neo-liberal concern over lack of control underlie the growing literature on command vulnerability and strategic stability.103 The Cuban missile crisis is a historical example of crisis, a time in which command stability is seen to acquire greater significance, and so it is fuel to the fire of C3 analysis.

Neo-liberals have concentrated upon exposing organizational and technical errors which occurred during the crisis. Incomplete information or loss of control due to psychological, bureaucratic and organizational error are viewed as threatening to peace. Once the mentality of conflict has been established in crisis, turning back may be difficult.

Political leaders have only so much control over the complex operations of government they oversee, and less control over the actual course of events. "McNamara's Law" is Robert McNamara's oft-repeated warning to potential cold-warriors:

It is impossible to predict with a high degree of certainty the consequences of the use of military force because of the risk of accident, miscalculation, inadvertence and loss of control.104

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104 Lukas, "Class Reunion," p.61.
Decision analysts concentrate upon exposing non-rational influences in the conduct of decision-makers during crisis, so that the process may be improved upon. The impact of uncertainty upon rational decision-making has been a criterion issue in political science, organizational management science, and social psychology. The neo-liberal approach to crisis analysis is very process oriented. Liberals and conservatives look to the outcome of crisis, finding arms race escalation and strategic victory, respectively. The neo-liberals are concerned with the effective employment of means in situations of complexity, and the subjective influences which may hinder rationality in the determination of ends.105

The Neo-Liberal Narrative

The anti-war values of neo-liberals are subtly reflected in their studies' concern with the rational political control of military operations and the rational behavior of political actors in determining the objectives and means of crisis management. Neo-liberal narratives on the Cuban missile crisis are replete with the terms miscalculation, misperception, inadverence, accident and unintended incident. There is no doubt the consequences of miscalculation during the Cuban missile crisis could have been devastating. The US lacked a strong air defense for protection from Soviet attack. Insubordination in the field could become catastrophic when many

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105 The method of decision analysis is easily as interesting as the decision itself. Decision studies have tended to utilize, in one work, competing models of decision. Graham Allison is well known for adopting this method. This method is based upon the premise that analysis from a multitude of perspectives yields a more comprehensive explanation. Allison's "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis" (American Political Science Review, September 1969) approached analysis of the decision-making behavior of the ExComm from various perspectives, including bureaucratic and organizational perspectives. In *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971) Allison attempted to comprehensively explain the actions of the ExComm, identifying the underlying causes of the policy outcome.
comparatively low-ranking officers were given discretionary control over nuclear weapons (as were SAC commanders).

Because they are concerned with the danger of the crisis environment, neo-liberal narratives, like those of the liberals, may criticize the Kennedy Administration’s pre-crisis bravado. Neo-liberals are hesitant to make elaborate statements of commitment, particularly if there is a commitment/capability gap, or if the interest is not vital to US national security. Blight, Nye and Welch, whose analysis of the crisis is mostly consistent with this school, had this to say about Kennedy’s pre-crisis bravado:

President Kennedy’s public warnings to the Soviets not to deploy offensive weapons in Cuba virtually committed the two countries to a showdown once the missiles were discovered.106

In analysis accounting for Kennedy’s statements regarding Cuba, neo-liberals, in contrast to the liberals, seem less interested in the danger of provoking the Soviets than they are interested in the practical matter of defending the commitment once challenged.

The Cuban missile crisis is valuable to the neo-liberal school as an historical episode in which many of the issues on their agenda came to the fore. This section will first explore the technological and political control factors used in neo-liberal narratives on the Cuban crisis. The remainder of this section will look at the ground-breaking work in decision study that came out of the crisis. Following Allison’s method of using competing models of decision, the last part of this paper will use the transcripts of the ExComm to work through another competing model of decision, that of

John D. Steinbruner, in the way of reviewing the actual ExComm deliberations.

Political Control

Neo-liberals are concerned that the political authority rest with the executive during crisis and that any devolution of authority to the military be subordinated to the political agenda. Because of the special nature of crisis, the issue of control becomes a special concern. Steinbruner notes that control is particularly difficult during crisis operations, when the forces are dispersed:

...geographic dispersion under crisis conditions [as in the] Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962...increases the risk that strategic operations will evolve beyond the ability of the command channels to control them.107

This danger is particularly acute in the case of naval operations. Scott Sagan reports:

During the quarantine, the NAW forced four or five F-class submarines to the surface by riding on them, pinging them with active sonar, and in at least one case, dropping practice depth charges.108

It has been reported that during the crisis a Soviet submarine near the quarantine line damaged in an encounter with American naval forces. It was then forced to return to the Soviet Union on the surface.109


108 These operations were authorized by the Sec Def, but point to the close encounters at sea. "Hawk's Cay," OTB p.63. See also Blight and Welch's discussion in "The View From" OTB pp. 125-26.

109 Scott Sagan, "Nuclear Alerts," p.117. Sagan said, "after a Soviet Zulu-class submarine was spotted while being refueled near the Azores on Monday, October 22, the US Navy searched an area of some 3.5 million square miles, eventually receiving more than twenty possible submerged contacts and succeeding in surfacing five or six Soviet Foxtrot-class diesel-attack submarines in or near the quarantine zone. In most cases...US naval forces simply 'rode' the diesel submarines, which had to surface approximately every 48 hours to recharge batteries, or
McNamara's concern over the conduct of American naval forces encountering Soviets at the quarantine became legendary when Graham Allison described the reportedly explosive encounter between McNamara and Admiral Anderson.\footnote{Allison, "Conceptual Models."}

Similarly, covert operations were in motion which seemed to be beyond the Executive's parameters of control. Whether or not Operation Mongoose achieved the political aims for which it was designed, it was effective nevertheless in carrying out some of its mission. According to Raymond Garthoff,

One incident, never before disclosed, that occurred in the midst of ...negotiations from October 28 to November 20 may have affected the American position favorably, but it was not planned or even known to the ExComm. By November 8, the United States had begun perceptibly to stiffen its insistence on the IL-28s and other issues at dispute, including what the Soviets could only see as an effort to backpedal on what was, for them, the key question remaining: American assurances not to attack Cuba. On that date, a Cuban covert action sabotage team dispatched from the United States successfully blew up a Cuban industrial facility.\footnote{Garthoff, Reflections on the Cuban Missile Crisis (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution) p.78. Cited hereafter as Garthoff, Reflections.}

...
Furthermore, Garthoff claims, the covert operations of Mongoose were not terminated until October 30, "once it had accidentally been learned that they were still going on!"  

Although Mongoose had been reinvigorated in early October, it had apparently been forgotten once the crisis resolution was in sight. Robert Kennedy was sent a message from an operative, uneasy about continuing operations after the agreement to end the crisis, to verify the mission. General Edward Lansdale went to Miami to confirm that the mission was terminated. It was too late:

three of ten six-man sabotage teams planned earlier in October to be sent into Cuba had already been dispatched and were beyond recall. One of them, on November 8, carried out its mission.

Military operations during the Cuban missile crisis often appeared out of the hands of the political authority. The Defense Condition (DefCon) command was signalled in the clear, without the policy-makers' knowledge. One might presume that this procedure would be carefully

112 Carthoff, Reflections pp.78-79.

113 In combination with the Philbrigex, the naval force on 'exercise' in the Caribbean, the scale of Mongoose was potentially very significant. Philbrigex was large enough for an invasion force. Right-wing conservatives were very critical of Kennedy because he had refused to provide US air cover for the Bay of Pigs invasion by Cuban dissidents directed by the CIA. Mongoose and Philbrigex may have been a concession to them.

114 Garthoff, Reflections p.79. Garthoff refers to Schlesinger, Robert Kennedy, pp.333-34; and Prados, Presidents' Secret Wars, p.214; and Alleged Assassination Plots, pp.147-48 on the matter of Operation Mongoose, but claims that the incident on November 8 has never been reported in a publication previous to Reflections.

115 General Powers allegedly told Major General George Keegan, 'Make a little mistake. Send a message in the clear.' Scott Sagan credits HR. Haldeman with this story. See The Ends of Power, (New York: Times Books, 1978) p.93. See also J. Anthony Lukas, "Class Reunion: Kennedy's Men Re-live the Cuban Missile Crisis," New York Times Magazine (August 30, 1987) p.61; cited hereafter as Lukas, "Class Reunion." Sagan argues that with or without the unauthorized in the clear signalling, the Soviets would have picked up on the American alert. See Sagan, "Nuclear Alerts." The unauthorized signalling, although contrary to the subordination of force to policy, was not in essence contrary to the intention of policy. The Kennedy Administration sought to make it explicit that not only was the US very serious about
monitored by the political authority, as would the operational plans of the military be well known to them, yet it seems that the President was unaware of the SAC plan to use tactical nuclear warheads in the strike against Cuba.

It might also be highly disconcerting to neo-liberals that the operational military plans which the Executive had at their disposal were seemingly irrelevant to the management of forces in crisis. The SIOP - or single integrated operational plan - of the American defense forces was considered "absolutely useless" by Robert McNamara. He recalls a conversation with Henry Kissinger, Secretary of State and National Security Advisor under Presidents Nixon and Ford:

he once asked me how I could have served seven years as Secretary of Defense and left the SIOP in such an unusable form. I told him there wasn't much of anything anybody could do with it. Eight years later he had the grace to say that he agreed. SIOP-53 was absolutely useless. Under no circumstances would I have used it.

One might find it troubling that there existed a "master plan" which was looked upon so negatively by the Secretary of Defense, and yet it continued to exist. Why did McNamara not have the SIOP revised? Or, more critical still, what if it had been implemented in 1962? McNamara's statement at the very least indicates that detailed scrutiny of the efficacy of SIOPs is warranted.

Intelligence Gaps

In order for policy-makers to choose the optimum course, it is very important that they have as much intelligence as possible. The Cuban

its perceived interests in the Caribbean, but that if military encounter did occur, the US would win.

116 "Hawk's Cay," OTB p.63. McNamara's emphasis. He is most likely reacting to the provisions for the use of nuclear weapons, an idea which is abhorrent to him.
missile crisis offers plenty of evidence that decision-makers can be astonishingly ill-informed.

Retrospective analysis of the military options during the crisis show that a successful air strike against Cuba was more possible than believed by the ExComm. The sites were all identified, and could have been easily hit by a large number of American sorties flying out of Florida. The nature of the weapons was such that launch under attack was not a threat. They were liquid fuel weapons and so the fuel could not be kept inside for long amounts of time. They were easily rendered useless by any hit in the general vicinity of their deployment area, and so planned use of tactical nuclear weapons in a US airstrike seems plausible. However, Kennedy's interpretation of the Air Force briefing was such that he concluded the danger of launch under attack was a deterrent to the air strike. Blight and Welch found instead that,

Though General Sweeney was technically correct in refusing to guarantee that he could destroy all the known missiles, he evidently failed to communicate to McNamara how unlikely a launch-under-attack would be.117

It should also be noted here that the President was told the warheads were not on the missiles but CIA reports said that there were missiles operational and some becoming so.118

The ExComm transcripts evidence great concern as to whether or not the missiles in Cuba were "operable,"119 and yet at Hawk's Cay it became clear some of the members of the ExComm, including the Secretary of

117 Blight and Welch, "Incommensurable Crises," in OTB, p.212; See also the larger discussion pp.209-213.


119 The term "operational" is used interchangeably.
Defense, did not seem to know what "operable" meant. Arnold Horelick questioned them, "Did the technologically unsophisticated in the crowd request a briefing on what 'operational' meant?" McNamara responded, "No, they didn't."120

Garthoff noted at the Hawk's Cay Conference that there were a number developments, about which the ExComm was not aware, which may have affected the outcome of the crisis. In addition to the October 22 DefCon signalling in the clear, Garthoff mentions that when Dean Rusk spoke to the Turks about the Jupiter missiles, the Turks presumed that Rusk knew the missiles had become operational and were formally handed over to them on October 22, 1962. Rusk apparently was unaware of this fact and conducted a misinformed dialogue with the Turks. Also on October 22, the Soviets arrested Colonel Penkovsky, who had been informing the United States. They may well have believed that their security had been severely violated.121

Three unintended incidents involving U-2 reconnaissance planes should also be mentioned. First, on August 30, a U-2 accidentally flew over Sakhalin Island, near Soviet Pacific Fleet bases.122 In September, a

120 "The Hawk's Cay Conference," OTB pp54-55. Discussion in "The View From Washington," OTB p.126. McNamara claims that the reports of the operability status of the missiles in any case, would not have made any difference because "we had to assume that they might have been and we weren't going to go a route [ed: he implies launch under airstrike attack] that risked millions of lives." This contrasts with his early insistence that the missile threat be eradicated before it became operational in the ExComm transcripts.

121 "The Hawk's Cay Conference," OTB p.75.

122 Gaithoff, Reflections p.13;
Nationalist U-2 flew over China and was shot down.123 On October 27, another U-2 strayed over Siberia.124

Such occurrences not only wreak havoc with the Clausewitzian notion of the subordination of force to policy, they compound uncertainty in a time "between peace and war" in which the pressures are already extreme:

"This is the week," President Kennedy told Dean Acheson, whom he had invited to his study for a chat on Thursday morning, "when I had better earn my salary." His remark reflected a deepening sense, among those concerned, of events getting out of control and time running out.125

It would seem very important that the American decision-makers would have some understanding of Soviet motivations. Blight and Welch describe what they perceive to have been at stake in the ExComm's assessment of the Soviet Union:

if the President chose to seek a negotiated solution, he would need to gauge those motivations in order to identify an acceptable bargain. If Khrushchev had deployed the missiles to defend Cuba, for instance, he might have accepted a non-invasion pledge in return for withdrawing them, but he probably would have rejected the offer of a missile trade.126

Likewise, if the President sought a military solution, understanding Soviet motivations would serve his interests, especially in determining the probable Soviet response:

If Khrushchev had deployed under-pressure from hard-liners, for instance, there may have been reason to think that an air strike or invasion carried comparatively little risk of Soviet retaliation, because Khrushchev could blame an American attack on his domestic political opponents and use the opportunity to secure his political position and

124 McGeorge Bundy, Danger and Survival pp.405-406. Bundy states, "Our spirits were not lifted [by this] news that another U-2...had strayed over Soviet territory, alerting Soviet fighters."
125 Leighton, The Cuban Missile Crisis p.15.
126 Blight and Welch, "The View From Washington," OTB p.119
enhance his reputation as peacemaker. If his main motivation was to provoke an American action to justify a move against Berlin, on the other hand, then a subsequent move against Berlin would seem—a more likely response.127

During the crisis itself, the Soviets were a virtual "black box" to the ExComm decision-makers, who came to rely greatly upon Lewellyn Thompson for his expertise on the Soviet Union.

Scholars who have studied the crisis have devoted a great deal of attention to this subject, and yet the policy-makers have been less eager to speculate on Soviet motives. Blight and Welch attribute the policy-makers attitude to the disorienting experience of crisis itself. While scholars are in the business of explaining events, policy-makers are in the business of managing them and taking the blame for their consequences.

Process Constraints

The ExComm alumni remember the role of the President, the availability of time to consider their options, and the advice of Lewellyn Thompson as their greatest assets. Thanks to these three assets, the ExComm had "the leadership, the time, and ultimately the information and advice they needed to re-orient themselves, to get over the initial shock, and, finally, to begin to try to explain the Soviets' behavior in rational terms."128 The authors conclude:

This process of psychological disorientation and reorientation, inevitable in the earliest phases of any truly nuclear crisis, profoundly affects the perceptions, judgments, [sic] and choices of decision-makers. No explanation or understanding of the Cuban missile crisis can be complete without a recognition of this fact.129

127 Blight and Welch, "The View From Washington," OTB p.119
128 Blight and Welch, "The View From Washington," OTB p.120.
129 Blight and Welch, "The View From Washington," OTB p.120.
In recognition of the psychological dimensions of crisis, many studies have sought to examine the decision-making process of the Administration itself. Graham Allison's study is the best-known analysis of this sort. His work, and the narrative on the crisis contained within it, was examined in some detail in Chapter II. Michel Crozier, who was present at the Harvard seminar on the Cuban Crisis, described his experience with Allison as:

the best exercise I had in the art of well-modulated rationality... Our purpose was to arrive at a decision theory capable of integrating the various elements connected with political life, administrative processes, and all the other material contingencies that...hinder the progress of rationality.130

Allison's objective was not oriented toward policy prescriptions. Crozier—asserts that the search was for reason, not right or wrong:

our seminar was aimed at avoiding an overly facile retrospective explanation as well as the moralizing that almost always goes with it, so as to understand the reasons for things at the moment they were happening.131

American policy analysts are seeking to recreate an objective and factual account of events. The assumption of rationality is questioned by neo-liberals because they seek improvements in policy formulation.

The neo-liberal approach of decision study should be recognized as being only impurely process-oriented. That is, the process is 'rational' if it effectively serves to attain a desired objective. The determination of objectives, the 'ends' of the policy, requires that value judgements be made. Hence, value judgements are implicit even in 'objective' analysis. The observations of the neo-liberals regarding the constraints on decision-makers

130 The Trouble with America: Why the system is breaking down Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, p.40; cited hereafter as Crozier, Trouble.

131 Crozier, op.cit. p.40. Although Crozier maintains that the seminar was unbiased, he is not bashful to state the following: "The hawks lost out because they had failed to understand the whole issue properly, owing to their intrinsic limitations." (p.41)
due to the conditions of crisis are nevertheless valuable. The way in which Kennedy mitigated some of the constraints of his situation in 1962 is worth study.

The "analytic paradigm," is an ideal model of rational decision-making. The conditions of analytic decision-making include accumulation of all information pertinent to the decision, consideration of all options open to the decision-maker, weighing of those options, and choosing that which best satisfies the objective at hand.

The most obvious decision constraint is time, which in crisis particularly is short for the decision-maker to complete a full range of analytic operations. Steinbruner noted that the decision-maker would logically wish to delay his decision until uncertainty can be resolved, yet often decisions are made in any case:

President Kennedy, faced with Soviet missiles in Cuba in the fall of 1962, was subject to great uncertainty. He did not know in any reliable way what the consequences of various actions on his part would be. If he did nothing he did not know whether it would irrevocably shift the world balance of power; whether it would be a reasonably minor shift in the arms balance, which was inevitable anyway; or whether some unforeseen but major effect might appear. No knowledge available to man could tell him such things, and yet he did in fact form some very strong opinions.

John D. Steinbruner offered a model of cybernetic thinking to illustrate the way in which decision-makers may try to maintain stability, simplicity, and consistency of belief systems, sometimes so much so that they may deny objective facts. Trade-off relationships may be denied under an assumption called value separation, "unless compelled to recognize it by a highly structured external situation (the reality constraint)."

The consequence of these principles, or assumptions, is that the problem may be constructed in a manner pleasing to the subjective needs of the decision makers, rather than the objective circumstance confronting them. The problem may be constructed as though there is only one value at stake, as though a given alternative has only one possible outcome, and as though the number of variables is confined to those which can be accommodated by the cognitive structure. Steinbruner's paradigm predicted that under complex situations the decision-maker will, characteristically, separate values, make categorical inferences about the consequences of actions, and consider too little information.

Steinbruner found that some patterns of thinking are more effective than others in mitigating the influence of the constraining principles. Because of bureaucratic structure, individuals in bureaucracies tend to exhibit theoretical thinking patterns. Decisions in large bureaucracies tend to become fragmented "into small pieces which are essentially independently treated."134 High-level officials are more likely to experience uncommitted thinking patterns.135 A great number of issues confront


134 Steinbruner, Cybernetic Theory, p.128 Theoretical thinking is more likely to be found in groups which deal regularly, and over a long period of time, with concentrated issues. Extensive familiarity with an issue may develop in the theoretical thinker a strong commitment to a particular conception of reality. The strength of this conception gives decision-makers confidence when confronted with uncertainty. Decisions by theoretical thinkers are particularly unlikely to reflect consideration of objective facts, because theoretical thinkers ground their consciousness in beliefs which are not empirically verifiable.

135 Unlike lower levels of decision making, where the problem may be fragmented, the executive level of decision-making is more likely to present the thinker with the complete problem. The uncommitted thinker will bring a number of general theoretical beliefs to consideration of a problem, yet will also consider alternatives consistent with that belief and attempt to calculate outcomes of those alternatives.
executives, and so they are less likely to develop theoretical thinking patterns which develop only over extended periods of time:

Because of the organizational setting, the reality principle forces a more abstract intellectual framework than the highly specific focus of the grooved thinker. Abstraction, however, involving a set of interacting and reasonably extensive inferences cast in at least medium time frame, is made more difficult by uncertainty. The decision maker thus has difficulty in establishing his [or her] beliefs and protecting them against the pressures of inconsistent information.\textsuperscript{136}

inconsistency is likely to propel the uncommitted thinker to oscillate between alternative belief patterns, "each of which represents a psychologically coherent and consistent segment of the overall problem."\textsuperscript{137}

The executive decision maker may turn to peers for corroborative judgements, yet those peers may disagree amongst themselves and the oscillation continues.

Of all the thinking patterns, the Uncommitted pattern is the most congenial to learning. The cognitive paradigm does allow for learning under conditions of uncertainty, but that learning will be constrained by the operations of the mind:

new information and new decision problems are fit into already established conceptual structures without causing any general adjustment of the structure. New ideas, new inferences, new perceptions are formed at lower levels of generality, and thus a belief system in a process of constrained learning is not static.\textsuperscript{138}

An application of Steinbruner's analysis shows that as President of the United States, and leader of the Executive Committee, John F. Kennedy certainly distinguished himself as an uncommitted thinker. At one point in the deliberations, his brother Robert would say, "why don't we try to work it

\textsuperscript{136} ibid., p.129

\textsuperscript{137} Steinbruner, \textit{Cybernetic Theory}, p.130

\textsuperscript{138} Steinbruner, \textit{Cybernetic Theory}, p.130.
out without you being able to pick."139 Reading of the transcripts reveals that Kennedy used group dynamics in a synergistic manner that reinforced his own private beliefs so that he could subjectively resolve the uncertainty confronting his decisions.

Having established that Kennedy was an uncommitted thinker, it is clear that Steinbruner's analysis is compatible with Levine's proposition, that bureaucrats will characteristically make marginalist recommendations. Likewise, the President is characteristically a marginalist. However, the President, following Steinbruner, may be able to overcome some of the blinders created by the system-maintaining approach of the bureaucracy, provided the necessary intelligence reaches him.140 This limited application also demonstrates the importance of the social context in which decisions are formed and the role of the President in mitigating the influence of constrained thinking patterns. Further research in this area appears warranted.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has described the three main narratives of the Cuban crisis as they are told by different schools of thought in the arms debate. Values and analyses underlying the narratives differ notably between the conservative and liberal schools, while the neo-liberal school maintains a position between them. Conservatives are more congenial to the use of military strategy to attain positively valued outcomes. Owing to US nuclear

139 "October 27". This was in regard to the missile trade proposal.

140 Franz Shurmann argued in that the President may wish to pursue visionary policies, a pursuit that is constrained by the system-maintaining bureaucrats. See Shurmann, Logic. Their relationship appears to be synergistic in this sense.
superiority, conservatives see this approach as being feasible. Liberals prefer to emphasize conflict prevention. Owing to the dangerous nature of nuclear weapons, minimal use of nuclear coercive diplomacy is the only safe course. Neo-liberals are more concerned with what transpires once crisis or conflict has begun. Owing to the concentration of authority and the time constraints imposed on decision-makers in crisis by the nuclear arsenals at their disposal, effective performance by the Executive is crucial. Chapter IV discusses in further detail the perceptions of the three schools regarding the role of the nuclear balance in the resolution of the missile crisis, and the way in which each school ultimately focuses upon the system of Presidential control of the government during crisis.
CHAPTER IV: COMMON CONCERNS

Many propositions on nuclear strategy are inherently untestable in the real world. As such, nuclear strategy sometimes resembles theology more than science.¹ Nevertheless, although nuclear war has not been experienced, the world has known superpower crisis.² The experience of the Cuban missile crisis has not, however, led to a single agreed-upon narrative because cause and effect inferences vary among three major narratives on the Cuban missile crisis. The last chapter described the larger structures of values and analyses of three schools from which the narratives were drafted.

The unresolved debate surrounding the Cuban missile crisis is worthy of description. Claims about the Cuban crisis emerging from the different schools “have played an important role in the discussion of strategic issues.”³ Identification of divergences in the narratives serves to identify ideological and doctrinal divergences in the larger debate on American arms policy. This thesis included a summary of the different schools of thought on the Cuban crisis in order to illustrate the way in which the ideological structures within the debate on American arms policy are found within, and in fact served to formulate, the discourse on the crisis.

This thesis has been structured not only to describe the discourse on the missile crisis, but to explain the political origins of the discourse.

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¹ See Levine, Arms Debate, pp.24-27.

² Even though they had experienced the crisis, ExComm participants found that the transition from experience to analysis is also often a rocky one. It was obvious at the Hawk’s Cay Conference that former ExComm participants had difficulty separating ‘cerebral’ from ‘visceral’ dimensions of the crisis, and were simply unable to address some seemingly fundamental questions from the participating scholars. See Blight and Welch, OTB, pp.127-128.

³ Marc Trachtenberg, "The Influence of Nuclear Weapons and the Cuban Missile Crisis," International Security vol.10 no.1 (Summer 1985) p.138; cited hereafter as Trachtenberg, “Influence.” Trachtenberg said, "claims about the Cuban missile crisis have played an important role..."
first chapter, discussed some theoretical aspects of discourse. Most importantly, discourse theory helps to explain the way in which events are transformed into history, and history into ideological narratives. The conventional wisdom on the missile crisis, presented in Chapter II, is all that many Americans may feel that they need to know about that event. Among the academic and policy making elite, however, interpretations vary sharply following the pattern of the three ideological schools discussed. But common, often unspoken concerns link the three schools.

If there is one element of the discourse that dominates, it is the debate on the nuclear balance. In his examination of the influence of nuclear weapons during the Cuban missile crisis, Marc Trachtenberg found that positions taken on this question reflect, in a rather crude and imperfect way to be sure, basic attitudes about the significance of shifts in the strategic balance. They thus can function as something of a surrogate for more direct notions about the role of the nuclear balance.4

The influence of nuclear weapons pervades nearly every aspect of the debate. This chapter will concentrate upon the influence of nuclear weapons in the discourse on the Cuban crisis.

The Debate within Time

With or without the evidence provided by the Cuban crisis, nuclear weapons have fueled an ongoing, dynamic debate between American liberals and conservatives.5 Strategic decisions made by both the United States and the


5 For an excellent analysis of the way in which the changing nuclear balance has influenced American policy formulation, see Marc Trachtenberg's study of the Eisenhower years in, "A Wasting Asset," International Security Vol.13, No.3 (Winter 1988/89); pp.5-49.
Soviet Union have fueled an arms race and ensuing debate. Each side's perceptions of the other's intentions, (for example, whether the other were pursuing a strategy of damage limitation or one of counterforce for possible first strike), were factored into decisions on strategy. Edward Haley, David Keithly and Jack Merritt summarized a worst-case interpretation of superpower modernization:

On the US side, there were two crucial decisions: the first, made in the 1950s and 1960s, was to maintain nuclear superiority; and the second, made in the 1970s, was to resort to limited nuclear strike options. On the Soviet side there was one crucial decision: the development of a nuclear counterforce, or war-fighting, strategy, the goal of which is the destruction of the opposition's military capabilities and will to resist.

Conservatives have sought to increase the military strength of the United States to include hard-target-urgent-kill-capability against Soviet forces. Liberals have fought a hard battle to stabilize the arms race, limit nuclear weapons to a minimum deterrent capability, and perhaps improve conventional forces so that reliance on nuclear weapons would be reduced. Because liberals are skeptical about the ability to limit war, and as large nuclear arsenals may be needed to maintain minimal deterrence, these three goals can conflict. Neo-liberals, or 'process' liberals, appear to have been fence-sitting in the arms debate. Their recommendations certainly are presented in the language of stability, and may suggest improved conventional forces or even a minimum deterrent. Conversely, neo-liberal recommendations may be endorsed by conservatives seeking to improve US forces for escalation dominance. By focusing their research efforts on ways

to minimize accident, miscalculation and inadvertence, these analysts were able to continue their work and leave the resolution of long-term goals (total disarmament or rollback of communism) to others.

Meanwhile, the dynamic arms policy debate has taken place within the context of changing US/USSR relations. How has the passage of time vindicated these schools of thought? When US nuclear capabilities were vastly more potent than those of the Soviet Union, the minimum deterrence policy of Assured Destruction was hardly questioned. Improvement in superpower relations during the détente of the 1970s may have lent credence to the neo-liberal's efforts to stabilize the competition in a time when anti-war values predominated but anti-communist analysis persisted as the primary focus. The 'failure' of détente in the late 1970s and early 1980s seemingly vindicated the conservative perspective. They interpreted the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as evidence of the persistence of Soviet expansionist aspirations. Meanwhile, problems of C3 vulnerability became increasingly relevant and were extensively studied by neo-liberals; and the Reagan years of arms race escalation added increased urgency to the anti-war efforts of liberals. Gorbachev's reforms and Eastern Europe's revolutions in more recent years seemingly vindicate the analysis of the liberals, (nuclear war is a greater threat than communism), and to some extent that of the neo-liberals, (in the long run the seemingly 'irreconcilable' aspects of superpower competition may diminish).

7 The failure of SALT to effectively inhibit modernization, notwithstanding, the SALT process itself represents a mutual attempt at stabilization. Haley, et.al, date the rise of the 'stabilizers' to the Nixon years, when the US "consciously refrained from building and deploying large numbers of extremely accurate missiles and warheads necessary to attack Soviet missile silos...the signal to the Soviets was clear, "join us in avoiding such destabilizing weapons." Nuclear Strategy, p.13.
Throughout these transitions, the Cuban missile crisis story has been told again and again. It has featured prominently as an example of Soviet adventurism, and is used as an example by proponents of superior American counterforce capabilities. On the other hand, it has also featured prominently as an example of arms race provocation, and underscores the liberal case for minimum deterrence, and even the case for cessation of covert activities in Latin America. Finally, it has been featured as an example of the need to balance interest with risk, and lends itself to the neo-liberals as a case for improving technological and decision processes.  

If one wonders if any one school is ‘winning’ the debate, or if there can be said to be any identifiable movement toward consensus, one should consider that at the Hawk’s Cay Conference “each group’s exposure to the other’s views led to polarization and discord rather than convergence and consensus.” Increasing empirical evidence has shed new light on the Cuban crisis, but not so much that the substantive, ideological differences of the schools have reconciled.

8 The decision analyses of the neo-liberals made a significant impact within political science, but appears to have waned in prominence when compared to the current emphasis of that school upon miscalculation and inadvertence. Did interest in decision theory decline after the Cuban crisis? To the contrary, crisis decision modelling became so significant, it went ‘underground’ to flourish among the elite in the National Security Council, the Pentagon, and in the advanced computer modelling centers of the National Defense University and the Naval War College. See Thomas B. Allen, War Games (New York: Berkley Books, 1989).


10 For example, did the offer to trade the Jupiter missiles in Turkey for the SS-4s and SS-5s in Cuba lead to the resolution of the crisis, or did Robert Kennedy’s so-called ‘ultimatum’ to Dobrynin on the 27 of October cause the Soviets to capitulate? The ‘evidence’ points either way.
National Interest and the Influence of Nuclear Weapons

Nuclear weapons are at the center of the obvious divergence in interpretations on the Cuban missile crisis. They are also at the center of the not-so-obvious convergence of those interpretations: namely, that each narrative deals explicitly or implicitly with presidential control of nuclear forces. Each school purported to analyze the Cuban case with a conception of what best serves US national interest. All three schools focused upon the US leadership during the crisis. And while the Cuban case would hardly be worth mentioning were American strategy not nuclearized, it is interesting that the discourse does not directly address whether it is in the self-interest of any president to have a nuclearized strategy. One finds within the discourse on the Cuban crisis, and American national security strategy in general, a built-in bias in favor of nuclear weapons. The various elites engaging in the dissection of the Cuban case have a vested interest in a strong president. Nuclear weapons strengthen the power and symbolic weight of the presidency.

Liberals

Looking to the school most averse to nuclear weapons, one finds reinforcement of a strong president. The liberal school, as described in Chapter III, views nuclear weapons as politically useless; their only role is to deter the use of nuclear weapons by another party. Their view is compatible with the premises of Assured Destruction, the doctrine which dominated American strategy for about ten years. Assured Destruction requires that the United States possess just enough weapons to inflict "unacceptable damage" on the Soviet Union, and so deter them from using
their own nuclear weapons for political gain.\textsuperscript{11} The strategy of Assured Destruction "is devoted to the prevention of nuclear war rather than its conduct,"\textsuperscript{12} and is therefore preferred by those who are averse to war. The strategy involves targeting Soviet cities with the expectation that they will do the same to US cities. Those who are war-averse are meant to take comfort from the fundamental premise of Assured Destruction, that "the President of the United States would never deliberately start a nuclear war."\textsuperscript{13}

Assured Destruction, because it suggests the destruction of total societies, places a tremendous burden of responsibility on the president. He may find himself in a position of making the ultimate of all decisions, lending credence to Kennedy's observation that foreign policy is "the sphere where a mistake 'can kill us'."\textsuperscript{14} The political leadership of the President as it relates to the use of military force acquires greater significance. Liberals seek to emphasize the the importance of the political dimension of strategy.\textsuperscript{15}

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\textsuperscript{11} 'Unacceptable damage' was considered to be the destruction of about one-third of the population and two-thirds of the industry of the Soviet Union. See Haley, et.al., Nuclear Strategy p.12.

\textsuperscript{12} Haley, et. al., Nuclear Strategy, p.17.

\textsuperscript{13} Trachtenberg, "influence," p.140.


\textsuperscript{15} The Gulf of Tonkin resolution, represents liberal insistence that the President must consult Congress (his domestic constituency) before undertaking an act of war. This situation was different than that of the Cuban missile crisis, because the latter was a relatively short time of intense insecurity and Vietnam was a gradual escalation. Kennedy's actions against Cuba, in contrast, were mandated by a Congressional resolution against tolerating the missiles. In this sense, he did not circumvent the Constitution in the way of later Presidents.
The liberal narrative on the missile crisis downplays the strategic threat of the Soviet deployment in Cuba. That is to say, it did not inhibit US Assured Destruction capability. McNamara has often been quoted as saying that the nuclear balance played no role in the considerations of the President, and that missiles were not counted — "it was not a slide rule calculation." Despite the liberal aversion to war, because even limited wars can escalate, liberal narratives have endorsed the use of the naval blockade, or as it was euphemistically called, 'quarantine.' It seems ironic that the ExComm members who favored the quarantine were labelled 'doves,' when this was, after all, an act of war. McNamara would later reflect on his reasons for favoring the blockade:

If we'd not gotten the response we did from Khrushchey, I would have proposed an extended blockade. I didn't know what would have happened, but that course of action ran lower risk of loss of control."

McNamara's encounter with Admiral Anderson, legendary within the specialist's conventional wisdom, further illustrated his concern that control of all aspects of the military operations rest with the Executive. It is deserving of mention that conventional forces were also not without risk. The shooting down of Major Rudolf Anderson's aircraft over Cuba on October 27 was probably an event which threatened war more than any


17 See, for example, Bundy, Danger pp.420-26.


19 He was shot down by a Surface to Air Missile (SAM) by a Soviet officer, apparently without orders from Moscow. See "Incommensurable Crises," in OTB p.213, and "Another October Revolution," in OTB p.311. According to a story published in The Washington Post, and based partly on an interview with former Defense Department analyst Daniel Ellsberg, there was some Soviet and Cuban military conflict over the SAM sites, in which the Cubans actually seized control for one day. See Seymour M. Hersh, "Was Castro Out of Control in 1962?"
other. Liberals point to the composure of Kennedy who did not react in an 'exaggerated' manner to the shoot-down and perhaps thereby avoided world war.20

Two further aspects of the liberal critique may be related in terms of strengthening the power of the presidency. First, the lack of consideration in the ExComm for a 'do-nothing' option has been criticized.21 If one believes Robert McNamara today, this was his position. If he has slightly modified history, it may be to underscore a point: the President may have felt compelled by domestic public opinion (the rival Republican Party) to pursue a course contrary to US interest. Likewise, the 'domestic-political problem'22 critique also conveys an implicit message to those outside the Executive Branch to allow the president to exercise his responsibility in the arena of foreign policy.

There is strong evidence that Kennedy's team sought to minimize the domestic political debate and thereby gain greater control over foreign policy. Nuclear weapons may serve as the president's sword, but his dagger deserves mention as well: covert operations also confine foreign policy to

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20 See Bundy, Danger, p.423, and pp.427, 428, 437, 446.

21 McGeorge Bundy reminded his readers that there was passed in September of 1962 a Congressional Resolution committing the President to 'do something' if missiles were placed in Cuba. He said "Critics of Kennedy's choices rarely note the congressional resolution and often claim that his decision to choose and announce a course of action before beginning the negotiation was excessively affected by his feeling that his personal determination and courage were being tested. That he had such feeling is certain...But he met those tests as much by restraint as by action." Danger, p.411.

22 Bundy said, "It is true that short-run popularity is often a poor guide to action, but a decent respect for the convictions of one's own people is different." Danger p.412.
the domain of the elite. Columnist James Reston made strong insinuations about covert operations, possibly Operation Mongoose in early October. Widely considered a source for 'official thinking' of the Kennedy Administration, "Reston was coming as close as he dared to explaining that the administration was 'in control' as well as 'doing something' and that the political debate was just muddying the water." Reston stated:

...it appears that the issue of American Cuban policy is between those who want to invade or at least blockade Cuba on the one hand, and those who want to 'do nothing' on the other.

This is not, however, the actual situation. There is a missing element in the debate which distorts the whole argument. This is the element of subversion, which is going on all the time in that island and which can be increased substantially if necessary. . .

A study of American newspapers reveals that Kennedy's critics had dominated the discourse on Cuba. Reston's objective was to restore control of the discourse on Cuba to the President.

Reston failed to achieve this objective. Control of the discourse was not achieved by Kennedy until the 22 of October. Not coincidentally, the crisis became truly nuclear and the US was on alert that day. The authors of the study conclude that "The politicians remained a critical element [sic: in news coverage] until Kennedy's somber announcement that there was indeed a crisis in Cuba and that the United States was indeed 'doing something.'"

Because of the seriousness of the crisis, the Kennedy Administration received a pledge by members of the press not to leak information prior to-


24 Reston quoted in Kern, et.al, Kennedy Crises p.121.

the. October 22 announcement. They therefore had about one week to deliberate in secret on a course of action regarding the Cuban missiles. The time given to the President would later be cited as an important contribution to his ability to respond in a measured and deliberate manner to the crisis.

How well does the liberal narrative on the missile crisis fare in terms of historical accuracy? The answer can be found in Marc Trachtenberg’s critique of the liberal claim that "the nuclear balance played no role in the Cuban crisis." This critique began with the tangible evidence that US nuclear forces went on high alert. The policymakers were aware at the time that whether or not the President would deliberately start a nuclear war, such war could come through inadvertence or accident. Therefore, they did accept some risk of nuclear war. The evidence shows that risk was in fact "manipulated to affect Soviet options in crisis." Trachtenberg concludes from his study that the Soviets indeed were influenced by their position of nuclear inferiority at the time. Richard Betts also points to the element of risk and its consequences for the Soviets. In his opinion,

26 The Kern, et.al. study found severe problems with the degree of press compliance with the Administration: "The period after Kennedy’s announcement of a national emergency, of a virtual war footing for the nation, produced press compliance and an utter lack of questioning of the facts he made available and his interpretations of them by even the opposition press. A president who announces a national emergency consistent with public opinion eliminates all the centers of strength in the society and in the press itself that counterbalance his influence in relation to the greater part of the press." Kennedy Crises, p.140. They also reminded the reader that following the crisis, "Defense press official Arthur Sylvester brashly proclaimed that the government had the right to deceive the press in the interest of national security. . ."(p.139).

27 Trachtenberg points explicitly to McNamara’s declaration that "we must now be ready to attack Cuba. . .Invasion had become almost inevitable," as evidence that McNamara was willing to accept what must have been seen by him as very serious risk. "Influence," pp.141-42.

the Soviets neither prepared for 'a fateful step' in response to the US nuclear alert, nor undertook significant conventional military preparations in Europe. Soviet observers were well aware of the US counterforce doctrine and prevalent views of American strategists about how reciprocal fear of surprise attack increases temptations in crisis to strike first. The remarkable Soviet nonalert was equivalent to a threatened dog's rolling over belly-up. It was a remarkable Soviet nonalert.

Finally, Trachtenberg cites McNamara to show that the Administration used the nuclear alert to deter not just Soviet use of nuclear weapons, but Soviet military might in general. The possibility that a US move on Cuba would meet with a Soviet military response "some place in the world" was considered at length by the ExComm. McNamara argued that this threat should be met, by trying to deter it, which means we probably should alert SAC, probably put on an airborne alert, perhaps take other s- [sic] alert measures. These risks bring risks of their own, associated with them.

Preparations designed to deter the Soviets in general, with the possibility this might lead to war, (intentional or unintentional), during the Cuban missile crisis demonstrates that the Kennedy Administration accepted this risk. Therefore, the nuclear balance did play a role. Liberals may now criticize such risk taking, but they can not convincingly deny it.


30 Betts, Nuclear Blackmail, p.120. Italics added. Betts probably is referring to the "damage limitation" doctrine of American strategists. Carl Kaysen, at the time of the missile crisis an aide to McGeorge Bundy, describes damage limitation: "Should sufficient warning of preparations for a Soviet strike or actual launching of one be available, US missiles could be launched against Soviet missile sites and airfields, thus limiting to an extent depending on warning time the damage the Soviet strike would inflict." in Carl Kaysen, "Keeping the Strategic Balance," Foreign Affairs, vol.46 no.4 (July 1968) p.668; cited in Trachtenberg, "Influence," p.160. Although the US had a policy of Assured Destruction, and targeting of cities, US refusal to state it would not go first and the "second-strike" damage-limitation policy "must have struck them [the Soviets] as a code term for preemption." (Trachtenberg, "Influence," p.160.) For an examination of the US SIOP during the Cuban crisis see Marc Trachtenberg, "SIOP-62: A War Plan Briefing to the President," International Security.

Conservatives

The conservative school argues that American nuclear superiority played a significant role in the Cuban crisis. Again, the burden of control rested with the president. It is he who was held responsible for underestimating Soviet intentions in Cuba, and he was also responsible for eliminating the problem. McGeorge Bundy offers a defense of the Administration in this regard, and notes that there was one member of the Administration who did predict the Soviet move. Interestingly enough, that member was John McConne, then director of the CIA, and not surprisingly, a hawk:

He [McConne] believed that the volume of material we had seen going into Cuba was too large and expensive -- especially the air defense missiles -- to be explained by anything less ambitious than the introduction of nuclear weapons. . .

McConne's advantage in this case was that he was himself a believer in nuclear superiority and in the high cost of losing it. He had been secretary of the air force and chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission under Eisenhower, and in these roles he had pressed for the expansion of strategic forces and the increased production of nuclear weapons. He did not believe in stopping the nuclear arms race but in winning it, and he worried continuously about losing it. There are all sorts of differences between McConne and Khrushchev, but on nuclear matters they were well placed to understand each other.32

One thing conservatives claim their doctrine has in common with Soviet doctrine is the principle that the use of military force must serve political objectives. Both seek to secure a post-war environment favorable to their own respective interest, should conflict occur. The conservative recommendation to control escalation and to utilize technical advances in weaponry to the benefit of planners create a great deal of detailed work for the Executive authority. Trachtenberg argues that Kennedy was unsure of the impact of the Cuban missiles on the strategic balance, and that he was perhaps uncomfortable with the narrow option of Assured Destruction:

32 Bundy, _Danger_, pp.219-420.
One therefore has the sense that President Kennedy’s feelings on this issue [sic: the strategic balance] had not really taken definite shape: it was as though he was groping for answers. Indeed, it seems that the administration in general, ever since it took office, was being pulled in two opposite directions: by intellectual argument, and by its extreme distaste for the idea of massive retaliation, it was drawn toward notions of discriminate and controlled war-fighting, and in fact nuclear war-fighting, strategies; but revolted by the very idea of nuclear war.

The kinds of assumptions made by conservatives regarding the rationality of superpower leaders in crisis acquire significance when considered within the context of war-fighting strategies. They also are significant when compared to the morality assumptions of the liberals within the context of the doctrine of Assured Destruction. The conservative approach would be to put the machinery in place, so to speak, so that the president could set himself to the business of war should it be necessary.

Kennedy’s own discomfort with the effective control available to him as president is a large reason why nuclear superiority did not seem to greatly affect his performance in the crisis. The fear of escalation effectively neutralized the advantages of US strategic superiority. The US policymakers were not certain how the warheads were controlled. They feared an escalation to nuclear war if the US attacked Cuba. While this was the main source of doubt concerning Soviet command and control operations, the news of an accidental overflight over the Soviet Union must have cast some doubt about their own control of events.

An examination of the evidence led Marc Trachtenberg to conclude that strategic superiority did not greatly influence American thinking during the crisis. He points to the absence of missile counting, or damage-limiting

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33 Trachtenberg, "Influence," p.151.
34 "October 16" transcripts p.13.
counterforce planning. Scholars present at Hawk's Cay found Robert McNamara hesitant to discuss war planning beyond tightening of the quarantine.\textsuperscript{35} To the vindication of the conservative view, however, Trachtenberg concludes that strategic \textit{inferiority} influenced Soviet behaviour. Because of universal fear of pre-emption in crisis, the Soviets may have believed Soviet signs of war preparations as "risky in a way that the corresponding American alert simply was not."\textsuperscript{36} The Cuban crisis was just one battle in a larger struggle, namely the arms race rivalry. The oft-quoted remark of Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Kuznetsov to John McCloy suggests the relevance of the strategic balance belongs to a larger campaign than a conflict over Cuba. Conservatives and liberals may surprisingly agree on the consequence of Soviet inferiority:

'You Americans will never be able to do this to us again' -- suggests that the Soviets drew back because of a relative, but remediable, weakness, and obviously their conventional inferiority in the Caribbean was not what Kuznetsov had in mind.\textsuperscript{37}

\textbf{Neo-liberals}

The Soviets eventually attained nuclear parity with the United States. Moreover, by 1972 they had deployed "half as many ICBMs as the United States and would surpass it in SLBMs in three years."\textsuperscript{38} While the United

\textsuperscript{35} This may be as much a function of McNamara's general political agenda as it is a reflection upon the events as they happened. Particularly in the case of military plans, it is a dangerous enterprise to assume that absence of mention in documentary materials can be taken at face value, as these are most often classified and remain censored in sanitized versions. Nevertheless, Trachtenberg's point is well-taken, missile counting and targeting options were not a pre-occupation of the ExComm.

\textsuperscript{36} Trachtenberg, "Influence," p.160.


\textsuperscript{38} Haley, et.al., \textit{Nuclear Strategy}, p.9.
States persisted in efforts to achieve a condition of mutually assured
destruction, conservatives feared that the Soviet Union was achieving a
counterforce capability that could threaten to hit US forces before launch
and so, theoretically, make destruction one-sided:

The US secretary of defense in the early 1970s, Melvin Laird, stressed
that the Soviet Union could choose to improve the warheads of the
SS-9 and obtain a destabilizing counterforce weapon. As it turned
out, what the Soviet government did made Laird appear to be an
optimist. Instead of improving the SS-9, the Soviet Union decided to
deploy more than three hundred of an even more deadly ICBM, the
SS-18, the largest nuclear missile in the world. This move caused
even greater alarm among US strategists and policymakers. In
addition, the Soviets began building SS-17s and SS-19s, ICBMs that
also have counterforce capability.39

This is somewhat overstating Soviet capabilities, as their missile accuracy was
less than precise in the 1970s. Those who did not see this Soviet move as
threatening argue that only a small portion of US forces were affected by the
Soviet deployments of the 1970s. Nevertheless, the conservative
interpretation of Soviet deployments figured prominently in the US strategic
discourse. The alleged Soviet capability would prove threatening to the
Assured Destruction doctrine. The counterforce capability attributed to the
Soviets was then used in the ‘window of vulnerability’ argument Ronald
Reagan cited in his bid for the attainment of a similar capability for the
US.40

The neo-liberal school emphasizes the importance of stabilizing
superpower competition, or reducing the incentives for either side to strike
first. Their goal is to see the subordination of military forces to prudently


40 Haley, et.al., *Nuclear Strategy*, p.21. The "window of vulnerability" is a way in which the
Soviets could, supposedly, mitigate the US deterrent through a counterforce first strike.
Reagan sought to eradicate this alleged Soviet opportunity by implementing a program of
strategic defense with a space-based anti-missile system. That SDI might be interpreted as
creating a window of Soviet vulnerability did not enter into Reagan's argument.
considered political goals of the Executive. For this reason, neo-liberal narratives on the Cuban missile crisis examine and criticize the operations of technological control and political decision-making. This is governed by their assumption that human rationality plays a role in decision-making. As such, this school, more than any other, shows a built-in bias toward Presidential control of nuclear weapons, to the minutely detailing of elaborate contingency plans to reduce vulnerability of command and control of strategic forces.\(^41\) John D. Steinbruner responded to US advocates of counterforce strategy, and arms-race bargaining strategy, (both strategies to 'win') with a critique of the rational-actor model. Arguing that policymakers rarely engage in the cost-benefit analysis exercises described in rational deterrence theory, Steinbruner concluded that there is a strong need to bring military capabilities in line with decision-making capabilities. He proposed that,

The problems that should command priority attention involve the internal management of weapons systems -- their design, development, procurement, and operation -- and the integration of military capability with international political purposes. The nation's defense in the coming years will depend far more on these things than on additional deployment of strategic weapons.\(^42\)

Narratives on the Cuban missile crisis which criticize presidential decision-making are especially interesting because, due to his possession of nuclear weapons, Kennedy's decisions held tremendous consequences. Due to nuclear weapons, policy analysts have devoted special attention to presidential decision-making. Nuclear weapons have focused strategic problems. There is greater concentration of discretional power and

\(^{41}\) See, for example, Steinbruner, "Strategic Stability."

authority in the executive branch of government that is responsible for nuclear strategy. The small size and great authority of the executive facilitates modelling of decision problems. In times of crisis, when the decisions and actions of the opponent are often unpredictable and not understood, and when the time in which decisions are made is short, the context of presidential decision-making is complicated. Neo-liberal analyses seek to make both analysts and decision-makers aware of these constraints. In addition, neo-liberal analysts draw attention to, and suggest remedies for, those aspects of the political process and military doctrine which act as constraints on the system in which the executive must operate. A president can only be strong and effective if he can rely upon the system.

How then, does the middle school view the relevance of the strategic balance during the missile crisis? Here, again, the narrative focuses upon the concept of risk. According to Trachtenberg, "nuclear weapons did matter, because the risk of nuclear war was bound to influence political behavior." He found that there are two approaches to this argument. First, there is the view that fear of escalation is "factored into political calculations: faced with this risk, states are more cautious and more prudent than they would otherwise be." Alternatively, "risk is seen as something that can be deliberately and consciously manipulated." In contrast to conservative analysts, this second view does not necessarily require military dominance, rather it rests upon the deterrence inherent in the risk itself.

In a stable strategic environment, both sides are sufficiently deterred by the risk of nuclear use to refrain from initiating war. As noted earlier, the United States went as far as initiating nuclear alert during the crisis, while

43 Trachtenberg, "Influence," p.139.
the Soviets stood still. The Kennedy Administration, it is assumed, gambled
that the escalation to DefCon 2 would have a greater effect on the Soviet Union, than it would on the United States. That is to say, the risk for the US in terms of provoking the USSR into initiating war was less than the importance of attempting to force Khrushchev into fearing the US would strike first if the Soviets did not stop their actions in Cuba. All things being equal, the balance of resolve was the critical influence on Soviet and American behaviour during the crisis.

Two comparative relationships drawn in narratives on the Cuban crisis buttress the argument that the objective of missile removal was achieved because the balance of resolve favored the US. The first compares the Berlin question to the Cuban crisis. The second compares the Jupiter missiles in Turkey to the Soviet missiles in Cuba. These issues came to the fore early on in the Excomm deliberations:

Mr. Khrushchev...knows that we don't really live under fear of his nuclear weapons to the extent that, uh, he has to live under fear of ours. Also, we have nuclear weapons in Turkey.

I also, think that, uh, Berlin is...very much involved in this. Ughm, for the first time I'm beginning to wonder whether maybe Mr. Khrushchev is entirely rational about Berlin. We've [hardly?] talked about his obsession with it. 44

Berlin had been a testing ground of political resolve. The question of superpower competition over Berlin preoccupied the decision-makers in the Kennedy Administration. It has been argued that when the Kennedy Administration "put the Russians on notice that it was aware of the full extent of their strategic vulnerability," they did so "to encourage Khrushchev to moderate his challenge of the Western position in Berlin...it could have

44 Dean Rusk, "White House Tapes and Minutes of the Cuban Missile Crisis," International Security, vol.10no.4, (Summer 1985); cited hereafter as "October 16."
appeared to Soviet leaders as the opening salvo of a US strategic political offensive." Soviet designs on Berlin were considered a plausible motivation for the deployment of missiles in Cuba, providing a means of distracting the United States. "Indeed," said Richard Betts, "Cuba was tacitly a fourth Berlin crisis." Soviets continue to deny any relationship between the two. Before the Cuban crisis, however, American newspapers were preoccupied with Soviet troop movements. At the very least, one should note the seeming preoccupation with Berlin the ExComm's missile crisis discussions.

Comparisons of the two crises revolve around the political use of nuclear weapons. First, both Berlin and Cuba were areas in which one superpower sought to use the presence of nuclear weapons as a means to deter the other from subverting a political situation. In the case of Berlin, the US sought to preserve the political status quo by placing IRBMs in Europe. In the case of Cuba, the Soviets claimed to be defending the regime of Fidel Castro. Second, the two crises were 'mirror image' situations, as the US "had conventional predominance, but (given that the missiles had already been put in) the United States was the power that was threatening to alter an existing situation."

The crucial difference between the two crises, Betts contended, was resolve:

One argument against symmetry is that the stakes in Cuba were far more vital to Washington than the stakes in Berlin were to Moscow.

45 Richard Ned Lebow, Between Peace and War, p.189.
46 Betts, Nuclear Blackmail p.110.
47 Betts, Nuclear Blackmail, pp.110-114.
48 Trachtenberg, "Influence," p.143.
Another objection is that Cuba lay within the recognized US sphere of influence. Trachtenberg agrees, arguing that "if the nuclear threat had perfectly symmetrical effects, American power should have been stalemated around Cuba as Soviet power was around Berlin. But the fact that this was not the case shows that fears and anxieties were not perfectly in balance: the balance of resolve favored the United States."

An important principle of the manipulation of risk is that it should be commensurate with the importance of the political interest in question. Comparing of the missiles in Turkey with the missiles in Cuba shows the above principle to have been an important factor in Kennedy's brinksmanship. The recently available Excomm transcripts show the president discounted the importance of the Jupiter missiles in Turkey, particularly if keeping them there meant also having to tolerate Soviet SS-4s and SS-5s in Cuba:

Kennedy's eagerness for something like a political settlement was therefore rooted not in a conviction that nuclear forces were politically impotent, but rather in the notion that the main obstacle to a solution was too trivial to warrant any serious risk of nuclear war.

The revised interpretation of the Cuban crisis shows that the Soviets did not totally capitulate; namely, they received the concession they sought in Europe, the removal of the Jupiters. The unequal balance of resolve produced neither a clear victor, nor an equal outcome, but rather, something in between. The Cuban case does seem to demonstrate the

49 Betts, Nuclear Blackmail, p.114. Those who see the Cuban deployment as a desperate attempt by the Soviets to overcome their position of strategic inferiority may disagree that the stakes were not vital to Moscow.

50 Trachtenberg, "Influence," p.143.

51 Trachtenberg, "Influence," p.146.

52 Trachtenberg, "Influence," p.162.
tendency of the Kennedy Administration toward negative assessment of escalation as opposed to positive assessment of "upping the ante," supporting the first view of resolve as a function of risk calculation given prudent political objectives.

Conclusion
The debate on the Cuban missile crisis can best be understood when considered in the context of a larger debate regarding American strategic posture and policy. The theory presented in Chapter I explained how events generate discourse. That there exists a large body of Conventional Wisdom on the Cuban missile crisis, presented in Chapter II, in and of itself illustrated the significance of this event. Events within the larger sphere of American and Soviet strategic competition help to account for continuing interest in the Cuban case. The heated debate among American academic and policy elite regarding the lessons of the Cuban missile crisis (Chapter III) is largely due to ideological differences between the schools regarding larger issues of strategic planning.

Changes in the superpower nuclear balance, particularly the Soviet attainment of parity and then a war-fighting capability, underlined the importance of the US president's role in the execution of a rational policy regarding nuclear weapons. This chapter identified a strong president as the common interest of the three schools. Whether as a moral leader, defender of the free world, or prudent balancer of risk, the president is the critical actor because he is in control of nuclear weapons.

53 Trachtenberg, "Influence," p.162.
Of the three schools of thought presented, this thesis concludes that the neo-liberal school contributes most in its discussion of the missile crisis. Not only because there is historical evidence to support their conclusion, namely that it was a successful outcome owing to prudent use of resolve, but also because since the 1970s, the strategic superiority lessons drawn by conservatives have had little relevance. Similarly, although the liberals offered some sage warnings about the dangers of arms race escalation and conflict mentality, their preferred policy of minimum deterrence was abandoned long ago with the demise of the doctrine of Assured Destruction. The neo-liberal schools focused upon aspects of the Cuban missile crisis that show the means and ends relationship at work, and this process approach has lasting benefit. It is a practical approach to analysis designed to increase stability by decreasing error.

The Cuban crisis discourse is significant in another way, for it generated a proliferation of work in the process-study vein. In a sense the Cuban missile crisis, in bringing problems of executive decision-making to the fore, created a sub-field of decision analysis within the academic discipline of international relations. One may say the event of the Cuban case accounts for a paradigm change.54 This thesis has shown that ideology, doctrine, and the structural-systemic imperatives of the larger discourse on American arms policy directed the use of the intro-crisis and ex post facto discourse by practitioners.

54 Blight and Welch, for example, talk of "a recent paradigm shift with the novelty of nuclear vulnerability," notably in the same breath they praise the caution of the dove's view "because it was firmly rooted in the psychological experience of shouldering the burden of responsibility attending that recognition." in "Incommensurable Crisis," OTB p.220
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

The very fact that there can be said to exist a body of conventional wisdom on the Cuban missile crisis speaks to the significance of this event. Foreign policy specialists have written volumes about the crisis. Generally, these works have been concerned either with specific issue areas, such as the role of the nuclear balance in the resolution of the crisis, or the perceptions of the actors involved in the management of the crisis.

A number of new considerations are presented by recent evidence on the crisis. The revelation of the clandestine Operation Mongoose combined with the large US naval presence in the Caribbean suggests that the momentum of US policy against Cuba was building at the time of the crisis. The image of Kennedy as legitimate defender of noble principles is questionable in light of revelations regarding US plans against Castro. Furthermore, revelations regarding military operations which threatened to escape Executive control suggest the difficulties of maintaining a definition of the problem in political terms. The discovery of the transcripts informs decision analysis of the Kennedy team, and shows the differentiation made between hawks and doves to have been rather exaggerated. Furthermore, new evidence supports the conclusion that Kennedy did make the Jupiter missiles in Turkey a concession for the Soviet missiles in Cuba. This suggests that Kennedy's effort to offer no concessions was subordinate to his objective of preventing unnecessary conflict. Robert McNamara's comment that the SIOP was completely useless suggests that the political leadership did not have the nuclear arsenal in hand. Indeed, this would prove to be an ongoing concern in the ensuing debate between conservatives and liberals on the Cuban crisis. Certainly, the Cuban missile crisis persists as a topic of discussion, owing to recent evidence and to the
continuing theme of nuclear coercive diplomacy and nuclear policy management embodied in the crisis and in the current US policy and posture debate.

This thesis has approached the crisis from the broader perspective of the discourse on it. The meaning of the crisis begins with the discourse. The experience of the crisis has been captured in the words used to describe and explain it. Language creates a forum in which society can articulate, refine, debate, and most basic of all, share the experience of the crisis. The intended purpose of language is to convey meaning. Yet, because language must be interpreted, meaning is not absolute. History is communicated through language, and so it is subject to the interpretation of mental structure, which then imputes meaning. Conversely, the imputed meaning influences subsequent understanding. The significance of the discourse is in this sense greater than the significance of the event itself which occurred on the phenomenological plane and transpired. Without attributing meaning to the crisis, it would be of little contemporary significance. With attributed meaning, however, the event lives on in the formulation of further attributions of meaning to events and the course of government with respect to events. Studying the evolution and characteristics of the discourse offers a self-reflective distance from which the direction of attributed meaning can be examined.

A cursory glance at the discourse on the Cuban missile crisis finds a picture of two images, consensus and debate. First, one can not ignore the body of shared understanding, or mythology, on the crisis which persists decades after its resolution. Secondly, it is difficult, when looking at recent manifestations of the discourse, to find a general body of agreement on the meaning of the crisis. The immediate common referent of the two images,
consensus and debate, is security. The conventional wisdom on the crisis, following Foucault’s theory of discourse generation, was generated largely because the visceral aspects of insecurity associated with the event necessitated expression. The debate on the lessons of the crisis shows the continuing role of this event in the attribution of meaning as manifest in the US debate on national security.

Following the assumption that the discourse on the crisis was controlled or structured so as to conform to a societal purpose, Chapter II developed the theory that the mythology of the crisis served to re-enforce the symbolic weight of the President in determining national security. Noam Chomsky’s theory of propaganda began, like Foucault’s, with the observation that discourse is structured. Chomsky’s theory developed an application of the purpose and consequences of discourse control in terms of the governance of society. This thesis borrowed from Chomsky only the notion that the governance of a large democracy necessitates that discourse be kept within sufficient bounds to form consensus, or sufficient agreement as to meaning. The ensuing analysis of the missile gap myth showed the way in which the President can influence the direction of discourse through manipulation of images. Conversely, this analysis also showed the way in which the President is in turn constrained by those very images which set the parameters of the discourse.

More detailed analysis gave deeper meaning of the Cuban missile crisis within the portion of the American electorate referred to as the academic and policy elite. This thesis was compelled to account for the characteristics of this portion of the discourse in terms of the shared mythology that is usually termed ‘conventional wisdom.’ Chomsky predicted that debate among elites is not system-destroying but system-
reinforcing, if held within bounds. This thesis, upon analysis of Graham Allison’s seminal work, found his characterization of the debate in the Executive Committee to have been exaggerated. In conformity with Chomsky’s prediction, the members of Kennedy’s team quickly defined the boundaries of their discourse, and debated within those bounds.

Allison implicitly criticized the Administration for premature closure of their discourse. The rapidly made decision by Kennedy, that he must do something, can be explained by the role of the President in the system of governance. McGeorge Bundy defended the President on the basis of his constitutional role. Allison does not directly confront this issue; rather, his analysis leads to further efforts to refine the bureaucratic system which the President must coordinate and direct in times of crisis.

Having found the common element in the two bodies of conventional wisdom to be the persistent theme of leadership, this thesis turned to the contemporary debate. It is important to note where the Cuban missile crisis is most manifest, namely, the debate on arms policy. Robert Levine constructed his particular model of tendency analysis to organize and explain the discourse on arms policy. Chapter III applied the conceptual taxonomy of his model to categorize the elements of the discourse on the crisis around which consensus did not form. First, values and analyses differed among the three schools of thought on the missile crisis. Conservative narratives of the crisis reflect attribution of meaning based upon anti-communist values; while liberal narratives reflect attribution of meaning based upon anti-war values. Each school applies the lessons of the crisis toward some policy direction for the system, whether it is attaining counterforce capability or minimizing the nuclear deterrent.
The middle school, the neo-liberals, is composed of those who balance in one sense or another the two values. This school has not, characteristically, drawn causal inferences regarding the phenomenological aspects of the crisis. Like the analysis of Graham Allison, this school is characterized by attention to process as opposed to outcome, and makes recommendations which affect the present system of national security (at most) at the margins. The peculiar manifestation of Cuban crisis discourse in this school, (by peculiar meaning the way in which strives toward ideological neutrality), is too significant to ignore. The key consideration of this school is process, namely, improving the process of national security management. Again the system and the role of the President as the dominant actor in the system are reinforced.

This thesis found that the propositions of the three schools have in common the fundamental necessity of effective subordination of military means to political direction. Nuclear weapons create special problems in regard to this principle, hence the starting point from which the discourse on the first serious nuclear crisis is directed. Chapter IV placed the evolution of the discourse on the crisis temporally, so as to establish the context of the debate presented in Chapter III. The rise of the process, or neo-liberal school is importantly related to the operational necessities created by modernizing nuclear forces on both sides. In short, the system was evolving technically, but insufficient attention had been paid to the operational implications. American leaders were desperately trying to contain it. Robert McNamara’s extraordinary comment that the SIOP was completely useless, and his later comments that under no circumstances would he have advised Kennedy or Johnson to initiate use nuclear weapons, indicates that for the political leadership nuclear weapons were something
of a "loose cannon." The technological capability of the military was not safely contained within the purview of Executive leadership, at least not sufficiently that they provided a tool of force.

One important area of consensus is that the weapons nevertheless provide the leadership with a tool of coercion. Even to liberals, in that they must stay within the accepted bounds of the system to remain effective in the debate, nuclear weapons exist for legitimate reasons. Even a doctrine of minimum deterrence is a doctrine which offers leverage to the Executive. Liberals grudgingly accept the necessity of brinksmanship in this sense, but only if they are driven to it. If not, they are outside the boundaries of the debate. Likewise, the 'do-nothing' option was outside the boundaries of Kennedy's assessment of possible options. McNamara's contemporary position on that option is naive in the sense that it simply does not account for the role of US strategic superiority in determining the context of Kennedy's decisions. In one respect, Kennedy had to use nuclear leverage against the Cuban deployment, even if it delayed the immediacy of the Soviet nuclear threat for a short time, because he could use nuclear leverage, owing to US superiority. As President of the United States, he was expected to use the means at his disposal to achieve policy goals. Soviet parity was an eventuality, whether Kennedy wished to acknowledge this or not. His exercise of coercive nuclear diplomacy was probably moderated by liberals, fearful of setting a precedent of excessive brinksmanship, as much as it was mandated by conservatives who saw a technological imperative to initiate nuclear alert. At the end of the day he knew that if he had to respond to the Soviets in an escalated conflict there seemed to be a window of Soviet vulnerability that held out some prospect of military 'success.'
If evolving technological capabilities have kept the liberal recommendations in the mainstream, the difficulties of managing those capabilities have kept the conservative recommendations from full realization. In short, no president can surrender to the "technological imperative," he must compromise between the demands of his armed services and national security as it is defined by the electorate to be a combination of anti-communist and anti-war values. The President must continue to keep control of nuclear weapons within the political domain. This is where the dark cloud of crisis particularly threatens. Hence, the birth of the 'process school' and its continued fascination with the Cuban crisis.

This thesis initially presented crisis as concentrating authority in the office of the President. Following the analysis of the conventional wisdom, this point remains. However, crisis is a two-edged sword with respect to Presidential power. It is in crisis that the President is forced to make the great decisions about interests.

While on the one hand the President's role as Commander in Chief of the armed forces acquires greater significance in crisis, in another sense it calls for him to relinquish greater control to the military. Whereas conservatives may seek to take the political restraints off of military operations so that they can be less vulnerable to the unpredictable whims of public opinion, liberals seek greater restraint in the exercise of force because of fear of escalation. Military leaders, who have been focusing solely on methods of achieving national security goals, acquire greater importance as experts upon whom the leadership must rely, and as those who control the discourse of possible options by defining capabilities and setting minimum requirements for security. Hence, the significance of the miscommunication that the air-strike could not be surgical. Involving the
military in planning policy is not in and of itself a bad thing, as long as the ends and means relationship is clear, and as long as policy truly embodies the substantive values of society, not merely token rhetorical support for them. The President must manifest those goals in concrete policy action, thus perpetuating, through actions as well as words, images (such as legitimacy) which motivate the public.

To capture and retain initiative in the American political system, no President can afford to surrender control of foreign policy discourse. Presidents must define the images of any genuine crisis situation. Kennedy seized control of public political discourse on the missile crisis via his speech of October 22. Prior to this critical speech, the discourse about Cuba was almost exclusively the domain of systemic anti-communists. Partly because of their voices, a number of military operations, including a naval exercise in the Caribbean (large enough for an invasion force) and Operation Mongoose, were already underway when the missile crisis unfolded.

By publicly announcing the crisis on October 22, President Kennedy, in the context of an already evolving military policy, took the problem into his own hands. He ‘presidentialized’ the American national response to the Soviet challenge in Cuba, by in effect declaring it to be a crisis. Just as Kennedy controlled the substance and the mythology of the missile gap (and dispelled it at his will), he also determined the precise beginning of the crisis. Once done, he then used the leverage afforded to him by nuclear coercive diplomacy, and the public support generated by media exposure, to rein in the anti-Castro operational forces inside the American military and intelligence communities so that he could then pursue his policy objectives.
on his own terms. He thus had the exclusive domain, and hence freedom of maneuver, required for creative options like the missile trade.

Some concluding observations are in order. First, the conservatives are in one sense right to say that the crisis is of little or no relevance in today's world. Any contemporary condition of nuclear crisis would be much more difficult for decision-makers because of drastic contraction of the time available for possible crisis diplomacy. In 1962 tactical warning was still measured in hours; today it is less than seven minutes. Presently major counterforce assault could be fully executed in less than one hour. Secondly, due to this condition, neo-liberals are right to conclude that careful study of operational performance of the nuclear arsenals to minimize the risk of inadvertent catastrophe is warranted. Finally, as liberals maintain, this condition also necessitates careful consideration of the societal goals as they are represented in policy.

Chomsky suggested in his book Dangerous Illusions that the dominant foreign policy myths in the US are dangerous because they cloak insidious forces of opportunism and intolerance. These accusations are harsh, but close analysis of actual policy process and rhetoric in the Cuban missile crisis suggests that Chomsky's indictment deserves consideration. It is important to look beyond manufactured images and test the policy-in terms of its alleged purpose. What this study has demonstrated is that American governmental behaviour in the Cuban missile crisis was as much an exercise in discourse control and therefore thought control, as it was an example of 'nuclear coercive diplomacy,' 'unnecessary brinksmanship,' or 'sound crisis management.'

The Cuban missile crisis may therefore have more manifestations of outcome than the more limited search for lessons from the ideological
schools can show. The case study of the event serves to illustrate valuable lessons on nuclear crisis management, to be sure. The case study of the discourse on the event serves to illustrate the way in which this event came to have such great meaning for those who experienced it, and for the specialists who deeply explored its ramifications. An examination of the larger discourse is only a beginning toward a greater understanding of not only the visceral and cerebral aspects of experience, but the way in which it leads inquiry.
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