

## THE MISSILE CRISIS:

### His Finest Hour Now

By JAMES A. NATHAN\*

#### INTRODUCTION

**H**ISTORIANS know there is a rhythm to their craft. Events are examined and orthodoxies are established. Then comes a chipping away of previously held convictions. New understandings emerge and stand, at least for a while; and then comes another tide of re-evaluation. The Kennedy Administration's shimmering hour—the Cuban missile crisis—has just begun to have its luster tarnished by critics. Yet few have subjected the event to a complex review of its meaning in terms of the assumptions, policy processes, and relationships of the cold war.<sup>1</sup>

My contention is that the crisis became something of a misleading "model" of the foreign policy process. There are seven central tenets of this model, each of which was "confirmed" by the "lessons" of the Cuban crisis:

- (1) Crises are typical of international relations. The international environment is a constant collision of wills that is a surrogate of war and, at the same time, takes place at the doorstep of war. Crises are objective elements of the international system—but they also have a profoundly psychological element of "will" and "resolve."
- (2) Crises are assumed to be manageable. The skills of personality, training, and organizational expertise that have been developed in the national security machinery during the past twenty-five

\* Most of the arguments contained in this article appeared in a paper delivered at the 1974 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, August 29-September 2, 1974.

<sup>1</sup> "Revisionist" critiques of the Cuban crisis are becoming more frequent. But most are rather polemical and thin. For a sample of some of the better ones, see Richard J. Walton, "The Cuban Missile Crisis" in *Cold War and Counter Revolution* (Baltimore 1972), 103-43; Leslie Dewart, "The Cuban Crisis Revisited," *Studies on the Left*, v (Spring 1965), 15-40; John Kenneth Galbraith, "Storm Over Havana: Who Were The Real Heroes?" (review of *Thirteen Days* by Robert F. Kennedy), *Book World*, January 19, 1969, 16; I. F. Stone, "The Brink" (review of *The Missile Crisis* by Elie Abel), *New York Review of Books*, April 1966, 13; Ronald Steel, "End Game," *New York Review of Books*, March 13, 1969, reprinted in Steel, *Imperialists and Other Heroes* (New York 1971), 115; Louise FitzSimmons, *The Kennedy Doctrine* (New York 1972), 126-73.

years can be orchestrated by a vast bureaucracy in controlled and responsive movements.

- (3) Although crises are a characteristic of the international system, the domestic system is one of order and consensus, and is insulated from the necessities of international politics. Public opinion can be controlled to lend support for a particular foreign policy; but rarely do appurtenances of the domestic sector have their own imperatives.
- (4) Diplomacy is a mixture of the instrumentation of force and bargaining. An essential element of crisis management is the ability to reconcile the inherent forward dynamic of violence, threats of violence, and the instruments of violence with negotiation.
- (5) The United States can control the process of crisis negotiation to "win." "Winning" results in the conclusion of the events themselves. Political crises therefore terminate by definition, almost like medical crises.
- (6) The Soviets seldom negotiate serious matters except under extreme duress.
- (7) Military questions are too critical to be left in the hands of strictly military men and organizations that are not in step with the needs of crisis management. Crisis management can and must be a civilian enterprise.

After the Cuban missile crisis, there were the beginnings of détente with the Soviet Union. The test-ban treaty, the hot line, and a more civil exchange between the two powers are widely believed to stem from the favorable resolution of the missile crisis. Yet the model and the usual inherent assumptions on the meaning of Cuba can be challenged. Nevertheless, the Cuban missile crisis stands as a watershed of the cold war and in the history of the contemporary international system.

#### I. MASTERY OR LUCK?

By far the most intense experience in East-West relations occurred in October 1962, when the Russians were discovered to have placed forty-two medium-range missiles in Cuba. In Khrushchev's apt description, it was a time when "a smell of burning hung heavy" in the air.<sup>2</sup> Kennedy's apparently controlled and masterful way of forcing Khrushchev

<sup>2</sup> Roger Hilsman, *To Move A Nation* (New York 1967), 48, 157; also cited in Steel, *Imperialists and Other Heroes*, 115.

to withdraw the missiles in the thirteen-day crisis has become a paradigmatic example of the way force can be harnessed to a policy by an elaborate manipulation of threats and gambits, negotiation and intimidation. Academic and government analysts have viewed Kennedy's response as a highly calibrated dissection of alternatives instead of seeing his actions as largely an intuitive response to a threat to his administration's electoral future, pride, and strategic posture. As Hans J. Morgenthau, the eminent scholar and a critic of the Kennedy Administration, concluded: "The Cuban Crisis of 1962 . . . was the distillation of a collective intellectual effort of a high order, the like of which must be rare in history."<sup>3</sup> Much of this analysis—so drenched in the cool light of hindsight—bears a suspicious resemblance to the logical and psychological fallacy of reasoning, *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the dominant lesson Americans have drawn from the Cuban experience has been a joyous sense of the United States regaining mastery over history.

For many years Americans had felt threatened by the Soviet challenge to world order—especially since that challenge had been reinforced by growing Russian strategic capability. But after Cuba, the fears of precipitate expansion of a Soviet-American dispute into a final paroxysm of nuclear dust were dissipated. After Cuba, "escalation" became the *idée fixe* of academics and policy-makers—a vision of a ladder of force with rungs separated by equivalent spaces of destruction, each with its own "value," running out toward darkness. Escalation became the dominant metaphor of American officialdom. Each rung could be ascended or descended with the proper increment of will and control. Events and military machines could be mastered for diplomatic ends. As Robert McNamara exalted after the exciting and frightening Cuban climax: "There is no longer any such thing as strategy, only crisis management."<sup>5</sup> Dennis Healy, the British Labor Party "shadow" Defense Minister called the Kennedy Administration's performance a "model in any textbook on diplomacy."<sup>6</sup> Journalist Henry Pachter described Kennedy's execution of crisis management as "a feat whose technical elegance compelled the professionals'

<sup>3</sup> Morgenthau, *Truth and Power, Essays of a Decade, 1960-1970* (New York 1970), 158.

<sup>4</sup> A current review of this enormous literature is contained in Charles F. Hermann, ed., *International Crises: Insights from Behavioral Research* (New York 1972).

<sup>5</sup> Cited by Coral Bell, *The Conventions of Crisis: A Study in Diplomatic Management* (London 1971), 2.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander George and others, *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy* (Boston 1971), 132.

admiration."<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the Wohlstetters made Cuba into a general historical principle about the use of force in times of great stress: "where the alternative is to be ruled by events with such enormous consequences, the head of a great state is likely to examine his acts of choice in crisis and during it to subdivide these possible acts in ways that make it feasible to continue exercising choice."<sup>8</sup>

The decisions as to what steps should be taken to deal with the implantation of the missiles were hammered out in the ExCom meetings. Although court chroniclers of the Kennedy Administration have pored over each detail, the impression now is not one of all choices having been carefully weighed and considered. Rather, in retrospect, there appears to have been a gripping feeling of uncertainty and pressure. Robert Kennedy, for instance, at the height of the crisis, looked across at his brother and almost fainted at the horror of what they were contemplating: "Inexplicably, I thought of when he was ill and almost died; when he lost his child, when we learned that our oldest brother had been killed; of personal times of strain and hurt. The voices droned on, but I didn't seem to hear anything. . . ."<sup>9</sup>

There were reports that one Assistant Secretary was so disconcerted and fatigued that he drove into a tree at 4 a.m. Robert Kennedy recalled, "The strain and the hours without sleep were beginning to take their toll. . . . That kind of pressure does strange things to a human being, even to brilliant, self-confident, mature, experienced men."<sup>10</sup> And President Kennedy, although deliberately pacing himself, wondered if some of his principal advisors had not suffered mental collapse from the long hours and pressure. Tense, fearful, and exhausted men planned and held together the American policy response to the Russian missiles.

The consensus of most behavioral research is that men operating under such acute stress are scarcely capable of considered judgment. Strain and fatigue commonly produce actions which are "caricatures of day-to-day behavior."<sup>11</sup> Although the stress of crisis decision-making

<sup>7</sup> Pachter, "J.F.K. as an Equestrian Statue: On Myths and Myth Makers," *Salmajundi* (Spring 1966), cited in George, *ibid*.

<sup>8</sup> Albert and Roberta Wohlstetter, "Controlling the Risks in Cuba," *Adelphi Paper No. 17* (London, Institute for Strategic Studies, April 1965), 19.

<sup>9</sup> Kennedy, *Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis* (with "Afterword" by Richard Neustadt and Graham T. Allison) (New York 1971), 48.

<sup>10</sup> Kennedy (fn. 9), 22; Sorensen, *Kennedy* (New York 1969), 705; Hermann (fn. 4), 33.

<sup>11</sup> See Thomas W. Milburn, "The Management of Crisis," in Hermann (fn. 4), esp. pp. 263-66.

concentrates and focuses the collective mind, it does not allow for the kind of elegant dissection of events that is now read into the Cuban affair. Events can take charge of decision-makers; on October 25, 1962, Robert Kennedy reported that he felt, as Soviet ships drew near the edge of the American quarantine, that "[W]e were on the edge of a precipice with no way off. . . . President Kennedy had initiated the course of events, but he no longer had control over them."<sup>12</sup> John F. Kennedy's calm public face, discipline, and cool control gave a sense of intellectual engagement in the crisis which yielded no hint of the mute wasteland he was contemplating. But his private anxiety is well recorded, and a case can be made that dispassionate analysis or problem-solving was all but precluded by the psychology of the situation.

It was very close. The military and the "hawks"—a term coined by journalistic descriptions of the ExCom deliberations—were pushing for actions ranging from a "surgical strike" to an all-out invasion of Cuba. Such options would have demanded the stark choice of an even greater Soviet humiliation or a Soviet response in kind. Ironically, a "surgical strike" was not really practical, for there was no guarantee that more than 90 percent of the missiles could be extirpated. Even after an American air attack, some of the missiles could have survived and been launched. And "surgical" always was a misnomer to describe an estimated 25,000 Cuban fatalities, not to speak of the 500 sorties which American planes would have had to run in order to "take out" the Soviet missiles and bombers. Nevertheless, if six out of fourteen members of the ExCom group had had their way, the blockade of Cuba would have been an attack, which Bobby Kennedy called a "Pearl Harbor in reverse." It is no wonder that President Kennedy estimated the world's chance of avoiding war at between one out of three and even.<sup>13</sup>

The illusion of control derived from the crisis was perniciously misleading. Although many Americans shared the belief of historian Schlesinger that the Cuban crisis displayed to the "whole world . . . the ripening of an American leadership unsurpassed in the responsible management of power . . . [a] combination of toughness . . . nerve and wisdom, so brilliantly controlled, so matchlessly calibrated that [it] dazzled the world,"<sup>14</sup> President Kennedy's control was in fact far from complete. For example, the main instrument of pressure was the blockade run by the Navy. Following the suggestion of British Ambassador Ormsby-Gore, Kennedy decided to move the blockade closer to Cuba, from 800 miles to 500 miles, in order to give the Russian

ships heading toward Cuba more time. The order was given but never carried out. The blockade remained at 800 miles.

McNamara had sensed the Navy's lack of responsiveness to civilian commands and had gone to the "Flag Plot," or Naval Operations Center, where he could talk to ship commanders directly by voice-scrambled radio. McNamara pointed to a map symbol indicating that a ship was in a spot where he had not wanted it. "What's that ship doing there?" he asked. Anderson confessed, "I don't know, but I have faith in my officers."<sup>15</sup> McNamara's unease with the apparent lack of responsiveness of the Navy to civilian command prompted him to inquire what would happen if a Soviet captain refused to divulge his cargo to a boarding American officer. Chief of Naval Operations Anderson picked up a Manual of Naval Regulations and rose to defend the Navy against any implied slight about Navy procedure. "It's all in there," Anderson asserted. McNamara retorted, "I don't give a damn what John Paul Jones would have done. I want to know what you are going to do, now!" The last word—again, however—was the Navy's: Admiral Anderson patronizingly soothed the fuming Defense Secretary, "Now, Mr. Secretary, if you and your deputy will go to your offices, the Navy will run the blockade."<sup>16</sup> As McNamara and his entourage turned to leave, Anderson called to him, "Don't worry, Mr. Secretary, we know what we are doing here."<sup>17</sup>

Just when the first Soviet-American encounter at sea seemed imminent, William Knox, the president of Westinghouse International, who happened to be in Moscow, was surprised by an abrupt summons from Premier Khrushchev. The voluble Soviet leader, perhaps half-convinced that Wall Street really manipulated American policy, gave a frightening summary of the strategic situation in the Caribbean. He warned that if the U.S. Navy began stopping Soviet ships, the Soviet subs would start sinking American ships. That, Khrushchev explained, would lead to World War III.<sup>18</sup>

Only a little later, the Navy began to force Soviet subs to the surface in order to defend its blockade—well before Kennedy had authorized contact with surface vessels. Kennedy was appalled when he learned that military imperatives are distinct from diplomatic necessities and

<sup>12</sup> Jack Raymond, *Power at the Pentagon* (New York 1964), 285-86.

<sup>13</sup> Elie Abel, *The Missile Crisis* (Philadelphia 1969), 155-56. Abel interviewed the witnesses to this episode, some of whom did not agree as to Anderson's exact words. Anderson, Abel reports, could not recall ever having said this.

<sup>14</sup> William A. Hamilton, III, "The Decline and Fall of the Joint Chiefs of Staff," *The Naval War College Review*, xxv (April 1972), 47.

<sup>15</sup> Abel (fn. 16), 151-52; Hilsman (fn. 2), 214; W. E. Knox, "Close-up of Khrushchev During a Crisis," *New York Times Magazine*, November 18, 1962, p. 128.

<sup>12</sup> Kennedy (fn. 9), 48-49.

<sup>13</sup> Sorensen (fn. 10), 705.

<sup>14</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days* (Boston 1965), 840-41.

can, all too often, conflict. When he found out that the Navy was intent on surfacing ships, he was horrified: "Isn't there some way we can avoid having our first exchange with a Russian submarine—almost anything but that?" McNamara replied, "No, there's too much danger to our ships. There is no alternative." The President's brother wrote that "all six Russian submarines then in the area or moving toward Cuba from the Atlantic were followed and harassed and, at one time or another, forced to surface in the presence of U.S. military ships."<sup>19</sup> One can only wonder what would have happened if one of the Russian subs had refused to surface and had instead turned on its pursuers.

Events were only barely under control when at the height of the crisis, on October 26, an American U-2 plane fixated on the wrong star and headed back from the North Pole to Alaska via Siberia. To compound matters the Alaskan Air Command sent fighter-bombers to escort the plane home, and the U.S. fighters and the spy plane met over Soviet territory before proceeding back.<sup>20</sup> To survive a Strangelove series of incidents like these, even given the assumptions of the day, can hardly be characterized as more than luck. It would not seem to be the mastery that Schlesinger and other court scribes delight in recalling and extolling.

## II. THE DOMESTIC FACTOR

Why was there a crisis in the first place? The answer is found, in part, in one of the unacknowledged necessities in the conduct of American international affairs—domestic political considerations.<sup>21</sup> The Kennedy Administration's sense of its own precarious electoral position, the coming of the November mid-term elections, and the place Cuba had occupied in public debate, all augured for an immediate and forceful response, no matter what the strategic reality was of having Russian missiles near American borders. The imperatives of American domestic politics during an election year had been building for some time. On August 27, 1962, for example, Republican Senator Homer E. Capehart of Indiana declared, "It is high time that the American people demand that President Kennedy quit 'examining the situation' and start protect-

<sup>19</sup> Kennedy (fn. 9), 55.

<sup>20</sup> Irving Janis, *Victims of Group Think* (Boston 1972), 163; Henry Pachter, *Collision Course* (New York 1963), 58.

<sup>21</sup> Leslie Gelb and Morton Halperin, "The Ten Commandments of the Foreign Affairs Bureaucracy," *Harpers*, Vol. 244 (June 1972), 28-37; Leslie Gelb, "The Essential Domino: American Politics and Vietnam," *Foreign Affairs*, 1 (April 1972), 459-76.

ing the interests of the United States."<sup>22</sup> Former Vice President Nixon, on the gubernatorial campaign stump in California, proposed that Cuban communism be "quarantined" by a naval blockade.<sup>23</sup> Republicans in both Houses had warned the administration that Cuba would be "the dominant issue of the 1962 campaign."<sup>24</sup> The chairman of the Republican National Committee jabbed at Kennedy's most sensitive spot—his concern for foreign policy "resolve": "If we are asked to state the issue in one word, that word would be Cuba—symbol of the tragic irresolution of the administration."<sup>25</sup>

The pressure mounted. As the political campaign began, one observer spotted a sign at a Kennedy rally in Chicago which read, "Less Profile—More Courage."<sup>26</sup> The widely respected and conservative *London Economist* reported that America had become "obsessed" by the "problem" of Cuba;<sup>27</sup> and I. F. Stone despaired in his *Weekly* that Cuba was a bogey which shook Americans, in the autumn of 1962, even more than the thought of war.<sup>28</sup> The domestic pressure on the American President was so intense that one member of Camelot, former Ambassador John Kenneth Galbraith, wrote: "once they [the missiles] were there, the political needs of the Kennedy administration urged it to take almost any risk to get them out."<sup>29</sup> This skeptical view was shared by none other than former President Eisenhower, who suspected "that Kennedy might be playing politics with Cuba on the eve of Congressional elections."<sup>30</sup>

Nor, as Ronald Steel pointed out, were the "principals"—the ExCom—insulated from domestic considerations in their deliberations.<sup>31</sup> One Republican member of the crisis planners sent Theodore Sorensen—Kennedy's alter ego—a note that read: "Ted—have you considered the very real possibility that if we allow Cuba to complete installation and operational readiness of missile bases, the next House of Representatives is likely to have a Republican majority?"<sup>32</sup> Similarly, McGeorge Bundy,

<sup>22</sup> "Capehart: U.S. Should Act, Stop 'Examining Cuba,'" *U.S. News and World Report*, September 10, 1962, p. 45.

<sup>23</sup> *New York Times*, September 19, 1962.

<sup>24</sup> "Cuban Crisis," *Data Digest* (New York 1963), 35, cited by Thomas Halper, *Foreign Policy Crisis: Appearance and Reality in Decision Making* (Columbus, Ohio 1971), 132.

<sup>25</sup> "Notes of the Month: Cuba: A U.S. Election Issue," *World Today*, XVIII (November 1962), 543; Halper (fn. 24), 132.

<sup>26</sup> Quincy Wright, "The Cuban Quarantine of 1962," in John G. Stoessinger and Alan Westin, ed., *Power and Order* (New York 1964), 186.

<sup>27</sup> *Economist*, October 6, 1962, p. 15.

<sup>28</sup> "Afraid of Everything but War," *I. F. Stone's Weekly*, September 17, 1962, p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Steel (fn. 1), 119.

<sup>30</sup> Abel (fn. 16), 78.

<sup>31</sup> Steel (fn. 1), 121.

<sup>32</sup> Sorensen (fn. 10), 688.

chief advisor to two presidents, wondered, when the missiles were first reported, whether action could be deferred until after the election.<sup>33</sup> If the missile installations were completed earlier, there would be, arguably, both a strategic and an electoral problem facing the administration.

What was the worrisome substance of change in the strategic balance represented by the placement of forty-two missiles? To Robert McNamara, the Secretary of Defense, it seemed that "A missile is a missile. It makes no great difference whether you are killed by a missile from the Soviet Union or from Cuba."<sup>34</sup> About two weeks later, on television, Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatrick confirmed the debatable meaning of the missiles: "I don't believe that we were under any greater threat from the Soviet Union's power, taken in totality, after this than before."<sup>35</sup> Indeed, Theodore Sorensen wrote in a memorandum to the President on October 17, 1962—five days before the blockade was ordered—that the presence of missiles in Cuba did not "significantly alter the balance of power." Sorensen explained, "They do not significantly increase the potential megatonnage capable of being unleashed on American soil, even after a surprise American nuclear strike." Sorensen confessed, in conclusion, that "Soviet motives were not understood."<sup>36</sup>

### III. JUST A DIRTY TRICK?

To Khrushchev, the missiles offered the appearance of what former State Department analyst Roger Hilsman called a "quick fix" to the Soviet problem of strategic inferiority. Khrushchev was under enormous pressure from the Russian military who rejected his "goulash communism" and were pushing for a vast increase in the Soviet arms budget.<sup>37</sup> The Cuban missile ploy was probably Khrushchev's response to the prospect of Russian strategic inferiority which was reported by the Kennedy Administration as it admitted that the Democratic pre-election charge of a "missile gap" had not been based on fact. The American announcement that the "gap" had been closed was accompanied by a Defense Department plan, dated October 19, 1961, for production of over one thousand missiles by 1964.

One purpose of the Soviet moves in Cuba was, therefore, to gain

Alexander

<sup>33</sup> George (fn. 6), 89. *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy*

<sup>34</sup> Hilsman (fn. 2), 195.

<sup>35</sup> *New York Times*, November 12, 1962.

<sup>36</sup> *Wilmington Morning News*, January 25, 1974.

<sup>37</sup> Walter W. Layson, "The Political and Strategic Aspects of the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis," unpub. Ph.D. diss. (University of Virginia 1969), 18-87; Thomas W. Wolfe, *Soviet Power and Europe, 1945-1970* (Baltimore 1970), 73-99, 100-194.

the appearance of parity with the Americans. The employment of twenty-four MRBM's and eighteen IRBM's seemed to be a dramatic movement in that direction. But such an increase posed no real threat to American retaliatory strength, or to increasing American superiority. As Henry Kissinger noted at the time, "The bases were of only marginal use in a defensive war. In an offensive war their effectiveness was reduced by the enormous difficulty—if not impossibility—of coordinating a first strike from the Soviet Union and Cuba."<sup>38</sup>

The U.S. Administration knew that the Soviets were not striving for more than an appearance of strategic equality. As Kennedy later reflected, they were not "intending to fire them, because if they were going to get into a nuclear struggle, they have their own missiles in the Soviet Union. But it would have politically changed the balance of power. It would have appeared to, and appearances contribute to reality."<sup>39</sup> In the 1970's, by contrast, "appearances" were less important while the Americans were arranging a complex international order which verged on duopoly. Indeed, beginning in 1970, Soviet submarines and tenders began to visit Cuban ports.<sup>40</sup> And by 1973, Soviet submarines with Polaris-type missiles were regularly stopping in Cuba. What protest there was by the Nixon Administration seemed so muted as to be almost inaudible.<sup>41</sup>

Why was Kennedy so concerned about "appearances"? Perhaps he felt that the American people demanded an energetic response, given their purported frustration over Cuba. The administration's evaluation of the public mood supported the notion that firmness was a requisite of policy. Although repeated Gallup polls before the crisis showed 90 per cent of Americans opposing actual armed intervention in Cuba,<sup>42</sup> Kennedy's own sense was, as his brother pointed out, that if he did not act, he would have been impeached.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Henry Kissinger, "Reflections on Cuba," *The Reporter*, xxvii, November 22, 1962, p. 22.

<sup>39</sup> Interview, December 17, 1962, *Public Papers of the Presidents*, John F. Kennedy (Washington, D.C. 1963), 898.

<sup>40</sup> *New York Times*, December 6, 1970. According to the authoritative *Aviation Week*, the Russians also began to schedule regular stops of long-range aircraft at about the same time. December 21, 1970, pp. 16-17.

<sup>41</sup> For a description of the forceful but private insistence that the building of a Soviet base at Cienfuegos be halted, see Marvin and Bernard Kalb, *Kissinger* (Boston 1974), 209-12. Nevertheless, sporadic press reports indicate that Soviet nuclear submarines are putting into Cuba up to this day. See Barry Blechman and Stephanie Levinson, "U.S. Policy and Soviet Subs," *New York Times*, October 22, 1974; *Washington Post*, October 26, 1974.

<sup>42</sup> "How U.S. Voters Feel About Cuba," *Newsweek*, October 13, 1962, p. 138, Halper (fn. 24), 133.

<sup>43</sup> Kennedy (fn. 9), 45, and "Afterword," 114.

Another explanation for Kennedy's concern that he would not "appear credible" to Khrushchev dates from the time, less than two years earlier, when he decided not to use air support for the Bay of Pigs invasion. According to James Reston's impression upon seeing Kennedy ten minutes after the two leaders had met in Vienna, "Khrushchev had studied the events of the Bay of Pigs; he would have understood if Kennedy had left Castro alone or destroyed him; but when Kennedy was rash enough to strike at Cuba but not bold enough to finish the job, Khrushchev decided he was dealing with an inexperienced young leader who could be intimidated and blackmailed."<sup>44</sup> Similarly, George F. Kennan, then the United States Ambassador to Yugoslavia, met the President after the Vienna summit session and reported that he found Kennedy "strangely tongue-tied" during these talks. Later, he recalled for a Harvard oral history interviewer:

I felt that he had not acquitted himself well on this occasion and that he had permitted Khrushchev to say many things which should have been challenged right there on the spot.

I think this was definitely a mistake. I think it definitely misled Khrushchev; I think Khrushchev failed to realize on that occasion what a man he was up against and also that he'd gotten away with many of these talking points; that he had placed President Kennedy in a state of confusion where he had nothing to say in return.<sup>45</sup>

Kennedy expressed concern to Reston and others that Khrushchev considered him but a callow, inexperienced youth and that he soon expected a "test." "It will be a cold winter," he was heard to mutter as he left the Vienna meeting. Khrushchev may indeed have been surprised at the forceful reaction of Kennedy, particularly after the young President had accepted the Berlin Wall in August 1961 with no military response and had temporized in Laos in 1961 and 1962.

Perhaps, as Hilsman has argued, the Soviets assumed that the fine American distinctions between "offensive and defensive" missiles were really a *de facto* acknowledgment of the Soviet effort in Cuba. One could conjecture that this was what led Khrushchev to promise, and to believe that Kennedy understood, that no initiatives would be taken before the elections. In any case, Kennedy's concern about his "appearance" and the national appearance of strength kept him from searching very far for Soviet motivation. His interpretation was that it was a personal injury to him and his credibility, as well as to Amer-

<sup>44</sup> Reston, "What Was Killed Was Not Only the President But the Promise," *New York Times Magazine*, November 15, 1964, p. 126.

<sup>45</sup> *New York Times*, September 1, 1970; *New York Daily News*, August 31, 1970.

ican power. He explained this sentiment to *New York Post* reporter James Wechsler:

What worried him was that Khrushchev might interpret his reluctance to wage nuclear war as a symptom of an American loss of nerve. Some day, he said, the time might come when he would have to run the supreme risk to convince Khrushchev that conciliation did not mean humiliation. "If Khrushchev wants to rub my nose in the dirt," he told Wechsler, "it's all over." But how to convince Khrushchev short of a showdown? "That son of a bitch won't pay any attention to words," the President said bitterly on another occasion. "He has to see you move."<sup>46</sup>

#### IV. TRUE GRIT AND CRISIS DIPLOMACY

The missile crisis illuminates a feature of the American character that came to be considered a requisite personality trait of the cold war: being "tough." Gritty American determination had become the respected and expected stance of American statesmen under stress in confrontations with the Soviets from the earliest days of the cold war. When Truman, for example, dispatched an aircraft carrier, four cruisers, a destroyer flotilla, and the battleship Missouri to counter Soviet pressure on the Turkish Straits, he told Acheson, "We might as well find out whether the Russians [are] bent on world conquest now as in five or ten years."<sup>47</sup> Clark Clifford gave more formal expression to this sentiment when he advised Harry Truman, in a memo, in late 1946: "The language of military power is the only language which disciples of power politics understand. The United States must use that language in order that Soviet leaders will realize that our government is determined to uphold the interest of its citizens and the rights of small nations. Compromise and concessions are considered, by the Soviets, to be evidence of weakness and they are encouraged by our 'retreats' to make new and greater demands."<sup>48</sup>

The American concern with its appearance of strength was a mark of the Kennedy Administration. One White House aide recalled that, especially after the failure of the Bay of Pigs, "Nobody in the White House wanted to be soft. . . . Everybody wanted to show they were just as daring and bold as everybody else."<sup>49</sup>

In the Cuban crisis, the cold-war ethic of being "tough" exacerbated the discrepancies between the necessities of force and the necessities of

<sup>46</sup> Schlesinger (fn. 14), 391.

<sup>47</sup> Walter Millis, ed., *The Forrestal Diaries* (New York 1951), 192.

<sup>48</sup> Arthur Krock, *Memoirs* (London 1968), 228-29.

<sup>49</sup> Hugh Sidey, *John F. Kennedy, President* (New York 1964), 127.

diplomacy and negotiation. As a result, diplomacy was almost entirely eclipsed. In fact, it was hardly tried. According to Adam Yarmolinsky, an inside observer of the Executive Committee of the National Security Council, "90 per cent of its time" was spent "studying alternative uses of troops, bombers and warships. Although the possibility of seeking withdrawal of the missiles by straightforward diplomatic negotiation received some attention within the State Department, it seems hardly to have been aired in the Ex-Com." Yarmolinsky confesses that it is curious that no negotiations were considered. Nor were economic pressures ever suggested by the foreign affairs bureaucracy. Only a series of military plans emerged, and they varied from a blockade to a preemptive strike.<sup>50</sup>

Kennedy knew the Russians had deployed missiles on October 16. But, instead of facing Soviet Foreign Secretary Gromyko with the evidence while the Russian was giving the President false assurances that missiles were not being installed, the President blandly listened without comment. Whether or not the Russians believed that Kennedy must have known, the effect of the charade was an absence of serious negotiations. Instead of using private channels to warn the Russians that he knew and intended to act, Kennedy chose to give notice to the Russians in a nationwide TV address. After that, a Soviet withdrawal had to be in public and it almost had to be a humiliation. When the Soviets attempted nonetheless to bargain for a graceful retreat, their path was blocked. Kennedy refused Khrushchev's offer of a summit meeting "until Khrushchev first accepted, as a result of our deeds as well as our statements, the U.S. determination in the matter."<sup>51</sup> A summit meeting, Kennedy concluded, had to be rejected; for he was intent on offering the Russians "nothing that would tie our hands." We would only negotiate with that which would "strengthen our stand."<sup>52</sup> If there were to be any deals, Kennedy wanted them to seem a part of American munificence. He did not want a compromise to be tied to the central issue of what he conceived to be a test of American will and resolve. "[W]e must stand absolutely firm now. Concessions must come at the end of negotiation, not at the beginning," Robert Kennedy cautioned.<sup>53</sup>

In other words, the Soviets had to submit to American strength before any real concessions could take place. When Khrushchev offered to exchange the Cuban missiles for the Jupiter missiles stationed in

Turkey, Kennedy refused, even though he had ordered the missiles out months earlier; in fact, he had thought they were out when Khrushchev brought them to his attention. (The Jupiters were all but worthless. A marksman with a high-powered rifle could knock them out.<sup>54</sup> They took a day to ready for firing and the Turks did not want them.) Kennedy, however, did not want to appear to yield to Soviet pressure even when he might give little and receive a great deal. An agreement would have confounded the issue of "will." As Kennedy's Boswell put it, the President wanted to "concentrate on a single issue—the enormity of the introduction of the missiles and the absolute necessity of their removal."<sup>55</sup>

In the final act of the crisis, Kennedy accepted one of two letters sent almost simultaneously by Khrushchev. One contained the demand for removal of the Turkish missiles; the other did not. Kennedy accepted the latter. Khrushchev's second letter began with a long, heartfelt, personal communication and made no mention of a *quid pro quo*. Kennedy's response was a public letter to Khrushchev, temperate in tone, in which he accepted the more favorable terms he preferred and further detailed American conditions. It is said that Kennedy published his response "in the interests of both speed and psychology."<sup>56</sup> But this procedure of publishing the private terms of an interchange with another head of state was a considerable departure from diplomacy. It was not negotiation; it was, in this context, a public demand. Public statements during a crisis lack flexibility. Compromise is almost foreclosed by such a device, because any bargaining after the terms have been stated seems to be a retreat which would diminish a statesman's reputation. Since reputation was the stake in Cuba as much as anything else, Kennedy's response was hardly more than a polite ultimatum. In private, Kennedy was even more forceful. Robert Kennedy told Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin, "We had to have a commitment by tomorrow that those bases would be removed. . . . If they did not remove those bases, we would remove them. . . . Time was running out. We had only a few more hours—we needed an answer immediately from the Soviet Union. . . . We must have it the next day."<sup>57</sup>

As a result of the crisis, force and toughness became enshrined as instruments of policy. George Kennan observed, as he left forty years of diplomatic service: "There is no presumption more terrifying than that of those who would blow up the world on the basis of their per-

<sup>50</sup> Yarmolinsky, *The Military Establishment* (New York 1971), 127.

<sup>51</sup> Kennedy (fn. 9), 44-45; (emphasis added).

<sup>52</sup> Sorensen (fn. 10), 699. <sup>53</sup> Schlesinger (fn. 14), 811.

<sup>54</sup> Hilsman (fn. 2), 202.

<sup>55</sup> Sorensen (fn. 10), 714.

<sup>56</sup> Schlesinger (fn. 14), 810.

<sup>57</sup> Kennedy (fn. 9), 87.

sonal judgment of a transient situation. I do not propose to let the future of mankind be settled, or ended, by a group of men operating on the basis of limited perspectives and short-run calculations."<sup>58</sup>

In spite of occasional epistles from the older diplomatists, the new managers who proliferated after Cuba routed those who most favored negotiations. In an article in the *Saturday Evening Post*, one of the last "moderates" of the Kennedy Administration, Adlai Stevenson, was attacked for advocating "a Munich." The source of the story, it was widely rumored, was President Kennedy himself.<sup>59</sup>

The policy of toughness became dogma to such an extent that non-military solutions to political problems were excluded. A "moderate" in this circumstance was restricted to suggesting limited violence. Former Under Secretary of State Ball explained his "devil advocacy" in Vietnam, in which he suggested that there be a troop ceiling of 70,000 men and bombing be restricted to the South: "What I was proposing was something which I thought had a fair chance of being persuasive . . . if I had said let's pull out overnight or do something of this kind, I obviously wouldn't have been persuasive at all. They'd have said 'the man's mad.'"<sup>60</sup>

This peculiar search for the middle ground of a policy defined in terms of force was abetted by the sudden sense on the part of Kennedy's national security managers that the military was filled with Dr. Strangeloves. There was some warrant for this fear. Time and time again, during the crisis, the military seemed obsessed by the opportunity to demonstrate its potential. When asked what the Soviet reaction would be to a surgical raid on their missiles and men, General Lemay snapped, "There will be no reaction." When the crisis ended on Sunday, October 25th, one of the Joint Chiefs suggested that they go ahead with a massive bombing the following Monday in any case. "[T]he military are mad," concluded President Kennedy.<sup>61</sup> Robert Kennedy recalled acidly that "many times . . . I heard the military take positions which, if wrong, had the advantage that no one would be around at the end to know."<sup>62</sup>

In part, it was as a result of the Cuban crisis that the civilians of the American defense and foreign policy bureaucracy grew to despise

<sup>58</sup> Schlesinger (fn. 14), 397; also cited by I. F. Stone, *In a Time of Torment* (New York 1968), 23.

<sup>59</sup> Walton (fn. 1), 119. The article was by Stewart Alsop and Charles Bartlett, "In Time of Crisis," *Saturday Evening Post*, December 8, 1962.

<sup>60</sup> Gelb and Halperin (fn. 21), 36.

<sup>61</sup> Schlesinger (fn. 14), 831; Neustadt and Allison, in "Afterword," in Kennedy (fn. 9), 126.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

the military. Hilsman reports that later in the Kennedy Administration, an official prepared a mock account of a high-level meeting on Vietnam in which Averell Harriman "stated that he had disagreed for twenty years with General [Brute] Krulak [Commandant of the Marines] and disagreed today, reluctantly, more than ever; he was sorry to say that he felt General Krulak was a fool and had always thought so." It is reported that President Kennedy roared with laughter upon reading this fictitious account.<sup>63</sup> Hilsman also delighted in telling a story about General Lemnitzer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who once briefed President Kennedy on Vietnam: "This is the Mekong Valley. Pointer tip hit the map. Hilsman, watching, noticed something, the point tip was not on the Mekong Valley, it was on the Yangtze Valley."<sup>64</sup> Hilsman's recollection of the general's error became a common office story.

Ironically, while the military was increasingly thought to be rather loutish and ill-prepared, civilians were starting to rely more and more on military instrumentalities in the application of which, with few exceptions, they were not trained, and whose command structure they despised as being second-rate at best. Civilian "crisis managers" felt, after Cuba, that they should have control and that the military could not be trusted and had to be made more responsive to the political and civilian considerations of policy. To many observers, as well as to these managers, the "failures" of the Cuban missile crisis were not failures of civilian judgment but of organizational responsiveness. The intelligence establishment, for instance, had not discovered the missiles until the last minute. McNamara never really secured control over the Navy. U-2 flights were sent near the Soviet Union to "excite" Soviet radar at the height of the crisis; until Kennedy ordered their dispersal, American fighters and bombers were wing to wing on the ground, almost inviting a preemptive Soviet blow. Moreover, American tactical nuclear weapons and nuclear-tipped IRBM's in Turkey and Italy were discovered to be unlocked and lightly guarded.<sup>65</sup> All this led observers and policy-makers to believe that crisis management demanded the President's organizational dominance and control, because the military and intelligence organizations were inept and their judgment was not reliable or at times even sane.

<sup>63</sup> Hilsman (fn. 2), 512-13; John McDermott, "Crisis Manager," *New York Review of Books*, ix, September 14, 1967, 4-10. The fictitious paper, written by James Thompson, also took on the whole Vietnam decision-making team.

<sup>64</sup> David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York 1972), 255.

<sup>65</sup> *Washington Post*, May 26, 1974.

## V. CUBA AND THE AMERICAN CENTURY

After Cuba, confidence in the ability of U.S. armed superiority to command solutions to "crises" in a way that would favor American interests expanded in such a way that Americans again began to speak of the American century. For a period before the crisis there had been a national reexamination. There were fears of national decline in the face of startling Soviet economic growth. Advances in Russian rocketry had led Americans to believe that not only were they in a mortal competition with the Soviets, but that the outcome was uncertain. Now, however, most of these doubts seemed to have dissipated.

The Cuban missile crisis revived the sense of the American mission. Henry R. Luce once rhapsodized in a widely circulated *Life* editorial that Americans must "accept wholeheartedly our duty and opportunity as the most powerful and vital nation in the world and in consequence to exert upon the world the full impact of our influence for such purposes as we see fit, and by such means as we see fit."<sup>66</sup> After the crisis, Arthur Schlesinger could lyrically resurrect this tradition: "But the ultimate impact of the missile crisis was wider than Cuba, wider than even the western hemisphere. . . . Before the missile crisis people might have feared that we would use our power extravagantly or not use it at all. But the thirteen days gave the world—even the Soviet Union—a sense of American determination and responsibility in the use of power which, if sustained, might indeed become a turning point in the history of the relations between east and west."<sup>67</sup>

Similarly, Professor Zbigniew Brzezinski, then a member of the Planning Council of the Department of State, proclaimed that American paramountcy was the lesson of Cuba. Brzezinski explained, "The U.S. is today the only effective global military power in the world."<sup>68</sup>

In contrast to the United States, Brzezinski declared, the Soviets were not a global power. Although Khrushchev may at one time have believed otherwise, the Cuban crisis demonstrated the limits of Soviet capabilities. "The Soviet leaders were forced, because of the energetic response by the United States, to the conclusion that their apocalyptic power [nuclear deterrent power] was insufficient to make the Soviet

<sup>66</sup> Luce, *The American Century* (New York 1941), 23, and *Life*, February 17, 1941, p. 63. Actually, Luce had been on record with this message from the age of twenty. See W. A. Swanberg, *Luce and his Empire* (New York 1972).

<sup>67</sup> Schlesinger (fn. 14), 840, 841.

<sup>68</sup> "Background" remarks to a conference for editors and broadcasters May 22, 1967, cited in Hans J. Morgenthau, *A New Foreign Policy for the United States* (New York 1969), 19. For Brzezinski's edited remarks, see "The Implications of Change for United States Foreign Policy," *Department of State Bulletin*, LVII, July 3, 1967, pp. 19-23.

Union a global power. Faced with a showdown, the Soviet Union didn't dare to respond even in an area of its regional predominance—in Berlin. . . . It had no military capacity to fight in Cuba, or in Vietnam, or to protect its interests in the Congo." No doubt the historic American sense of divine purpose and the almost Jungian need to be the guarantor of global order received a strong fillip from the Cuban crisis. Brzezinski concluded: "What should be the role of the United States in this period? To use our power responsibly and constructively so that when the American paramountcy ends, the world will have been launched on a constructive pattern of development towards international stability. . . . The ultimate objective ought to be the shaping of a world of cooperative communities."<sup>69</sup>

The overwhelming belief of policy-makers in American superiority seriously eroded deterrence. The Soviet Union reached the same conclusion as the United States—that a preponderance of military power, ranging across the spectrum of force from PT craft to advanced nuclear delivery systems, was the *sine qua non* of the successful exercise of political will. Before fall of 1962, Khrushchev's strategic policy, in the words of a Rand Kremlinologist, "amounted to settling for a second-best strategic posture."<sup>70</sup> The missile crisis, however, manifestly demonstrated Soviet strategic weakness and exposed every Soviet debility that Khrushchev's verbal proclamation of superiority had previously covered.

## VI. CUBA AND DETERRENCE

After Cuba, the Soviet military, responding to the humiliating American stimulus, demanded a higher priority to strategic arms and a cutback on the agricultural and consumer sectors of the Soviet economy. Although Khrushchev and Kennedy were by then moving toward a détente—best symbolized by the signing of the test-ban accords of mid-1963—many in the Kremlin saw this as but a breathing spell in which the Chinese might be isolated and Soviet arms could catch up. Naval preparations, especially the building of Polaris-type submarines, were intensified.<sup>71</sup> Soviet amphibian landing capability—something in which the Soviets had shown little interest before—was revitalized and expanded. As Wolfe noted, "From the time of the first test-launching . . . of 1957 to mid-1961 only a handful of ICBM's had been deployed. . . . After Cuba, the pace of deployment picked up, bringing the total

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Wolfe (fn. 37), 134.

<sup>71</sup> David Woodward, *The Russians at Sea: A History of the Russian Navy* (New York 1964), 229-30.

18 To 1  
number of operational ICBM launchers to around 200 by the time of Khrushchev's ouster."<sup>72</sup> Although the West still outnumbered the Russians by four to one in numbers of launchers at the time, the Russians worked furiously, and by September 1968, they commanded a larger force than the United States.<sup>73</sup> Worldwide "blue water" Soviet submarine patrols were initiated; and a decision was taken under Brezhnev and Kosygin to extend the Soviet navy to "remote areas of the world's oceans previously considered a zone of supremacy of the fleets of the imperialist powers."<sup>74</sup>

After the missile crisis, the cold-war establishmentarian John McCloy, representing President Kennedy, was host to Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister V. V. Kuznetsov. McCloy secured an affirmation from Kuznetsov that the Soviets would indeed observe their part of the agreement to remove the missiles and bombers from Cuba. But the Soviet leader warned, "Never will we be caught like this again."<sup>75</sup>

The Soviets were to yield again to U.S. strength in Vietnam and the Middle-East. But each time, the usable strategic leverage of the United States grew weaker. Thus, the structure of the international system and international stability was shaken in three ways.

First, the United States became confident that its power would prevail because global politics had become "unifocal."<sup>76</sup> But American military primacy began to erode as soon as it was proclaimed, when the Soviets fought to gain at least a rough strategic parity.

Second, nations, once cowed, are likely to be less timid in the next confrontation. As Kennedy admitted some time later, referring to the Cuban missile crisis, "You can't have too many of those."<sup>77</sup> Just as Kennedy feared he had appeared callow and faint-hearted in successive Berlin crises, and thus had to be tough over Cuba, the Soviets were likely to calculate that they must appear as the more rigid party in future confrontations or risk a reputation of "capitulationism." For weeks after the missile crisis, the Chinese broadcast their charges of Russian stupidity and weakness to the four corners of the globe. The Chinese labeled Khrushchev an "adventurist" as well as a "capitulationist," and therefore not fit for world Communist leadership. The

<sup>72</sup> Wolfe (fn. 37), 182-83.

<sup>73</sup> Statement by Secretary of Defense Clark M. Clifford, *The Fiscal Year 1970-1974 Defense Program and Defense Budget*, Department of Defense, January 15, 1969, p. 35.

<sup>74</sup> Fleet Admiral V. Kasatonov, "On Battle Watch," *Krasnaia zvezda*, July 30, 1967; cited in Wolfe (fn. 37), 446.

<sup>75</sup> John Newhouse, *Cold Dawn: The Story of SALT* (New York 1973), 68.

<sup>76</sup> George Liska, *Imperial America: The International Politics of Primacy* (Baltimore 1967), 36 ff.

<sup>77</sup> K. J. Holsti, *International Politics* (2d ed., Englewood Cliffs, 1972), 325.

Russian answer was to accuse the Chinese of being even "softer" than they for tolerating the Western enclaves of Macao and Hong Kong.<sup>78</sup> The charge of who was the most capitulationist, the Chinese or the Russians, grew almost silly; but these puerile exchanges had their own dangers in terms of deterrence.

Third, once a threat is not carried out—even after an appearance of a willingness to carry it out has been demonstrated—the ante is upped just a bit more. Morgenthau described a two-step process in nuclear gamesmanship, "diminishing credibility of the threat and ever bolder challenges to make good on it. . . . [T]he psychological capital of deterrence has been nearly expended and the policy of deterrence will be close to bankruptcy. When they reach that point, the nations concerned can choose one of three alternatives: resort to nuclear war, retreat, or resort to conventional war."<sup>79</sup>

Morgenthau's observation captured the dilemma of American policymakers after Cuba. The problem was that nuclear superiority had been useful, but each succeeding threat (since no nuclear threat has ever been carried out) would necessarily be weaker than the last. Yet, how could security managers translate military power into political objectives without such threats? Daniel Ellsberg recalled the quandary of U.S. security managers:

McNamara's tireless and shrewd efforts in the early sixties, largely hidden from the public to this day, [were to] gradually control the forces within the military bureaucracy that pressed for the threat and use of nuclear weapons. [He had] a creditable motive for proposing alternatives to nuclear threats. . . . [I]n this hidden debate, there was strong incentive—indeed it seemed necessary—for the civilian leaders to demonstrate that success was possible in Indochina without the need either to compromise Cold War objectives or to threaten or use nuclear weapons.

Such concerns remained semi-covert: (for it was seen as dangerous to lend substance to the active suspicions of military staffs and their Congressional allies that there were high Administration officials who didn't love the Bomb). . . .<sup>80</sup>

But after the Cuban crisis, the option of "low-level violence" became more and more attractive. Conventional and limited deployments of force became increasingly necessary as conventional force was considered less forbidding than the nuclear abyss. After all, the

<sup>78</sup> Michel Tatu, *Power in the Kremlin: From Khrushchev to Kosygin* (New York 1968), 319-20.

<sup>79</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, *A New Foreign Policy for the United States* (New York 1969), 212-13.

<sup>80</sup> Daniel Ellsberg, *Papers on the War* (New York 1972), 292-93.

symbolic or "psychological capital" of deterrence rested on the notion of resolve. And one way to demonstrate political will was through the resurrection of conventional force as an instrument of demonstrating "commitment"—a commitment whose alternative form was a threat of nuclear holocaust. The latter was bound to deteriorate with the advent of a viable Soviet retaliatory capability and the knowledge that the Soviets had collapsed once under a nuclear threat and might not be willing to be quite so passive again. Many national security managers found they could navigate between the Scylla of nuclear war and the Charybdis of surrender with the serendipitous discovery of the "lifeboat" of the 1960's—limited war. It would not prove to be a sturdy craft.

Of course, the assumptions of the planners of limited war—as they emerged victorious from the Cuban crisis—were as old as the cold war. They dated from the Truman Doctrine's Manichean presentation of a bipolar global confrontation where a gain to one party necessarily would be a loss to the other. A world order of diverse centers of power, with elements of superpower cooperation, where gains and losses would be less easily demonstrable, was not so demanding of military remedy. A multipolar world would be less congenial to the belief that the only options available to policy-makers were either military force or retreat. Maneuver and negotiation, in such a world, would again become part of diplomacy. But such a development was to come about only after the tragic failure of the military remedy had been demonstrated in Vietnam.

## VII. THE BY-PRODUCTS OF SUCCESS

There were other effects related to the exuberant reaction to the Cuban crisis. As the United States began to feel that power and force were successful solvents to the more sticky problems of the cold war, the role of international law declined precipitously.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Dean Rusk reflected earlier, obligatory American statements about international legal order and American foreign policy when he declared:

Our foreign policy has been reflected in our willingness to submit atomic weapons to international law, in feeding and clothing those stricken by war, in supporting free elections and government by consent, in building factories and dams, power plants and railways, schools and hospitals, in improving seed and stock and fertilizer, in stimulating markets and improving the skills and techniques of others in a hundred different ways. Let these things stand in contrast to a foreign policy directed towards the extension of tyranny and using the big lie, sabotage, suspicion, riot and assassination as its tools. The great strength of the United States is devoted to the peaceful pursuits of our people and to the decent opinions of mankind. But it is not healthy for any regime or group of regimes to incur, by

Moral pontifications appeared increasingly hypocritical after Cuba. But after all, hypocrisy, in the words of H. L. Mencken, "runs, like a hair in a hot dog, through the otherwise beautiful fabric of American life."<sup>82</sup> The participants in the crisis knew the blockade was an act of war that had little basis in international law. After the crisis was over, even lawyers began to see law as but another instrumentality of American policy. The conclusion reached by American academics was that "International law is . . . a tool, not a guide to action. . . . It does not have a valid life of its own; it is a mere instrument, available to political leaders for their own ends, be they good or evil, peaceful or aggressive. . . . [The Cuban missile crisis] merely reconfirms the irrelevance of international law in major political disputes."<sup>83</sup>

Dean Acheson summarized the code of the cold war as it was confirmed by the Cuban experience: "The power, prestige and position of the United States had been challenged. . . . Law simply does not deal with such questions of ultimate power. . . . The survival of states is not a matter of law."<sup>84</sup>

George Ball, former Under Secretary of State, wrote: "No one can seriously contend that we now live under a universal system or, in any realistic sense, under the 'rule of law.' We maintain the peace by preserving a precarious balance of power between ourselves and the Soviet Union—a process we used to call 'containment' before the word went out of style. It is the preservation of that balance which, regardless of how we express it, is the central guiding principle of American foreign policy."<sup>85</sup>

The UN was used in the Cuban Crisis, not as Kennedy had told the General Assembly the year before, as "the only true alternative to war,"<sup>86</sup> but as a platform where Adlai Stevenson, the eloquent Amer-

---

their lawless and aggressive conduct, the implacable opposition of the American people. The lawbreaker, unfortunately in the nature of things, always has the initiative, but the peacemaking peoples of the world can and will make themselves strong enough to insist upon peace.

Cited in Halberstam (fn. 66), 327.

<sup>82</sup> H. L. Mencken, "Editorial," *American Mercury*, ix, November 1926, 287. Cited in Halper (fn. 24), 157.

<sup>83</sup> William P. Gerberding, "International Law and the Cuban Crisis," in Lawrence Scheinman and David Wilkinson, eds., *International Law and Political Crisis: An Analytic Casebook* (Boston 1968), 209-10.

<sup>84</sup> Richard J. Barnet and Marcus Raskin, *After Twenty Years* (New York 1965), 229n.

<sup>85</sup> George Ball, "Slogans and Realities," *Foreign Affairs*, xlvii (July 1969), 624.

<sup>86</sup> John F. Kennedy, "Let Us Call a Truce to Terror," address to the General Assembly of the United Nations, September 23, 1961, *Department of State Bulletin*, October 16, 1961, p. 619.

ican representative, could deal "a final blow to the Soviet case before world opinion."<sup>87</sup>

Epitomized by Cuba, crisis after crisis pointed out the stark irony: Americans, who had so long stroked the talisman of international law, now seemed to do so only when their interests were not jeopardized. Otherwise, law became merely a rhetorical flourish of United States policy. International law was still a part of the admonition that "armed aggression" and "breaches of the peace" cease and desist. But, in back of these legalistic and moralistic injunctions, the armed cop became more and more apparent. As General de Gaulle had observed earlier, the conclusion that American idealism was but a reflection of the American will to power became almost inescapable after the Cuban crisis.<sup>88</sup> Few obeisances about the need for law in international society disguised the sense that America had abandoned her ancient, liberal inheritance in the zesty pursuit of world order.

Another effect of the crisis was to differentiate the "great powers"—the United States and the Soviet Union—from other states which were literally frozen out of a major role in structuring global politics. After all, the major "chips" of big-power poker were simply not accessible to other governments—even those with modest and nominally independent nuclear forces. For no other nations had the capability of making even plausible calculations of either preemptive or second-strike blows against a great power, much less basing national strategies on such possibilities. As a result, Europeans were offered the appearance of some control in their nuclear lot with the ill-fated MLF. But the nuclear trigger was still in the hands of the United States, and so was the final squeeze. Not only were the weapons of great-power diplomacy increasingly inaccessible to other states, but the other tools of statecraft also receded from the grasp of those with modest resources. The spy, for instance, was largely replaced by satellite reconnaissance. Intellectual musings on great-power conflict became differentiated from other strategic thinking. Gradually, the Soviets and the Americans created a shared private idiom of force; and a curious dialogue began between the congressional budget messages of the Secretary of Defense and the periodic revisions of *Strategy* by Marshal Sokolovsky.<sup>89</sup> Allies became mere appurtenances of power whose purpose, in the

<sup>87</sup> Schlesinger (fn. 14), 824.

<sup>88</sup> For General de Gaulle's analysis, see his *Mémoires de Guerre*, Vol. II, *L'Unité* (Paris 1956), 97-98.

<sup>89</sup> Marshal Z. D. Sokolovsky (introduction by Raymond Garthoff), *Military Strategy: Soviet Doctrine and Concepts* (New York 1963). (Subsequent editions were translated by RAND for internal use by government officials.)

duopolistic structure of international society, was increasingly symbolic. Thus, for example, the OAS was asked to validate the U.S. blockade at the same time the American quarantine was announced.

Similarly, Dean Acheson flew to Paris and other European capitals to confer with American allies about the coming confrontation over Cuba.

"Your President does me great honor," de Gaulle said, "to send me so distinguished an emissary. I assume the occasion to be of appropriate importance." Acheson delivered President Kennedy's letter, with the text of the speech to be delivered at P-hour, 7 P.M. Washington time. He offered to summarize it. De Gaulle raised his hand in a delaying gesture that the long-departed Kings of France might have envied. "May we be clear before you start," he said. "Are you consulting or informing me?" Acheson confessed that he was there to inform, not to consult. "I am in favor of independent decisions," de Gaulle acknowledged.<sup>90</sup>

For the Europeans, Gaullists and Leftists alike, it appeared that there was a high likelihood of nuclear annihilation without representation.<sup>91</sup> In spite of European gestures of support, the alliance received a shock from which it did not recover. The British, in the midst of a vicious internal debate about whether or not to abandon nuclear weapons, decided they were necessary to buy even minimum consideration from their American allies. The French did not debate; they accelerated their nuclear programs while withdrawing from a military role in the alliance.

On the Soviet side, it was equally apparent that Russian interests would not be sacrificed to sister socialist states. Castro was plainly sold out. The weak promise tendered by the Kennedy Administration not to invade the island was probably cold comfort as Castro saw his military benefactors beat a hasty retreat from American power. Embarrassingly, Castro began to echo the "capitulationist" theme of Chinese broadcasts. Privately Castro said that if he could, he would have beaten Khrushchev to within an inch of his life for what he did. Soviet Foreign Minister Mikoyan was dispatched to Cuba and stayed there for weeks, not even returning to the bedside of his dying wife, but Castro's fury was unabated. Whatever the motive for Khrushchev's moves in Cuba, the Chinese were also enraged.<sup>92</sup> Any attempts

<sup>90</sup> Abel (fn. 16), 112.

<sup>91</sup> Amitai Etzioni, *Winning Without War* (Garden City, N.Y. 1965), 46.

<sup>92</sup> Adam Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence* (New York 1968), 675. Ulam (pp. 668-70), suggested that Khrushchev aimed at precluding both Chinese and German acquisition of nuclear weapons.

the Soviets had made prior to October 1962 to dissuade the Chinese from assuming a nuclear role lost their validity when it became obvious that the Russians would not risk their own destruction for an associate.

By 1963, a new era of East-West relations was unfolding. The United States still cultivated the asymmetrical assumptions of the cold war, but the Soviet Union was at least admitted as a junior partner in a duopolistic international system which began to be characterized as *détente*. The relaxation was favorable to Kennedy, who wanted to begin to deal with the Soviets without the ideological rancor that had poisoned previous relations, and who had a vision of Soviet "responsibility" which was to be enlarged upon by succeeding administrations. The Soviets, too, sought a *détente*. Given their acknowledged strategic inferiority, they could hardly expect to be successful in another series of confrontations. Moreover, the Chinese began to present formidable ideological and political difficulties for the Russians, whose new interest in improved relations with the United States caused intense fears in China of American-Soviet collusion. At the same time, the Soviets began to fear a Sino-American agreement that would be detrimental to their interests. As Michael Suslov, chief ideologue of the Soviet Union, explained in early 1964, "With a stubbornness worthy of a better cause the Chinese leaders attempt to prevent the improvement of Soviet-American relations, representing this as 'plotting with the imperialists.' At the same time the Chinese government makes feverish attempts to improve relations with Britain, France, Japan, West Germany, and Italy. It is quite clear that they would not refuse to improve relations with the United States but as yet do not see favorable circumstances for such an endeavor."<sup>93</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

Thus, by 1964, the crisis had precipitated a change in the global structure of power. American paramountcy had been self-proclaimed; the seeds of *détente* had been sown by a shared vision of nuclear oblivion; and the ingredients for a great-power condominium were becoming clear. If it had not been for the war in Vietnam, the present framework of international affairs might have been with us ten years earlier. Tragically and ironically, the "lessons" of the Cuban missile crisis—that success in international crisis was largely a matter of national guts; that the opponent would yield to superior force; that presidential control of force can be "suitable," "selective," "swift," "effective," and

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 691.

"responsive" to civilian authority; and that crisis management and execution are too dangerous and events move too rapidly for anything but the tightest secrecy—all these inferences contributed to President Johnson's decision to use American air power against Hanoi in 1965. The Cuban crisis changed the international environment but riveted American expectations to the necessities of the diplomacy of violence. Even the language of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution was almost identical to that which Kennedy's legal advisors had drawn up for the OAS in October of 1962.<sup>94</sup> Although the Cuban crisis created substantial changes in distinguishing superpowers from other states, the realization of the equality of the superpowers and of the indications that they could join in a relationship which had some elements of condominium and some elements of the classic balance of power was suppressed until the American agony in Vietnam drew to a close.

<sup>94</sup> Remarks by William P. Bundy, University of Delaware, October 16, 1973.