

## Lessons from the Cuban Missile Crisis



# HOW DIPLOMACY *not* DETERRENCE SAVED THE WORLD IN 1962

Timmon Wallis PhD

**Cover photo:**

*President Kennedy with Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko and Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin, meeting at the White House on October 18, 1962.*

PHOTO: Library of Congress

## Author

Timmon Wallis is an independent researcher with a PhD in Peace Studies from Bradford University in England. He is the author of *Disarming the Nuclear Argument: The Truth About Nuclear Weapons*, Luath Press, 2017 and *Warheads to Windmills: How to Pay for a Green New Deal*, NuclearBan.US, 2019.

© 2022 NuclearBan.US

NuclearBan.US  
20F St NW, Suite 700  
Washington, DC 20001  
<https://www.nuclearban.us>

## **The Cuban Missile Crisis:**

How Diplomacy – not Deterrence – Saved the  
World in 1962

*By Timmon Wallis PhD*

## Contents

1. Introduction – The Cuban Missile Myth . . . . .	3
2. What was at stake in 1962 . . . . .	4
3. Potential triggers for nuclear war . . . . .	8
4. What actually resolved the crisis . . . . .	9
5. A deal that remained secret . . . . .	12
6. Lessons for today? . . . . .	13
Bibliography . . . . .	15
Endnotes . . . . .	17

## Abstract

The Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962 was, until today, the most dangerous moment in human history. Even at the time, no one knew just how dangerous it really was. And yet the resolution of that crisis, so important for our understanding of how to resolve such crises since then, was kept secret for 30 years. Even today, few people seem to understand that it was straightforward diplomacy that saved the world from nuclear war – not threats or macho posturing. Even Lyndon Johnson, who was shortly to become President himself, was never told the truth about the diplomatic deal that ended the Cuban Missile Crisis. Both Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan faced down the Soviet Union in the decades that followed, still unaware that diplomacy rather than deterrence is what saved the world in 1962.

## Introduction – The Cuban Missile Myth

On October 27, 1962, the world was the closest it has ever been, before or since, to an all-out nuclear war that could have ended human civilization as we know it.<sup>1</sup> Right up until the 11<sup>th</sup> hour, President Kennedy was threatening to invade Cuba, with all the risks that entailed, unless Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev backed down by removing nuclear missiles capable of reaching Washington, DC, in a matter of minutes from Cuba.

War was averted at the last minute through back-channel diplomacy and a straightforward deal that saw the removal of Soviet missiles from Cuba in exchange for the removal of the equivalent US missiles -- capable of reaching Moscow in a matter of minutes -- from Turkey. The US Jupiter missiles in Turkey had been installed starting in late 1961 and were declared fully operational on October 22, 1962 – the same day the President Kennedy went on national television to denounce the Soviet missiles in Cuba.<sup>2</sup>

But that is not what people were told at the time. The myth of the Cuban Missile Crisis is that Kennedy stared down Khrushchev, and Khrushchev blinked first. By risking nuclear war

with the Soviet Union, Kennedy got what he wanted: the removal of Soviet missiles from Cuba. Only nine men knew about the secret agreement to remove the Jupiter missiles from Turkey.

It was nearly 30 years before the truth about the Cuban Missile Crisis became public, long after many of the actors involved had died. Lyndon Johnson went to his grave never knowing about the secret deal that ended the crisis. Presidents Nixon and Reagan both used the threat of nuclear war to try to bend the Soviet Union to their will in the decades that followed, not knowing that President Kennedy had in the end struck a deal with his Soviet counterpart rather than risk nuclear war.

Even now, 60 years later, the myth of President Kennedy's machismo during the Cuban Missile Crisis lives on, while his willingness to negotiate a mutually agreeable solution to the crisis is somehow excused as an afterthought if acknowledged at all. As President Biden "stands firm" against Vladimir Putin, refusing to negotiate over Ukraine, we are seeing the

---

*“War was averted at the last minute through back-channel diplomacy and a straightforward deal... But that is not what people were told at the time.”*

---



*Photos from US spy planes over Cuba revealed what appeared to be construction of intermediate range nuclear missile sites, which were reported to President Kennedy on October 16, 1962.* PHOTO: National Security Archive

consequences of the Cuban Missile myth still being played out today.

And the risks are as high today as they were in 1962, if not higher. US nuclear forces are not yet at DEFCON2,<sup>3</sup> but anything could happen at any moment in Ukraine to tip the balance towards the possibility of all-out nuclear war. In 1962, there were at least men like John F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev who understood what

that meant. It is not as clear today that there is that same understanding among those with the power to unleash nuclear war.

## What was at stake in October 1962

The Cuban Missile Crisis began, for President Kennedy at least, on October 16, 1962, when he was informed that nuclear missile sites were being constructed in Cuba. On October 22<sup>nd</sup>, Kennedy announced to the world that the US would not tolerate the existence of these missiles and was henceforth going to stop any further military shipments to Cuba by force.

In the days that followed, tensions continued to build to a fever pitch, as the US enforced the blockade of Cuba

---

*“Kennedy announced to the world that the US would not tolerate the existence of these missiles...”*

---

with 46 navy warships, 240 planes and helicopters, and 30,000

---

*“By October 27, at least 6 medium-range nuclear missiles from the Soviet Union were already fully operational in Cuba ...”*

---

personnel.<sup>4</sup> While this was going on, the Pentagon was simultaneously finalizing plans to drop more than 1,000 bombs on the missile sites in Cuba starting on Monday, October 29<sup>th</sup>.<sup>5</sup> This was to be followed by a full-scale invasion of Cuba seven days later, involving as many as 140,000 troops, over 500 aircraft and 175 ships.<sup>6</sup> If necessary, the use of “tactical” nuclear weapons had been authorized.<sup>7</sup>

In expectation of a US invasion, Cuba had mobilized a 350,000-strong “popular militia” who were preparing to defend the island. Over 100 “tactical” nuclear weapons were already fully operational and in position to destroy the US base at Guantanamo Bay,<sup>8</sup> as well as any invasion fleet, as soon as the US invaded.<sup>9</sup> Castro had already told Khrushchev he was willing to sacrifice the whole Cuba if necessary to destroy the US enemy.<sup>10</sup>

By October 27, at least 6 “medium-range” nuclear missiles from the Soviet Union were already fully operational in Cuba. These were on mobile launchers that could be moved around the island, able to be launched within an hour of the order being given, with a range of 1,200 miles. Each had a nuclear warhead of either 1 or 2 megatons, approximately 65-130 times the size of the Hiroshima bomb (0.015 megatons) that had destroyed an entire city, killing up to 70,000 people in a single instant, another 70,000 people over the



*Fidel Castro in Havana during the 1959 revolution.*

PHOTO: Lezumbalaberenjena

following months and at least another 70,000 in the years since then.

Khrushchev claimed at the time that even if only one of these missiles survived a pre-emptive US attack, they could still take out New York City.<sup>11</sup> The missiles already in Cuba were accompanied by a significant military force of some 42,000 Soviet soldiers.<sup>12</sup>

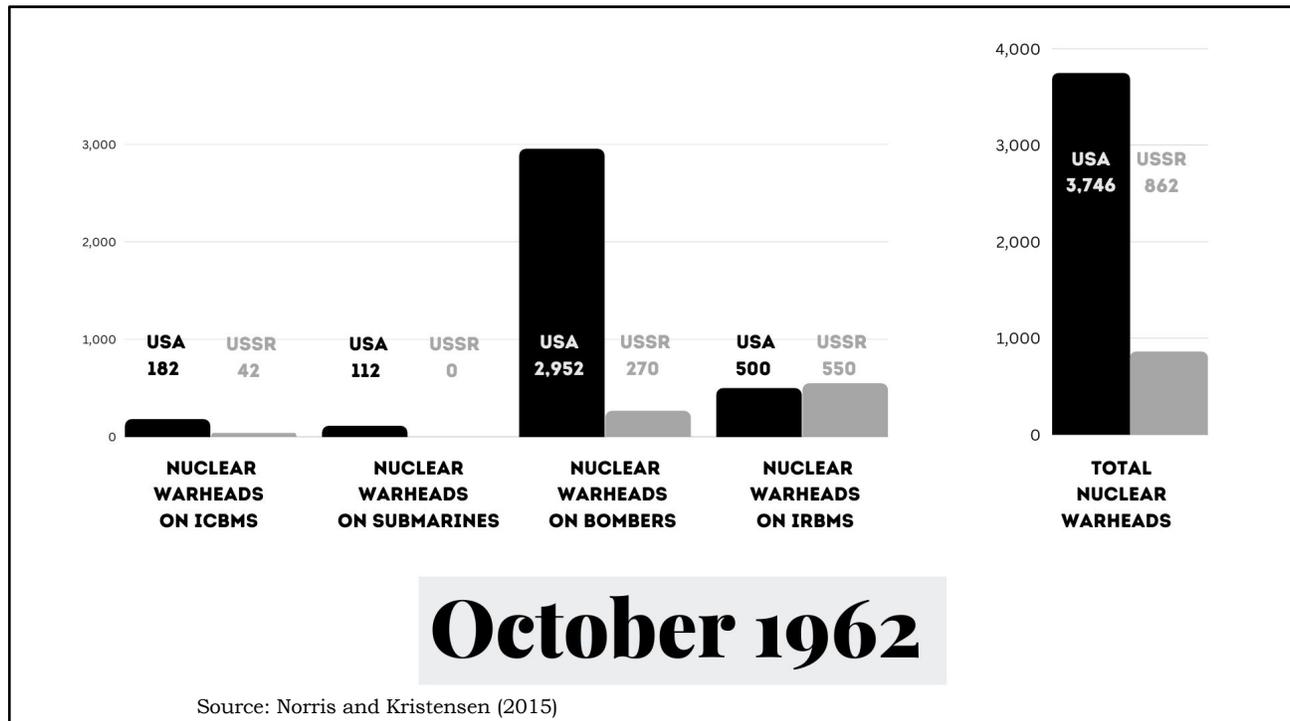
Meanwhile 200 Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles across the United States were being readied for launch. Missile crews had been scrambled to man their underground silos on October 22<sup>nd</sup> and had remained there ever since. Seven Polaris submarines, with a total of 112 nuclear missiles on board, had been dispersed to their secret underwater locations ready for the orders to fire.

In Europe, there were expectations that a US attack on Cuba could result in the Soviets moving against West

For the first time ever, US nuclear forces had been placed on DEFCON2 alert status, one step away from nuclear war. Nearly 200 B-52 and B-47 bombers laden with multi-megaton nuclear bombs were kept in the air at all times,<sup>13</sup> circling the Arctic and awaiting the order to proceed to their targets. The remaining nuclear bomber force was dispersed to 30 civilian airfields around the country.<sup>14</sup>

---

*“even if only one of these missiles survived a pre-emptive US attack, they could still take out New York City...”*



Berlin, attacking the US missile sites in Turkey and/or other possible reprisals. US nuclear forces in Europe were put on heightened alert, and on the 27<sup>th</sup>, President Kennedy authorized the loading of nuclear weapons onto strike aircraft based in several European countries.<sup>15</sup>

In total, the US was ready to send as many as 3,500 nuclear weapons to their targets as soon as the orders were given. Some of these weapons were more than 1,000 times the size of the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945.

President Kennedy ordered the immediate evacuation of family members from Guantanamo Bay, and ordered missile defenses to be moved into position around Miami (although the chances that any of those defenses would be effective were slim at best).<sup>16</sup> A Civil Defense plan for evacuating



*Atlas ICBM on launchpad.* PHOTO: Public Domain



*President Kennedy announcing the imminent threat of war.* PHOTO: Public Domain

major cities and military sites across the US was rejected as being too ineffective,<sup>17</sup> but there were unconfirmed reports coming in that the citizens of Moscow were already being evacuated.

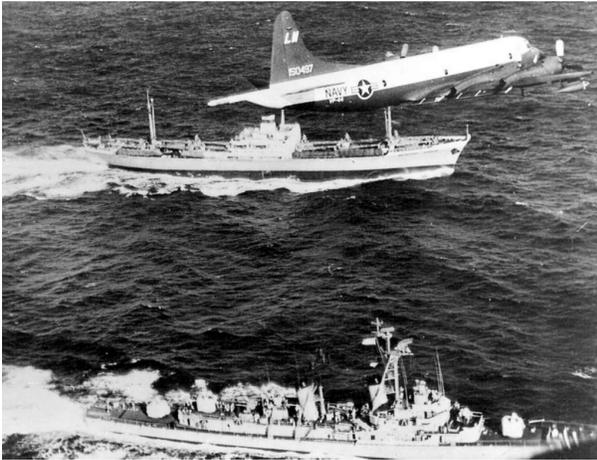
President Kennedy was told that a war with the Soviet Union would likely lead to 200 million casualties in North America and double that number in the Soviet Union,<sup>18</sup> although in discussions at the White House, they spoke of “only” 80-100 million dead.<sup>19</sup> Khrushchev meanwhile believed as many as 500 million in the Soviet bloc could die if war broke out.<sup>20</sup> But right to the end, both men stood ready to take that risk.

---

*“the US was ready to send as many as 3,500 nuclear weapons to their targets as soon as the orders were given...”*

---

## The potential triggers for nuclear war



*US Navy ship and plane intercept Soviet cargo ship, the Metallurg Anosov in international waters. PHOTO: US Museum of Naval Aviation*

On October 27, 1962, just two days before the bombing of Cuba was scheduled to begin, a US spy plane was shot down over Cuba, killing the pilot and plunging the White House into a crisis. President Kennedy had earlier authorized the use of force should any US pilots be shot down. He then rescinded that order on the 27<sup>th</sup> in order to give Khrushchev more time.

Later that day, the US Navy dropped “practice” depth charges on the B-59 Soviet submarine to force it to surface.<sup>21</sup> The Navy was unaware that the submarine had nuclear weapons on board, and the submarine was unaware that the Navy was only trying to communicate with it. Instead, the submarine crew thought they were under attack and that war had already broken out.

Two officers on board authorized the launch of a 15 Kiloton nuclear torpedo, which was only prevented by

a third officer, Vasily Arkhipov, who just happened to be on board and was able to intervene before the torpedo was launched. The torpedo, with the destructive force equivalent to that which destroyed the city of Hiroshima in 1945, would have almost certainly sunk a number of US warships in the area and killed a large number of US sailors, along with the submarine itself.<sup>22</sup>

That same evening, a US spy plane strayed over Soviet territory near the Arctic Circle, chased by Soviet MiG fighter jets who were in turn being chased by US fighter jets from Alaska. The US fighters, designed for intercepting Soviet bombers coming over the north pole, were armed only with nuclear air-to-air missiles at this



*Soviet Naval Officer, Vasily Arkhipov.*

PHOTO: Olga Arkhipova, Creative Commons

point in the crisis. Luckily the Soviet jets were unable to intercept the U-2 spy plane and returned to base before the US fighters caught up with *them*.<sup>23</sup>

At sea, a Soviet cargo ship, the *Grozny*, was steaming toward Cuba and was non-responsive to calls for the ship to stop and be searched. The Navy fired “star shells” over the bow of the ship to signal it to stop. It is unknown to this day what might have happened in that confrontation at sea had the news not come through at that moment that the crisis was over.

US low level reconnaissance planes were meanwhile flying regularly over Cuba and were continually being fired upon by Cuban anti-aircraft guns. According to Cuban sources, they were getting closer and closer to being able to shoot down one of the US planes.<sup>24</sup> By this point in the crisis, the orders from the White House were to respond to any more shooting down of planes with immediate bombardment and not wait until the following Monday to initiate the planned attack.<sup>25</sup>

## What actually resolved the crisis

When it comes to nuclear weapons, most people still believe the lie that the mere *threat* of using nuclear weapons is enough to make sure these weapons are never used. The Cuban Missile Crisis is trotted out as the prime example of how so-called “nuclear deterrence” works: a real and credible threat of using nuclear weapons against the Soviet Union in October 1962 forced the Soviet Union to back down and nuclear war was thereby averted – the deterrent “worked.”

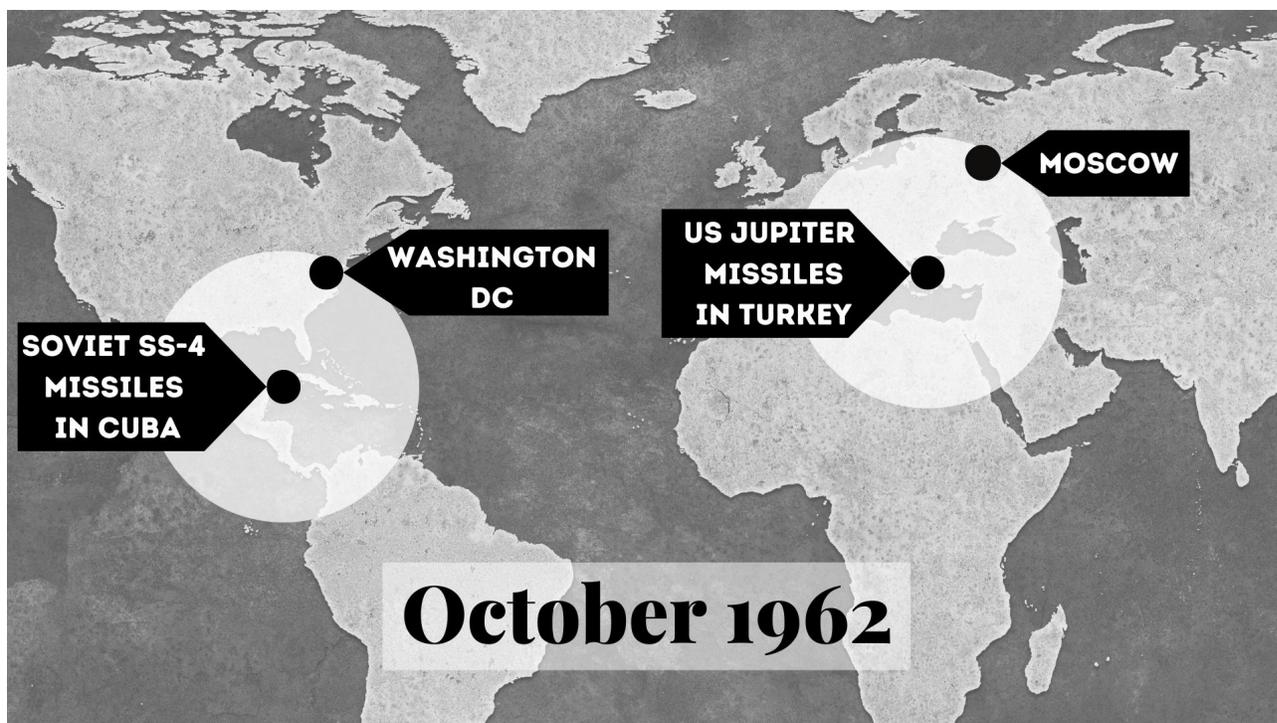
Sounds convincing, except that that’s not what actually happened. What actually happened was that Kennedy and Khrushchev engaged in some good, old-fashioned diplomacy, out of the limelight of the press and the public eye. They came to an agreement that was mutually acceptable to both parties, and that is what ended the crisis.



*President Kennedy with Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko and Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin, meeting at the White House on October 18, 1962.*

PHOTO: Library of Congress

In exchange for withdrawing Soviet missiles from Cuba, Kennedy agreed to withdraw US missiles from Turkey. It was an even swap, a totally straightforward *quid pro quo*, despite every effort to pretend otherwise, even today.



Attempts to downplay this deal include claims that the US Jupiter missiles in Turkey were “already obsolete;” that “they were going to be withdrawn anyway;” that this was just a last minute side issue, a distraction and/or a way to let Khrushchev “save face” in what would otherwise have been seen as a complete capitulation to US demands.

---

*“These missiles in Turkey were... perceived to be just as much a threat to the Soviets as the missiles in Cuba were to the United States”*

---

What cannot be denied, however, is that in the months prior<sup>26</sup> to Soviet nuclear missiles being discovered in Cuba, the US was installing a squadron of 15 Jupiter nuclear

missiles at Cigli airbase near Izmir, Turkey. These missiles could reach Moscow within minutes, with nuclear warheads roughly 100 times the size of the bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki. These missiles, whether or not they were the most up-to-date models available, were perceived to be just as much a threat to the Soviet Union as the missiles in Cuba were perceived to be a threat to the United States.

Khrushchev had strenuously complained about US plans to base nuclear missiles on the very border of the Soviet Union when those plans were first made public in 1959.<sup>27</sup> In February 1961,

Khrushchev warned Turkey about hosting US missiles. During his first meeting with President Kennedy in Vienna in June 1961, Khrushchev again raised his concern about the missiles in Turkey.<sup>28</sup>

In May, 1962, with construction of the missile base in Turkey well underway, Khrushchev made another speech objecting to the missiles to be stationed on the border of the Soviet Union, explicitly linking this to the right of the Soviets to do likewise to the United States.

According to Bernstein (1997, p. 63) President Kennedy then commissioned a study in August 1962, months before the Soviet missiles were actually discovered in Cuba, asking what would happen if the Russians put missiles in Cuba in response to the US missiles being deployed in Turkey. And on October 16, the same day that President Kennedy was informed about Soviet missiles in Cuba, Khrushchev made a formal complaint to the US ambassador about US missiles being now operational in Turkey.<sup>29</sup>

Following the failed Bay of Pigs invasion of 1961<sup>30</sup> and continuing attempts by the CIA

to assassinate Castro and destabilize his regime,<sup>31</sup> there were clearly reasons for Cuba to want to be “defended” by its Soviet ally against further

attack from the US. Nevertheless, according to Nash (1997, p. 106),

*“the Jupiters in Turkey did serve as a secondary motive and as an important, if not decisive,*

*catalyst for Khrushchev’s decision.”*

According to Khrushchev himself, in the final letter he sent to Kennedy on October 27, 1962,<sup>32</sup> leading to the deal that ended the Cuban Missile Crisis:

*“You are disturbed over Cuba. You say that this disturbs you because it is*

---

*“Do you consider, then, that you have the right to demand security for your own country and the removal of the weapons you call offensive, but do not accord the same right to us?”*

---



*Kennedy with Soviet Prime Minister Nikita Khrushchev in Vienna in 1961. PHOTO: Stanley Tretick /National Archives and Records Admin.*

*90 miles by sea from the coast of the United States of America. But Turkey adjoins us; our sentries patrol back and forth and see each other. Do you consider, then, that you have the right to demand security for your own country and the removal of the weapons you call offensive, but do not accord the same right to us? You have placed destructive missile weapons, which you call offensive, in Turkey, literally next to us. How then can recognition of our equal military capacities be reconciled with such unequal relations between our great states? This is irreconcilable.”*

## A deal that remained secret

The deal that was reached between Kennedy and Khrushchev was kept secret for 30 years, but is now undeniable. Most of the relevant documents have been declassified and are the public domain.<sup>34</sup> The handful of men who were party to the deal (and still alive 30 years later) have all confessed, including Ted Sorensen, Kennedy’s White House Counsel, who admitted to doctoring Bobby Kennedy’s posthumously published memoir, *Thirteen Days*, to remove references to the deal that was struck with Khrushchev.<sup>35</sup>

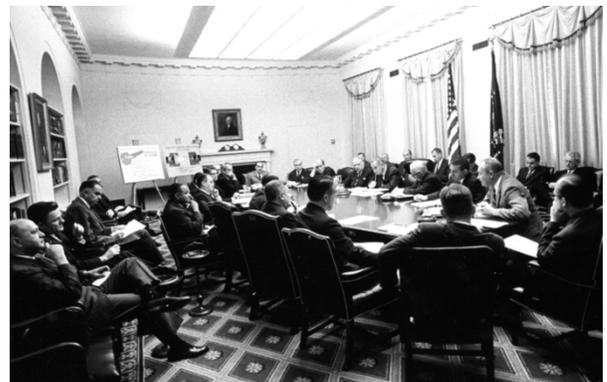
Both Dean Rusk and Robert McNamara lied under oath<sup>36</sup> to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee when asked directly if there had been a deal to resolve the crisis. Others who had been party to the deal continued to vehemently deny it. The national press were emphatically instructed at

The US missiles in Turkey were not only of deep concern to Khrushchev. They were central to the discussions within Kennedy’s inner circle from the very beginning of the crisis.<sup>33</sup> President Kennedy, having just put those missiles in Turkey, was initially opposed to any consideration of removing them. But in the end, that was a price worth paying to prevent nuclear war.

the time that there had been no deal. Turkey was officially informed that there had been no deal.

According to Bundy’s memoir, published in 1990<sup>37</sup>:

*“There was no leak. As far as I know, none of the nine of us told anyone else what had happened. We denied it in every forum that there was any deal...”*



President Lyndon B. Johnson with his cabinet, 1965.  
PHOTO: US national archives.

President Kennedy himself never disclosed the deal even to his Vice President, Lyndon Johnson. According to numerous sources, Johnson was never told about the deal even after becoming President.<sup>38</sup>

That means that **Johnson's handling of the Vietnam War**,<sup>39</sup> which for him meant accepting nothing short of military victory, was done with the belief that he was following in the warlike footsteps of his former president, and without the knowledge that it was diplomacy, not threats, that had saved the world. According to Stern (2012, p. 153), Johnson went to his grave believing that his predecessor had used the threat of nuclear war to successfully force the Soviets to capitulate to his demands regarding Cuba.

It almost certainly means that **Richard Nixon's explicit nuclear threats**<sup>40</sup> and apparent willingness to actually use nuclear weapons to end

the Vietnam War were made without knowing the truth about the Cuban Missile Crisis. Although Nixon's actions were almost certainly in conscious emulation of what Eisenhower claimed was a series of successful threats to end the Korean War, the further example of what he understood to be the effectiveness of Kennedy's threats over Cuba undoubtedly reinforced Nixon's willingness to use threats with nuclear weapons.

And it also almost certainly means that **Ronald Reagan's determination to "play tough"** with the Soviet Union, his harsh rhetoric and his massive nuclear re-armament program<sup>41</sup> were all undertaken without the knowledge of what really happened during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, since that knowledge did not become public until after the Reagan presidency.

## Lessons for today?

What lessons do Joe Biden and his senior advisors draw from the Cuban Missile Crisis today? Biden started his political career in the Senate in 1973, at a time when the myth of President Kennedy's "toughness" which still very much the dominant paradigm among American politicians of all political persuasions.

When the truth about Kennedy's negotiations and the deal he struck with Khrushchev started coming out

in 1989, Biden was still recuperating from brain surgery. Perhaps he was too busy after that, as chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, to take note of revelations that were coming out about events that took place back in 1962.

Although Biden voted against the first Gulf War in 1991, he has been an enthusiastic supporter of all America's wars since then, in Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria. His position on

Ukraine has been to arm Ukraine and to avoid direct negotiations with Russia.

Perhaps, as in 1962, there are secret negotiations going on with Russia that we don't know about. But keeping such negotiations hidden from the public and the media is also dangerous, since people continue to draw the wrong conclusions from that. When will politicians, academics, journalists and the general public come to terms with the truth of the Cuban Missile Crisis and the necessity of negotiating to resolve crises like that? Even during one of the most dangerous and tense moments in all of history, the conflict was ultimately resolved not through threats, intimidation or military action, but through diplomacy and negotiation.

It is true that Kennedy and Khrushchev stuck to their guns, as it were, for 13 days, pushing themselves into a corner and refusing to give in to each other right up until the last possible moment, *even if it meant destroying the entire world.*

Luckily for the entire world, however, both men ultimately realized what was at stake, stepped back from the brink and decided to solve the crisis the only way any such crises can ever be solved – by talking to each other and negotiating a solution.

Unluckily for the entire world, that is still not the lesson most people take away from the Cuban Missile Crisis. Rather it is the dangerous and wholly mistaken belief that threats and intimidation – and a refusal to negotiate – are what solve dangerous international crises like this.

Sixty years after the world very nearly didn't make it, we are again at an extremely perilous moment in history. International tensions are running extremely high and the refusal to talk about them only increases the danger that we could all be engulfed in a nuclear war that nobody wants and few would survive.

On this 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the last time the world was this close to disaster, we can only hope that more people in positions of power and influence will discover the real lessons from that experience.



Peace negotiations between Israel and Egypt, 1977.

PHOTO: Creative Commons.

## Sources

- Allyn, Bruce J., James G. Blight, and David A. Welch, eds. *Back to the Brink: Proceedings of the Moscow Conference on the Cuban Missile Crisis, January 27-28, 1989*. CSIA Occasional Paper, no. 9. [Cambridge, Mass.]: Lanham, Md: Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard University; University Press of America, 1992.
- Bernstein, Barton J. "Reconsidering the Missile Crisis: Dealing with the Problems of the American Jupiters in Turkey." In *The Cuban Missile Crisis Revisited*, edited by James A. Nathan, 55–129. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 1992. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-11462-4\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-11462-4_3).
- Bundy, McGeorge. *Danger and Survival: Choices about the Bomb in the First Fifty Years*. 1st Vintage Books ed. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.
- Dobbs, Michael. *One Minute to Midnight: Kennedy, Khrushchev, and Castro on the Brink of Nuclear War*. 1st ed. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008.
- "Dubious Secrets of the Cuban Missile Crisis." Accessed October 20, 2022. [https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb457/#\\_edn1](https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb457/#_edn1).
- Ellsberg, Daniel. *The Doomsday Machine: Confessions of a Nuclear War Planner*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2017.
- "Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–1963, Volume XIV, Berlin Crisis, 1961–1962 - Office of the Historian." Accessed October 20, 2022. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v14/d33>.
- Garthoff, Raymond L. "Cuban Missile Crisis: The Soviet Story." *Foreign Policy*, no. 72 (1988): 61–80. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1148820>.
- Hershberg, Jim. "The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962: Anatomy of a Controversy." Accessed October 19, 2022. [https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/nsa/cuba\\_mis\\_cri/moment.htm](https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/moment.htm).
- "Jupiter IRBM Basing Strategy." Accessed October 20, 2022. <http://www.themilitarystandard.com/missile/jupiter/basing.php>.
- Kaplan, Fred M. *The Bomb: Presidents, Generals, and the Secret History of Nuclear War*. First Simon&Schuster hardcover edition. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020.
- Kennedy, Robert F. *Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis*. New York: Norton, 1971.
- Ketov, Ryurik A. "The Cuban Missile Crisis as Seen Through a Periscope." *Journal of Strategic Studies* 28, no. 2 (April 2005): 217–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390500088304>.
- Khrushchev, Nikita. "Letter From Chairman Khrushchev to President Kennedy, October 27, 1962 - Cuban Missile Crisis - John F. Kennedy Presidential Library & Museum." Accessed October 20, 2022. <https://microsites.jfklibrary.org/cmc/oct27/doc4.html>.

- Lednicer, David. "Aviation History Pages." In *Intrusions, Overflights, Shootdowns and Defections During the Cold War and Thereafter*, 2010. <http://mysite.ncnetwork.net/res12e522/ColdWar.html>.
- Lewis, Patricia. "Too Close for Comfort: Cases of Near Nuclear Use and Options for Policy." London: Chatham House, April 28, 2014. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2014/04/too-close-comfort-cases-near-nuclear-use-and-options-policy>.
- "JFK and the Cuban Missile Crisis | Miller Center," October 6, 2017. <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/educational-resources/jfk-and-cuban-missile-crisis>.
- Nash, Philip. *The Other Missiles of October: Eisenhower, Kennedy, and the Jupiters, 1957-1963*. Chapel Hill, N.C: University of North Carolina Press, 1997.
- "Nixon White House Considered Nuclear Options Against North Vietnam." Accessed October 20, 2022. <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB195/index.htm>.
- Norris, Robert S., and Hans M. Kristensen. "The Cuban Missile Crisis: A Nuclear Order of Battle, October and November 1962." *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 68, no. 6 (November 1, 2012): 85–91. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0096340212464364>.
- Samuels, Brett. "Biden Says He Has 'No Intention' of Meeting with Putin at G20 next Month." Text. *The Hill* (blog), October 12, 2022. <https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/3683864-biden-says-he-has-no-intention-of-meeting-with-putin-at-g20-next-month/>.
- Savranskaya, Svetlana V. "New Sources on the Role of Soviet Submarines in the Cuban Missile Crisis." *Journal of Strategic Studies* 28, no. 2 (April 2005): 233–59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390500088312>.
- Schaffer, Jennifer. "The Turkish Missile Crisis: The Root of Anti-American Sentiment in Turkey." *Meddah: A U.S.-Turkey Storytelling Project* (blog), March 30, 2020. <https://medium.com/meddah-a-u-s-turkey-storytelling-project/the-turkish-missile-crisis-the-root-of-anti-american-sentiment-in-turkey-6e7258e8975>.
- Schwarz, Benjamin. "The Real Cuban Missile Crisis." *The Atlantic*, January 3, 2013. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2013/01/the-real-cuban-missile-crisis/309190/>.
- Sherwin, Martin J. "One Step from Nuclear War." *National Archives*, Fall 2012, 44, no. 2 (August 15, 2016). <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2012/fall/cuban-missiles.html>.
- Simpson, Charlie. "Land Based USAF Missiles." Accessed October 20, 2022. [https://rvsn.ruzhany.info/0\\_2021/aafm\\_1997\\_06\\_00\\_en.html](https://rvsn.ruzhany.info/0_2021/aafm_1997_06_00_en.html).
- Stern, Sheldon. *The Cuban Missile Crisis in American Memory: Myths Versus Reality*, 2012. <https://bookshop.org/p/books/the-cuban-missile-crisis-in-american-memory-myths-versus-reality-sheldon-m-stern/11010026>.
- Times, The Moscow. "Russian Defense Ministry Releases Cuban Missile Crisis Records." *The Moscow Times*, September 11, 2017.

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2017/09/11/russian-defense-ministry-released-data-on-cuban-missile-crisis-a58899>.

Young, John. "When the Russians Blink: The U.S. Maritime Response to the Cuban Missile Crisis." USMCR, 1990. Accessed October 24, 2022.

<https://www.amazon.com/When-Russians-Blinked-Maritime-Occasional/dp/1495226336>.

Missile Threat. "SM-78 Jupiter." Accessed October 19, 2022.

<https://missilethreat.csis.org/missile/jupiter/>.

"The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962: Documents." Accessed October 19, 2022.

[https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/nsa/cuba\\_mis\\_cri/docs.htm](https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/docs.htm).

"The Cuban Missile Crisis: Lessons for Today, Session 1 | JFK Library." Accessed October 19, 2022. <https://www.jfklibrary.org/events-and-awards/forums/10-22-cuban-missile-crisis-conference-1>.

"Nixon White House Considered Nuclear Options Against North Vietnam."

Accessed October 20, 2022.

<https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB195/index.htm>.

"SAC during the 13 Days of the Cuban Missile Crisis," February 22, 2013.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20130222100942/http://www.afgsc.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123323100>.

"The Soviet Cuban Missile Crisis: Castro, Mikoyan, Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Missiles of November." Accessed October 23, 2022.

<https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB393/>.

"What Did LBJ Know About the Cuban Missile Crisis? And When Did He Know It? | History News Network." Accessed October 19, 2022.

<https://historynewsnetwork.org/article/43977>.

"What LBJ Did Not Know and Why He Did Not Know It? | FBC." Accessed October 19, 2022. <https://federalbarcouncilquarterly.org/?p=689>.

## Endnotes

---

<sup>1</sup> There have been at least a dozen other occasions since 1945 when nuclear war was narrowly averted at the last moment, most recently in 2002, during a nuclear stand-off between India and Pakistan over Kashmir (Lewis, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> See Dobbs (2008), p. 234.

<sup>3</sup> DEFCON5 is the normal state of alert for US military forces, and DEFCON1 means we are in the midst of a nuclear war. President Kennedy moved US forces worldwide to DEFCON3 on October 22, and General Power, head of the Strategic Air Command, moved the alert level to DEFCON2, for US nuclear forces only, on October 24.

<sup>4</sup> Young, 1990, p. 80.

<sup>5</sup> See "The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962: Documents." Accessed October 19, 2022.

[https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/nsa/cuba\\_mis\\_cri/docs.htm](https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/docs.htm).

<sup>6</sup> Stern, 2012, p. 161.

<sup>7</sup> According to transcripts of the discussion that took place in Moscow between US, Soviet and Cuban actors 40 years later (Allyn, 1992, p. 101). So-called "tactical" nuclear weapons included any nuclear weapons that could only be fired from relatively short range. The smallest of these weapons still had a destructive force many times that of a conventional bomb, and in fact most were many times more powerful than the bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki. So to equate "tactical" with "small" is incorrect.

---

<sup>8</sup> Guantanamo Bay is a large US naval base on the southeastern tip of Cuba. It was established long before the Cuban revolution of 1959 and has remained there ever since, with over 8,000 US military personnel (and since 9/11, housing the detention center where suspected terrorists from Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere have been tortured and held without trial for over 20 years.)

<sup>9</sup> According to Soviet reports 40 years later, missile commanders on site in Cuba were authorized to decide when and if to use the short-range nuclear weapons already operational in Cuba. There can be little doubt that under direct attack from the US, at least some of these missiles would have been used (Stern, 2012, p. 2)

<sup>10</sup> Letter from Castro to Khrushchev in <https://faculty.chass.ncsu.edu/slatta/hi216/sovietscuba.htm>.

<sup>11</sup> (Stern, 2012, p. 17)

<sup>12</sup> The Pentagon estimated the number of Soviet troops in Cuba to be 7,000 and the CIA's estimate was 17,000. Only in 1989 was it revealed that there were actually 42,000 Soviet troops on the island at that time (Ellsberg, 2017, p.203).

<sup>13</sup> Ellsberg, 2017, p. 211.

<sup>14</sup> Ellsberg, 2017, p. 187. Dispersal was meant to protect the planes from Soviet attack, but at the same time it was putting population centers at risk all across the country.

<sup>15</sup> See "The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962: Documents." Accessed October 19, 2022. [https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/nsa/cuba\\_mis\\_cri/docs.htm](https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/docs.htm)

<sup>16</sup> See "The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962: Documents." (op.cit.)

<sup>17</sup> Stern, 2012, p. 25.

<sup>18</sup> Estimated casualties in the Soviet bloc included those in Eastern Europe as well as in China, because US nuclear war plans included targeting all those areas.

<https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2012/fall/cuban-missiles.html>

<sup>19</sup> Recording of JFK meeting with Joint Chiefs of Staff, October 19<sup>th</sup>, in Stern (2012), p. 17.

<sup>20</sup> Ellsberg, 2017, p. 221.

<sup>21</sup> These were only capable of producing a loud bang and not considered sufficient to damage the submarine, although from the submariners' point of view, it appeared they were under attack.

<sup>22</sup> This only came to light after US and Soviet documents were declassified 40 years later, in 2002: <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/russia-programs/2022-10-03/soviet-submarines-nuclear-torpedoes-cuban-missile-crisis>.

<sup>23</sup> Ellsberg, 2017, p. 212.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 212.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, p. 213.

<sup>26</sup> Construction of the missile sites began in late 1961 and was completed in early 1962. The launch crews were trained and readied in stages between Nov 1961 and March 1962 and the missiles were declared fully operational in July 1962. Control of the missiles, but not the nuclear warheads, was supposed to be handed over to the Turkish airforce, however, and this was not completed until October 22, 1962. See [https://military-history.fandom.com/wiki/PGM-19\\_Jupiter](https://military-history.fandom.com/wiki/PGM-19_Jupiter) and Nash (1997, p. 103).

<sup>27</sup> Bernstein (1992, pp 58-59)

<sup>28</sup> Nash (1997, p.99)

<sup>29</sup> Nash (1997, p. 128)

<sup>30</sup> The CIA trained and supplied a force of about 1,400 Cuban exiles who were opposed to Castro's revolution to launch an invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs on April 17, 1961. They were defeated by the Cuban armed forces and it became a huge political embarrassment for President Kennedy who had just entered the White House in January of that year.

<sup>31</sup> See Allyn (1992) for fascinating discussions 30 years later between key Russian, American and Cuban actors about the context leading up to the Crisis.

<sup>32</sup> <https://microsites.jfklibrary.org/cmc/oct27/doc4.html>

<sup>33</sup> Nash (1997), pp. 128-129.

<sup>34</sup> [https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/nsa/cuba\\_mis\\_cri/moment.htm](https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/moment.htm)

<sup>35</sup> Allyn (1992), p. 93.

<sup>36</sup> <https://federalbarcouncilquarterly.org/?p=689>

<sup>37</sup> McGeorge Bundy, *Danger and Survival*, 1990, p. 434.

---

<sup>38</sup> See “What Did LBJ Know About the Cuban Missile Crisis? And When Did He Know It? | History News Network.” Accessed October 19, 2022.  
<https://historynewsnetwork.org/article/43977>.

“What LBJ Did Not Know and Why He Did Not Know It? | FBC.” Accessed October 19, 2022.  
<https://federalbarcouncilquarterly.org/?p=689>.

<sup>39</sup> <https://historynewsnetwork.org/article/43977>

<sup>40</sup> <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB195/index.htm>

<sup>41</sup> Ronald Reagan is better known now for befriended Mikhail Gorbachev and negotiating the INF Treaty that eliminated a whole class of nuclear weapons at the end of his Presidency. But he started his Presidency and spent his first 4-year term determined to do battle with what he called the “evil empire.” He launched a massive program to upgrade every type of nuclear weapon in the US arsenal and engaged the US in covert operations against the Soviets in Afghanistan as well as against the Nicaraguans and other communist regimes.