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The Cuban Missile Crisis: Trading the Jupiters in Turkey?

BARTON J. BERNSTEIN

President John F. Kennedy has been variously praised and blamed for his handling of the Cuban missile crisis in October 1962. For most, it was his great triumph: seven days of wide-ranging deliberations and careful planning; and six days of the shrewd use of cautious threats, limited force, and wise diplomacy to achieve victory.¹ For critics, however, it was an unnecessary crisis, or dangerously mishandled, or both: Kennedy should either have acceded to the Soviet missiles in Cuba, or at least tried private diplomacy before moving to the quarantine. Removal of the missiles was not worth the risk of nuclear war.²

Many assessments focus on Kennedy's response to the Soviet demand on Saturday, October 27, that the United States withdraw its missiles from Turkey. Publicly, he seemed to reject the Soviet proposal.³ But did he? Some defenders

¹ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), pp. 808–35; Theodore Sorensen, *Kennedy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965); Roger Hilsman, *To Move A Nation* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967), pp. 159–229; and Robert Kennedy, *Thirteen Days* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1969).

² Barton J. Bernstein, "Their Finest Hour?" *Correspondent* 32 (August 1964): 119–21; idem., "The Cuban Missile Crisis," in *Reflections on the Cold War*, eds. Lynn Miller and Ronald Pruessen (Philadelphia, Pa.: Temple University Press, 1974), pp. 111–42; idem., "The Week We Almost Went to War," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 32 (February 1976): 13–21; I.F. Stone, "The Brink," *New York Review of Books*, 14 April 1966, pp. 12–16; Ronald Steel, "End Game," *New York Review of Books*, 13 March 1969, pp. 15–22; and James Nathan, "The Missile Crisis: His Finest Hour Now," *World Politics* 27 (January 1975): 256–81.

³ White House statement, 27 October 1962; Kennedy letter to Khrushchev, 27 October 1962, both

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have claimed—on the basis of hints in Robert Kennedy’s memoir⁴—that the president actually struck a private bargain and, hence, indirectly acceded to the Soviet terms.⁵ Critics, on the other hand, have either denied that there was such an agreement or have stressed that it was dangerously loose.⁶ It required that Premier Nikita Khrushchev trust Kennedy’s hedged, private promise and accept public defeat in order to avoid an American invasion of Cuba and possibly all-out war. Why, the critics ask, did Kennedy refuse to accept the Turkey-Cuba trade publicly and thus leave Khrushchev a choice between possible holocaust or humiliation? Was not Kennedy guilty of brinkmanship? What would Kennedy have done if Khrushchev had not retreated and accepted public humiliation?

New evidence—recently declassified minutes, some staff reports, key diplomatic cables, and some published parts of Robert Kennedy’s still-closed papers⁷—reopens these issues about the Turkey-Cuba missile trade and its background. This evidence reveals that President Kennedy was partly responsible for installing the missiles in Turkey and that the president and some advisers, from the early days of the crisis, were privately more flexible than memoirists or critics acknowledged. The new evidence establishes that Kennedy privately offered a hedged promise on 27 October 1962 to withdraw the Jupiter missiles from Turkey at a future time. Unfortunately, these documents do not resolve the problem of what Kennedy would have done had Khrushchev insisted on a public pledge. Would Kennedy have yielded and thus risked weakening his credibility? Or would he have invaded Cuba?

WHO PUT JUPITER MISSILES IN TURKEY?

In 1957 the Eisenhower administration decided to arrange to send missiles to Europe, largely to strengthen NATO, both militarily and psychologically. Even before Sputnik, partly to repair the “special relationship” torn by the Suez debacle, the administration promised Britain sixty Thors—intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBMs).⁸ And shortly after Sputnik, when administration

in *Public Papers of the Presidents: John F. Kennedy, 1962* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1963), pp. 813–14.

⁴ Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, pp. 94–95.

⁵ Though not formally a defender, see Graham Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown, 1971), pp. 228–29.

⁶ For the denials of such an agreement, see Nathan, “Missile Crisis,” pp. 268–70 and Steel, “End Game,” pp. 15–17; those stressing that the agreement was dangerously loose include Bernstein, “Cuban Missile Crisis,” pp. 120, 135, and idem. “Week We Almost Went to War,” p. 19.

⁷ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *Robert F. Kennedy and His Times* (Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1978), pp. 499–532, used the Robert F. Kennedy papers, now at the Kennedy Library, with permission of the family. According to the library, the sections on the missile crisis are still classified, and not organized, and access is still barred to independent scholars (William Moss to Barton Bernstein, 23 January 1979, and Martin McGann to Bernstein, 24 August 1979; and conversation with McGann, 21 November 1979). Schlesinger recently shared some of his notes with me.

⁸ Harold Macmillan, *Riding the Storm, 1956–1959* (London: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 245–46;

members feared a "confidence" or "deterrence" gap, the Eisenhower administration gained NATO's unanimous approval for the deployment of missiles on the continent. Most NATO allies, however, fearful of antagonizing the Soviet Union and in many cases of inflaming domestic opposition, refused the weapons. Only Italy and Turkey accepted them.⁹

The agreement with Turkey, completed in October 1959, provided for fifteen Jupiter missiles (IRBMs). The arrangements of ownership and custody were cumbersome: The missiles would be owned by Turkey; the nuclear warheads would be owned by the United States and in the custody of its forces; the weapons could be launched only on the order of the Supreme Allied Commander-Europe (an American) on the approval of both the American and Turkish governments; and the sites would be manned by soldiers of both nations. It was, in principle, a dual-veto system.¹⁰

The legal provisions raised serious problems about actual practices during a crisis. What would happen if only one nation decided to launch the missiles? How would the complex legal and custodial arrangements—with their checks and balances—actually operate? Could American troops stop the Turkish government, or even panicky Turkish troops, from acting unilaterally? What would happen if the Turks seized control of the weapons and warheads during a local crisis with the Soviets and launched the nuclear missiles, despite American objections? Such questions undoubtedly added to the fears of the Soviet Union, for the missiles would be close to the border. Could the Soviets trust the Turks? Should the United States?

The Jupiters were liquid-fuel IRBMs, taking hours to fire, quite inaccurate, very vulnerable, and hence only useful militarily for a first strike, and thus provocative. The skin of the Jupiter was so thin that a sniper's bullet could puncture it and render it inoperative. "In the event of hostilities, assuming that NATO will not strike the first blow," a then-secret congressional report warned, "the USSR with its ballistic missile capability logically could be expected to take out these bases on the first attack, which undoubtedly would be a surprise attack."¹¹ Put bluntly, the Jupiters would draw, not deter, an attack.

Why then did various Turkish governments, both before and after the coup of 1960, want these weapons? They added prestige, emphasized Turkey's key role in NATO, and exaggerated the warmth of relations with a great power, the United States. The missiles were political assets abroad and possibly at home.

Michael Armacost, *The Politics of Weapons Innovation: The Thor-Jupiter Controversy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), pp. 190–97.

⁹ Armacost, *Weapons Innovation*, pp. 175–211.

¹⁰ William H. Brubeck, "Jupiters in Italy and Turkey," 22 October 1962, National Security Files (hereafter NSF), Countries: Cuba, Box 36, John F. Kennedy Library, Waltham, Mass. (hereafter JFKL); W.W. Rostow to Bundy, "Turkish IRBM's," 30 October 1962, NSF, Regional Security Files (hereafter RSF): NATO-Weapons, Box 226, JFKL; *New York Times*, 11 October 1959, pp. 1, 11, and 28 October 1962, p. 31.

¹¹ U.S., Congress, House, Committee on Armed Services, *Hearings on the Military Posture*, 88th Cong., 1st sess., 30 January 1963, pp. 277–81.

Turkey's military leaders believed that the Jupiters added useful military power.¹² Turkish officials probably did not understand the strategic liabilities; perhaps they believed that the missiles, because of their first-strike capacity and the ambiguity of actual control, were sufficiently frightening to deter the Soviets from pressuring Turkey.

Unlike the Eisenhower planners and the Turkish officials, President Kennedy and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara worried about the provocative nature of these weapons. As a result, according to some memoirists, Kennedy actually ordered the removal of the Jupiters before October 1962, and thus was shocked and dismayed to learn during the Cuban missile crisis that they were still in Turkey.¹³

Such recollections are misleading. Well before the crisis, Kennedy knew the Jupiters were in Turkey. In fact, his administration, not Eisenhower's, had actually installed these weapons in late 1961 to fulfill the 1959 agreement.¹⁴ Key documents reveal that the actual deployment of the Jupiters did not occur until *after* Kennedy had been in the White House for at least six months, and probably not until the autumn, and they did not become operational until about July 1962.¹⁵

The first document, a partly declassified report by the Joint Congressional Committee on Atomic Energy, makes clear that construction for the Jupiters had not even started when Kennedy entered the White House. On 11 February 1961 the committee urged that "construction . . . should not be permitted to *begin* on the . . . Jupiter sites [which are necessary for] placing 15 obsolete Jupiters in Turkey." Instead, according to the committee, the government should deploy to the area a Polaris submarine, with its sixteen missiles, operated and controlled by American personnel. That assignment, the committee emphasized, could be made before 1962, when the Jupiters would become operational, and the Polaris would be "a much better retaliatory force." It would be mobile, concealed, and thus virtually immune from a Soviet attack. As a result, unlike the Jupiters, the Polaris would add to deterrence and better protect the United States, NATO, and Turkey.¹⁶

The second document, a National Security Council (NSC) memorandum entitled "Deployment of IRBM's to Turkey," dated 6 April 1961, confirms that

¹² Ibid., pp. 277–85; Raymond Hare to Secretary of State, no. 587, 26 October 1962, NSF, RSF:NATO-Weapons, Box 226, JFKL; compare Sorensen, *Kennedy*, p. 3.

¹³ Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, pp. 94–95, implies that JFK had been trying to remove them since 1961. Kenneth O'Donnell and David Powers, with Joe McCarthy, *Johnny, We Hardly Knew Ye* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1972), p. 337, states that JFK had given the order five times. Also see Hilsman, *To Move A Nation*, pp. 202–203; Elie Abel, *The Missile Crisis* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), pp. 168–71; and Allison, *Essence of Decision*, pp. 44, 101, 142, 226.

¹⁴ Headquarters, SAC, *The Development of the Strategic Air Command* (n.p., SAC Historian, 1976), p. 104. I am indebted to Dr. Alfred Goldberg, Historian, Department of Defense, for locating this source for me.

¹⁵ House Armed Services Committee, *Hearings on Military Posture*, p. 283.

¹⁶ Report quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 279–80 (emphasis added). For evidence that Polaris missile warheads were often unreliable see *New York Times*, 3 December 1978, p. 32.

there were no Jupiters then in Turkey and that the administration was considering whether it could back away from fulfilling Eisenhower's 1959 agreement. According to this document, at a March 29 meeting of the NSC, President Kennedy directed that a committee, drawn from the Departments of State and Defense and from the Central Intelligence Agency, "should review the question of deployment of IRBMs to Turkey and make recommendations to him." The committee was to be chaired by a representative from the State Department, which, unlike the Defense Department, was not deeply troubled by the provocative nature of the Jupiters and which was likely to serve as a partisan for Turkish interests and resist cancellation of the weapons.¹⁷ Was this appointment of the State Department representative as chair accidental? Probably not. Kennedy, a knowledgeable leader who understood bureaucratic politics, probably cared more about not offending the Turks than about withholding the Jupiters. This message was probably clear to the chair and other representatives.

The details of the committee's activities remain classified, but another document, probably a report from the committee's chairman, establishes that the Jupiters were still not in Turkey in early summer. On June 22, George C. McGhee of the State Department reported to McGeorge Bundy, the president's special assistant for national security, "that action should not be taken to cancel *projected* deployment of IRBM's to Turkey." This conclusion was "based primarily," McGhee explained, "on the view that, in the aftermath of Khrushchev's hard posture at Vienna, cancellation . . . might seem a weakness." American credibility and the president's prestige required doing what the Defense Department regarded as militarily dangerous. In addition, McGhee continued, "the Turkish reaction was strongly adverse" and General Lauris Norstad, commander of NATO, "underlined the military importance of sending IRBM's to Turkey. This makes it unlikely that any attempt [would succeed] to persuade the Turkish military that they should abandon this project."¹⁸

Unfortunately, Norstad's arguments remain unavailable. An analyst cannot determine whether he failed to recognize the provocative nature of the Jupiters in Turkey, or whether he thought that they would make the Soviets uneasy and thus deter some small-scale adventurism, or whether he believed that the missiles were primarily valuable as symbols of (not weapons for) the alliance. What is clear is that Norstad's reasoning helped undercut the analysis of Secretary McNamara and his "whiz kids," who hoped to make deterrence more reasonable and thus chafed at the resistance of allies, the American brass, and the State Department.

Why did Kennedy accede to deploying the missiles? The documents are still classified. The most likely explanation is that McGhee's report summarized Kennedy's own thinking that summer. The president did not want to seem weak

¹⁷ McGeorge Bundy, "Deployment of IRBM's to Turkey," National Security Action Memorandum, 6 April 1961, NSF, RSF:NATO-Weapons (Cables-Turkey), Box 226, JFKL.

¹⁸ George McGhee to Bundy, "Turkish IRBM's," 22 June 1961, NSF, RSF:NATO-Weapons (Cables-Turkey), Box 226, JFKL (emphasis added); and McGhee to Bernstein, 19 February 1979.

after the debacle at Vienna, where he felt Khrushchev had bullied him. Nor did he wish to weaken the NATO alliance politically and deeply offend a key American ally, Turkey, by reneging on Eisenhower's commitment. Perhaps, as McNamara later hinted, the administration might have been tempted to promise a Polaris for the future, when it would be available, instead of deploying Jupiters *then*, in mid-1961. Because there were no extra Polaris subs then, such a promise in mid-1961 would not have met Kennedy's needs or Turkish hopes. "There would have been," McNamara later explained, "a psychological loss to the West of simply cancelling the program and failing to replace them—the missiles—simultaneously with some other more modern system."¹⁹ Presumably, after the pain of Vienna faded, when U.S. credibility was reaffirmed and more Polaris subs became available, the administration, in 1962 or so, could always try to negotiate such an arrangement with Turkish officials. But in 1961, there was no felt need for haste, since the Jupiters were deemed a minor problem in a nuclear edifice that, for the new administration, required major remodeling and expansion.

DID KENNEDY ORDER REMOVAL?

According to some memoirists, President Kennedy raised with the State Department in early 1962 the issue of withdrawing the Jupiters, which would become operational in about July. At the NATO meeting in May, according to Roger Hilsman, Secretary of State Dean Rusk found that the Turks still objected, primarily on political grounds.²⁰ There is no evidence that the administration offered a Polaris as a substitute, and Turkish officials probably would have found the submarine less attractive. They did not seem to share the Defense Department's concern about an invulnerable deterrent, and the Jupiters offered two notable advantages the Polaris lacked: The missiles, because they were visible, added more tangible prestige; and they were subject, in principle, to some Turkish control.

By the summer, Hilsman claims, Kennedy again raised the matter of removing the Jupiters, this time with Undersecretary of State George Ball, and rejected the State Department's "case for further delay."²¹ And in late August, Kennedy raised this subject yet again, this time, surprisingly and dramatically, in the context of Cuba. Still, he did *not* order withdrawal, but only implied a study of its feasibility. Bundy's National Security Action Memorandum No. 181, dated 23 August 1962, expresses Kennedy's thoughts and new fears of missiles in Cuba and Soviet efforts to equate them with the Jupiters.

The President has directed that the following actions and studies be undertaken in the light of new [Soviet] bloc activity in Cuba.

¹⁹ House Armed Services Committee, *Hearings on Military Posture*, p. 283.

²⁰ Hilsman, *To Move A Nation*, pp. 202–3; Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, pp. 94–95.

²¹ Hilsman, *To Move A Nation*, pp. 202–3; Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, pp. 94–95. For additional doubts that Kennedy ever ordered withdrawal, see George Ball to Bernstein, 22 February 1979.

1. What action can be taken to get Jupiter missiles out of Turkey? (Action: Department of Defense). . . .
6. A study should be made of the advantages and disadvantages of making a statement that the U.S. would not tolerate the establishment of military forces (missile or air, or both?) which might launch a nuclear attack from Cuba against the U.S. . . .
7. A study should be made of the various military alternatives which might be adopted in executing a decision to eliminate any installations in Cuba capable of launching nuclear attack on the U.S. What would be the pros and cons, for example, of pinpoint attack, general counter-force attack, and outright invasion?
(Action: Department of Defense)²²

By shifting responsibility for removal of the Jupiters to the Department of Defense, which, unlike the Department of State, was more concerned about nuclear strategy than about maintaining warm relations with a dependent ally, either Kennedy himself or Bundy had decided to minimize the role of the State Department. So far as the available records and recollections indicate, however, the Defense Department accomplished nothing in the next seven weeks to phase out the Jupiters.²³ Obviously, removing the missiles first required a plan and then probably diplomatic negotiations. General Norstad, as well as Turkish officials, could be an impediment. Probably the Defense Department was again flirting with the possibility of substituting deployment of a Polaris (there were nine) near Turkey for the Jupiters.

Did Kennedy believe that this directive of 23 August 1962 would soon remove the Jupiters? Given that his government had installed them, and they had just become operational in about July, he could not have been so foolishly optimistic. Nor did the memorandum *order* the Department of Defense to act. It asked "What action can be taken?" and stated that there would be a meeting with the president in about nine days "to review progress on these items." Thus it is too simple to conclude, as have some analysts, that Kennedy ordered removal of the missiles and that the bureaucracy thwarted his instructions.²⁴ In-

²² Bundy, National Security Action Memorandum, no. 181, 23 August 1962, Cunliffe-NSC Box, Modern Military Records, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

²³ Since many files are still classified, there may have been some action. Bundy does not recall that there was any action (interview with Bundy, 31 July 1979). At the meeting of August 31 or September 1, with JFK, on the points in this memo, there was, as Henry Rowen recalls, no discussion of item 1 (interview with Rowen, 13 February 1979).

²⁴ See, for example, Allison, *Essence of Decision*, pp. 101, 141–42, 225–26, who uncritically accepted recollections that JFK had given a clear order and then tries to explain, in terms of bureaucratic politics, why it was not carried out. A more subtle approach would acknowledge that a chief executive may often express preferences (not orders) for policies, and that he may sincerely reinterpret them as *orders* when his own inaction leaves him woefully unprepared in a crisis. In this way, a president can place blame on a subordinate, and other aides who listen to his charges tend to believe that the president actually issued an order, and not simply stated a wish or hope. In later memoirs and journalistic accounts, the president's interpretation dominates and becomes "fact." Practitioners of the "bureaucratic politics" model develop a vested interest in uncritically accepting such dubious evidence precisely because their model so nicely "explains" it. Thus, the model *first* helps define the reliability of the evidence and *then* explains it—a dangerous, circular process. For related critiques,

deed, according to Bundy's recent recollection, the president did not order withdrawal of the Jupiters until *after* the Cuban missile crisis.²⁵

Why did Kennedy in August link the missiles in Turkey to the problem of Cuba? Did he foresee that the Soviet Union would install surface-to-surface missiles ninety miles from the United States? The memoirists tell us that neither Kennedy nor his advisers, with the exception of CIA director John McCone, deemed such Soviet action as likely.²⁶ Thus, their concern probably was more general: that the Soviets might justify a build-up of troops and even bombers in Cuba by pointing to the Jupiters, which had just become operational. There was already evidence that recent Soviet deliveries to Cuba probably included surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) and possibly planes.

The NSC memorandum had suggested the danger of the Soviets equating "offensive" missiles in Turkey with those in Cuba. Even before a U-2 photographed the Soviet "offensive" missile sites on October 14, therefore, a NSC staff member prepared an argument to stress the political differences between U.S. Jupiters in Turkey and Soviet missiles in Cuba: The Soviet weapons were designed for aggression and deployed secretly; the American weapons were defensive and deployed openly. Put simply, the Soviet action was dangerous and dishonorable, the American action peaceful and honorable.²⁷ It was a strained, self-righteous document, characteristic of the administration's public pronouncements during the crisis.

THE UNITED STATES CONSIDERS A TRADE

On Tuesday, October 16, when learning of the Soviet missiles in Cuba, some administration members feared that the Soviets would point to the Jupiters for justification. During the six days, from October 16 to October 21, when the Executive Committee of the National Security Council (ExComm) deliberated on how the administration should respond, United Nations ambassador Adlai Stevenson, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, and some other advisers occasionally suggested trading missiles (in Turkey for those in Cuba) to settle the crisis. Apparently the president flirted with this notion.

On Wednesday, October 17, Stevenson warned Kennedy that world opinion would equate U.S. missile bases in Turkey with the Soviet bases in Cuba. Stevenson's memorandum was fuzzy, perhaps because he feared that he was

see Dan Caldwell, "A Research Note on the Quarantine of Cuba, October 1962," *International Studies Quarterly* 20 (December 1978):625-33; and Donald Hafner, "Bureaucratic Politics and 'Those Frigging Missiles': JFK, Cuba and U.S. Missiles in Turkey," *Orbis* 21 (Summer 1977):307-33.

²⁵ Interviews with McGeorge Bundy, 29 and 31 July 1979.

²⁶ Hilsman, *To Move A Nation*, p. 170.

²⁷ I.M. Tobin, "Attempts to Equate Soviet Missile Bases in Cuba with NATO Jupiter Bases in Italy and Turkey," 10 October 1962, NSF, Countries: Cuba, Box 36, JFKL. Also see Thomas Sorensen, "Information Policy Guidance on Cuba," 22 October 1962, Classified Subjects Files (hereafter CSF), Box 48, Theodore Sorensen Papers (hereafter Sorensen Papers), JFKL.

giving unwelcome counsel, for he both warned that “we can’t negotiate with a gun at our head” and suggested trading the bases in Turkey for those in Cuba. “*I feel you should [make] it clear that the existence of nuclear missile bases anywhere is negotiable before we start anything,*” he underlined.²⁸

In fairness to Stevenson, on Wednesday, when he offered this counsel, the ExComm was leaning toward an attack on Cuba to eliminate the missiles; in that context, he was probably more concerned to head off disaster than to phrase an exact plan for negotiations. His memo was unclear on key matters: Should Kennedy privately demand that the Soviets withdraw their missiles and also mention future negotiations on the Jupiters? Or should he negotiate on them then? The problems of when, how, and under what conditions to offer a trade—whether explicit or informal—would bedevil thinking on this matter throughout the crisis.

Two days later, on Friday, October 19, according to the ExComm minutes quoted by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., “more than once during the afternoon Secretary McNamara voiced the opinion that the US . . . would at least have to give up our missile bases in Italy and Turkey and would probably have to pay more besides . . . to get the Soviet missiles out of Cuba.” On Saturday, McNamara again offered the same analysis: “We would have to be prepared to accept the withdrawal of US strategic missiles from Turkey and Italy and possibly agreement to [withdraw in the future from] Guantanamo. He added that we could obtain the removal of the missiles . . . only if we were prepared to offer something in return.”²⁹

On Saturday, after the ExComm had finally agreed on the quarantine, Stevenson attended the meeting and once more recommended a trade, this time to be announced along with the quarantine. His proposed settlement would have included withdrawal of Jupiters from Turkey and abandonment of the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo.³⁰ According to Schlesinger, who has seen the classified ExComm minutes, “everyone jumped on Stevenson.” Why? Schlesinger claims that most feared that this proposed tactic, by *starting* with concessions, would “legitimize Khrushchev’s action and give him an easy triumph.”³¹ Robert Kenne-

²⁸ Adlai Stevenson to President, 17 October 1962, Sorensen Papers. The irrationalities of the classification-declassification system are well illustrated by the fact that the typed copy of this item was declassified by the State Department in August 1974, but the handwritten copy (which is trivially different because of some crossing out) was kept classified until summer 1978, despite requests and appeals for declassification in the intervening years. After Stewart Alsop and Charles Bartlett skewered Stevenson in the press for being a “dove,” Stevenson argued that he never meant to imply that the Turkey and Italy bases should be traded as part of a settlement (Stevenson to Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., [January 1963], Sorensen Papers).

²⁹ Leonard Meeker, memorandum, 19 October 1962, meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Security Council, Arthur Schlesinger Papers, JFKL, quoted in Schlesinger, *Robert F. Kennedy*, p. 515. On the State Department’s later suppression (classification) of Meeker’s memo, see Abram Chayes, *The Cuban Missile Crisis* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. vii–viii and 14–15.

³⁰ Notes on minutes of NSC, 20 October 1962, courtesy of Schlesinger.

³¹ Schlesinger, *Robert F. Kennedy*, p. 515. Also see, [Adlai Stevenson?], “Political Program to be

dy later added that the timing and the Guantanamo offer, not the Turkish bases, provoked the anger.³² Probably, in addition, Stevenson himself provoked ire. Because he was an outsider, not respected by either Kennedy brother, his counsel, even when similar to that of the trusted McNamara, easily rankled the tired members of the ExComm. Whereas they viewed themselves as “tough” and decisive, they viewed Stevenson as indecisive and soft.

President Kennedy “sharply rejected the thought of surrendering [Guantanamo],” according to the ExComm minutes. “He felt that such action would convey to the world that we had been frightened into abandoning our position.”³³ He “emphatically disagreed,” reports Schlesinger, “that the initial presentation to the UN should include our notion of an eventual political settlement.” According to the minutes, “he agreed that at an appropriate time we would have to acknowledge that we were willing to take strategic missiles out of Turkey and Italy if this issue was raised by the Russians. But he was firm in saying that we should only make such a proposal in the future.” The quoted minutes in Schlesinger’s account leave unclear whether the president was willing to countenance an explicit public trade of the Jupiters, or whether he was suggesting something private, hedged, even evasive.³⁴

On Sunday morning, October 21, high-level State Department officials flirted with the Cuba-Turkey missile trade. At an evening meeting, convened by Robert Kennedy, a number of senior government officials agreed, in the words of Abram Chayes, the State Department’s legal adviser, “that the Turkish missiles would have to be given up in the end, as the price of settlement.” Why not have the United States introduce this offer at the United Nations right after the announcement of the quarantine? Offered at the beginning, such a concession would have various liabilities and seem, according to Chayes’s summary of attitudes, “rather weak and defensive [and] inconsistent with the sense of resolution and determination that was judged essential to the success of the quarantine.”³⁵

Suggesting a trade, W. Averell Harriman, assistant secretary of state for Far Eastern Affairs, counseled President Kennedy on likely Soviet purposes: “There has undoubtedly been great pressure on Khrushchev for a considerable time to do something about our ring of bases, aggravated by our placing Jupiter missiles in Turkey.” Harriman hinted that such a trade might rescue Khrushchev, who,

Announced by the President,” 20 October 1962, Sorensen Papers; [Stevenson?], “Speech Insert on Political Program,” n.d. (probably October 17 or 20), Box 48, Sorensen Papers; and Stevenson, “Why the Political Program Should Be in the Speech,” n.d. (probably October 21), in CSF, Box 49, Sorensen Papers. The first memo called for sending U.N. observation teams to Turkey, Italy, and Cuba to “insure [against] surprise attack,” and suggested discussions on NATO bases in Italy and Turkey. The last memo suggested trading Guantanamo but did not offer the bases in Turkey and Italy.

³² Kennedy, in interview with John B. Martin, 6 December 1966, cited by Schlesinger, *Robert F. Kennedy*, p. 515; Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, p. 50.

³³ Minutes of NSC, 20 October 1962, quoted in Schlesinger, *Robert F. Kennedy*, p. 515.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Chayes, *Cuban Missile Crisis*, pp. 81–82.

he thought, had been pushed to take such bold action by a tough group in the Kremlin.³⁶

On Monday morning, the day the president announced the quarantine, Attorney General Robert Kennedy sketched the administration's public line, at least for the next few days.³⁷ Fearful that Stevenson might be too soft in dealing with the Soviets at the United Nations, Kennedy pulled aside Schlesinger, then serving as Stevenson's aide, to outline the administration's thinking: "We will have to make a deal at the end, but we must stand absolutely firm now. Concessions must come at the end of negotiation, not at the beginning."³⁸ His implication: the quarantine, if successful, would frighten the Soviets but not compel them to yield unless the United States also offered some quid pro quo. Did the attorney general have the Jupiters in mind? The deliberations of the past week, especially the Sunday evening meeting, certainly suggested them as part of an exchange.

Why did the president not order the dismantling of the Jupiters before they might become a public bargaining card in the crisis? Probably the time was too short, and probably he was also tempted by the prospect of a future trade and therefore unwilling to discard this extra card. Stevenson, among others, warned of a potential liability: that the Jupiters would also make it harder to persuade the world that the Soviet missiles constituted a new kind of threat. But probably Kennedy was willing to take that risk in order to keep open future options, to protect himself from international embarrassment (would not the sudden dismantling suggest U.S. acknowledgement that Turkey-Cuba missile bases were equivalent?), and to avoid domestic charges of weakness and a sellout.

Plans to Trade the Jupiters

After the president's Monday evening speech announcing the quarantine, some American officials vigorously canvassed the possibility of trading the Jupiters in Turkey as part of the ultimate settlement of the crisis. There were basic questions, as they knew: Whether and, if so, how to exchange the Jupiters, ideally without appearing to do so? Would other weapons meet the military and political needs of NATO and Turkey? If so, could the United States withdraw these missiles without offending most NATO nations and Turkey in particular? "The danger in Turkey can be especially acute," one official warned. "If the Alliance or the US seems to be pulling away from [Turkey] it could lead to the fall of the present government."³⁹ An uneasy new coalition, shored up by the Turkish

³⁶ W. Averell Harriman, "Memorandum on Kremlin Reactions," 22 October 1962, JFKL.

³⁷ At one point, Sorensen had sketched a loose Turkey-Cuba missile trade for inclusion in Kennedy's message to Khrushchev (Sorensen, draft, 18 October 1962, CSF, Box 48, Sorensen Papers).

³⁸ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 811

³⁹ "Scenario," 26 October 1962, NSF, Countries: Cuba, JFKL. This memorandum also dealt with removal of the thirty Jupiters from Italy.

military and by American economic aid, the Turkish government could not afford to antagonize its powerful generals or risk a crisis.⁴⁰

Working within these constraints, Undersecretary of State George Ball, W. Averell Harriman, Harlan Cleveland (assistant secretary of state for International Organization), Walt Whitman Rostow (director of the Policy Planning Council), and Stevenson, among others, scratched around for some solution involving the Jupiters. At times, this line seemed to capture the fancy of President Kennedy, but hard questions always lingered for him.⁴¹

Early in the week, President Kennedy apparently directed the State Department to consider withdrawing the missiles, which spurred Ball to consult key ambassadors. On Wednesday, October 24, he notified Ambassador Raymond Hare that a trade was being considered and requested an assessment of the political situation in Turkey so "that [we will] not harm our relations with this important ally." Would Turkey accede to withdrawal of the Jupiters, Ball asked, if there was some military replacement—possibly deployment of an American-controlled Polaris or establishment of seaborne, multilateral nuclear force (MLF) within NATO?⁴² Both notions had been knocking about Washington for more than a year, and the administration, like Eisenhower's, had been flirting with the creation of a MLF, under NATO, in order to restrain the desire of some European nations, especially France, for an independent deterrent.

Removal of the Jupiters as part of an explicit trade would weaken NATO and injure American relations with Turkey, Hare replied. Turkish officials would greatly resent "that their interests were being traded off in order to appease an enemy." They were proud that, unlike the Cubans, they were not the "stooge" of a great power. Both Turkey's political prestige and military power were at stake, he claimed, and the Jupiters fulfilled both needs.⁴³

Could these missiles be used to settle the Soviet-American conflict? Hare was not optimistic but dutifully discussed some programs. He reluctantly suggested a secret Soviet-American agreement (without Turkey's knowledge) and then the prompt dismantling of the missiles. That course would prove attractive in Washington.⁴⁴

On receiving Ball's cable, NATO Ambassador Thomas Finletter also replied that Turkish officials would bitterly resent a trade. He lectured the State Department on the dangers of a "horse trade." It could set a "pattern for handling Russian incursions" elsewhere and thus frighten other members of NATO, who

⁴⁰ *New York Times*, 30 October 1962, p. 14; see also, George Harris, *Troubled Alliance* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1972), pp. 83–95.

⁴¹ Bromley Smith, "Summary Record of NSC Executive Committee Meeting, No. 7, Oct. 27, 1962, 10:00 A.M.," NSF, NSC: ExComm Meetings, JFKL. (hereafter cited as "Summary Record, ExComm").

⁴² Secretary Rusk (drafted by Ball) to Ambassadors Hare and Finletter, 24 October 1962, NSF, RSF:NATO-Weapons, Box 226, JFKL.

⁴³ Ambassador Hare to Secretary of State, 26 October 1962, NSF, RSF: NATO-Weapons, Box 226, JFKL.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

"may wonder whether they will be asked to give up some military capability" the next time. Unlike Hare, Finletter did not even glance at the possibility of a secret deal with the Soviets.⁴⁵ Perhaps he did not conceive of this strategy; more likely, he did not want to risk mentioning what he deemed a disastrous course.

By Thursday, October 25, while one special NSC committee was sketching the scenario for an air strike, another was outlining a "political path"—a summit meeting while the quarantine continued—to settle the crisis. "It would probably involve discussion over Berlin or, as a minimum, our missile bases in Turkey," the committee warned.⁴⁶ A linked proposal, probably from the same committee, suggested an offer "to withdraw our missiles from Turkey in return for Soviet withdrawal of . . . missiles from Cuba." To avoid a crisis in NATO and to assuage Turkish officials, such an offer "might be expressed in generalized form, such as withdrawal of missiles from territory [near] the other [great power]."⁴⁷

On Friday, October 26, Harriman was also urging negotiations to get the missiles out of Turkey. He endorsed the "defanging resolution" of Assistant Secretary Harlan Cleveland: Only nuclear powers should possess nuclear weapons and missiles, and thus the United States and the Soviet Union would not place these systems in the territory of nonnuclear powers. Such terms, Harriman explained, would compel the United States to pull missiles out of Turkey and Italy, but not Britain, which was a nuclear power, and Russia would have to withdraw its missiles from Cuba. By raising the terms to a level of generality, Harriman hoped to conceal what some could regard as a naked trade—missiles in Turkey and Italy for missiles in Cuba. "*Agreement should be put forward not as a trade over Cuba,*" he underlined, but "*as a first and important step towards disarmament.*"⁴⁸ And he believed sincerely that the result would be both a way out of the crisis and a course toward more effective arms control. Harriman was seizing on the crisis to address more basic problems and also offering Khrushchev a way of avoiding humiliation. At first glance, his plan seemed appealingly simple: The negotiations *might* be speedy, and the Soviets would recognize that they could take credit for forcing a trade and for promoting disarmament. But what would happen if the negotiations were not speedy? Would not obtaining the endorsement of NATO and Turkey take too much time?

⁴⁵ Ambassador Finletter to Secretary of State, Polto 506, 25 October 1962, NSF,RSF: NATO-Weapons, Box 226, JFKL.

⁴⁶ "Political Path," 25 October 1962, NSF,NSC: ExComm Meetings, Box 316, JFKL.

⁴⁷ Neither the author nor the date is given for this untitled document, but the document begins: "The following political actions might be considered" (Vice-Presidential Security File, Nations and Regions, Policy Papers and Background Studies on Cuba Affair, folder III, Lyndon B. Johnson Library, [hereafter LBJL] Austin, Texas). (This series will hereafter be cited as VP Security File: Cuba.)

⁴⁸ Harriman to Under Secretary, 26 October 1962, NSF, Countries: Cuba, Box 36, JFKL. Harriman's first choice was a resolution on denuclearization of Latin America, which excluded the problem of Europe. On October 24, he had argued for the "defanging resolution" (Schlesinger to Stevenson, 24 October 1962, Schlesinger Papers, JFKL).

Even though all the middle-range ballistic missile (MRBM) sites *had been operational* since the first day of the quarantine, and therefore the Soviets could have launched a first salvo of about half their forty-two MRBMs, Kennedy and members of ExComm worried about the continued work on missile sites in Cuba. They seemed to fear that the Soviets would reduce the time required for launching an MRBM, and that they also were advancing quickly on twelve or eighteen launchers for IRBMs (twelve to thirty-six missiles), likely to be ready in about five weeks. The CIA was not sure whether nuclear warheads were in Cuba, but the administration assumed the worst.⁴⁹

The ExComm minutes are scattered with demands that work on the missiles must soon stop. And Kennedy seemed to have a self-imposed deadline of roughly between Sunday, October 28, to about Tuesday, October 30.⁵⁰ As a result, plans involving a trade of the Jupiters had to meet his informal timetable. Those plans that seemed to involve lengthy negotiations would be unacceptable, unless they stipulated a way of getting the Soviets promptly to halt work on the sites.

While Harriman's plan *may* have had this liability, two others—one from a special NSC committee and the other from Rostow—certainly did. On Friday, the special committee offered a proposal, forwarded by Rusk without comment to Kennedy, for a "face-saving cover, if [the Soviets] wish, for a withdrawal of their offensive weapons from Cuba."⁵¹ It was an elaborate, guardedly optimistic scheme suggesting a summit conference, to be preceded by the agreement of NATO and Turkey to accept a multilateral nuclear force and to remove missiles from Turkey and Italy.

Walt W. Rostow, sketching a similar plan, believed that he had devised a way out of the crisis while maintaining all of the "Free World assets" and actually strengthening the NATO alliance. His solution: secure NATO's speedy approval for MLF, presumably with an agreement to dismantle the Jupiters. The

⁴⁹ Central Intelligence Agency, "Readiness Status of Soviet Missiles in Cuba," 23 October 1962, had counted twenty-three (of the ultimate twenty-four) launchers and thirty-three (of the ultimate forty-two) MRBMs, and was unsure whether the warheads were in Cuba (NSF, Countries: Cuba, JFKL; see also, CIA, "The Crisis: USSR/Cuba," 26 October 1962, NSF, NSC:ExComm Meetings, JFKL, which is location of CIA, "The Crisis" reports). For an admission that some MRBMs were operational and probably had nuclear warheads, see McNamara's statement, *Washington Post*, 25 October 1962, p. A-10. Generally newspapers, including the *Washington Post*, disregarded this admission. For the implications on reassessing the crisis, see Bernstein, "Week We Almost Went to War," pp. 13-21. For a tendentious argument, which overlooks this essay and cites an abbreviated version, see Schlesinger, *Robert F. Kennedy*, pp. 517-18, who charges of suppression of evidence. His paperback edition struggles to maintain much of the claim while squirming away from an admission that he failed to research his subject adequately and thus simply missed Bernstein's article in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*.

⁵⁰ Harold Macmillan, *At the End of the Day, 1961-1963* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), pp. 209-11; see also, "Summary Record, ExComm, No. 5, Oct. 25, 1962, 5:00 P.M."; and "Summary Record, ExComm, No. 6, Oct. 26, 1962, 10:00 A.M."

⁵¹ Rusk to President, "Negotiations," with attached paper, 26 October 1962, NSF, Countries: Cuba, Box 36, JFKL.

Soviets, he acknowledged, "could read it [dismantling] as a way of helping them off the hook"; but it would "nail down the missile portion of the Alliance and [thus thwart Soviet efforts] to disrupt the confidence of the Alliance in the U.S." An additional attraction, for Rostow, was that it achieved goals he had long sought—a stronger NATO, establishment of MLF, and removal of dangerous weapons.⁵² But how could these negotiations with NATO nations be completed in a few days?

Ideally, the analyst would like to know which ExComm members supported which proposals and what kind of informal dialogue ensued. But, for the most part, that kind of evidence is not available. The special NSC committee's proposal went to Kennedy, as did Rostow's, and probably all the reports reached Bundy's desk.⁵³ By Friday, judging from the contents of the various memorandums, there had been substantial informal dialogue. Many advisers were looking for a road to a settlement, and the Jupiters constituted a possible one.

On Friday morning, the ExComm considered whether Kennedy should seek U.N. assistance in arranging negotiations with the Soviets while they halted construction on the missile sites and, as Stevenson suggested, the United States suspended its quarantine. Could the crisis be settled this way? Stevenson, who seemed optimistic, "predicted that the Russians would ask for a new guarantee of the territorial integrity of Cuba and the dismantlement of U.S. strategic missiles in Turkey" in return for withdrawal of missiles from Cuba. Stevenson still regarded these terms as reasonable. But John McCone, the CIA director, was outraged. He resented linking the missiles in Turkey with the Soviet missiles in Cuba. He said, according to the minutes, "the Soviet weapons in Cuba were pointed at our heart and put us under great handicap to carry out our commitments to the free world."⁵⁴

Kennedy did not bar the trade outlined by Stevenson. According to the minutes, he said, "we will get the . . . missiles out of Cuba only by invading or trading. He doubted that the quarantine alone would produce a withdrawal of the weapons." After Kennedy spoke, the dialogue quickly shifted from the Jupiters to Stevenson's proposal that the quarantine should be suspended during negotiations. Most ExComm members strongly opposed that concession. The pressure must be maintained, they concluded, to help force a settlement. Curiously, they did not return to the issue of the Jupiters at that meeting.⁵⁵

⁵² Rostow to Secretary et al., "Alliance Missiles," 26 October 1962, with copy to Bundy in NSF, Countries: Cuba, Box 36, JFKL, discussed trading the missiles in Turkey and Italy. Also see Rostow et al. to Secretary, "Cuba," 25 October 1962, NSF, RSF: NATO-Weapons, Box 226, JFKL; Rostow to Secretary et al., "Negotiations about Cuba," NSF, Countries: Cuba, JFKL; and Rostow to Bundy, [25 October 1962], with memorandum, "Summit," 25 October 1962, NSF, JFKL.

⁵³ This conclusion is based partly on the fact that the reports are usually available in the NSF—actually the Bundy files—at the JFKL.

⁵⁴ "Summary Record, ExComm, No. 6, Oct. 26, 1962, 10:00 A.M." Also see Stevenson to Secretary of State, 25 October 1962, VP Security File: Cuba, folder III, LBJL.

⁵⁵ "Summary Record, ExComm, No. 6, Oct. 26, 1962, 10:00 A.M."

Later that Friday, the Soviets indicated terms for settling the crisis: withdrawal of their missiles from Cuba and on-site inspection in return for U.S. termination of the quarantine and a pledge not to invade Cuba. There was not even a hint that the United States must dismantle its Jupiters; the Soviets were asking for less than many American officials had anticipated and than some had proposed to grant.⁵⁶

That Friday night, most ExComm members could find reason for satisfaction. The dangerous crisis would end with one American concession—the pledge not to invade Cuba.⁵⁷ Only a few advisers, including McCone and at least some of the Joint Chiefs, were deeply unhappy that Castro would be safe from a United States attack.⁵⁸ For the rest, the pledge was a small price to pay. According to Secretary Rusk, it was simply a reaffirmation of existing obligations: “we are committed not to invade Cuba [because we] signed the UN Charter and the Rio treaty.”⁵⁹

Would Western Allies Have Accepted a Trade?

On Saturday morning, October 27, the heady optimism speedily collapsed: Some Soviet ships were approaching the quarantine line; the FBI reported that the Soviet delegation was destroying intelligence documents in likely preparation for war; and a surface-to-air missile (SAM) shot down a U-2 over Cuba.⁶⁰ Worst of all, a new Soviet message arrived, raising the terms of settlement to

⁵⁶ “Significantly, and contrary to expectations, Khrushchev did not seek to link the Cuba issue with . . . the Jupiters in Turkey and Italy” (“The Immediate Consequences,” n.d. [late October 26 or early October 27], CSF, Sorensen Papers). For a similar statement, also see Hilsman to Secretary, “Implications of the Soviet Initiative on Cuba,” 27 October 1962, CSF, Box 48, Sorensen Papers. In searching for a settlement, the ExComm and other advisers had usually dwelled more upon the American missiles in Turkey (and less upon those in Italy), possibly because those in Turkey were closer to the Soviet Union and had provoked more Soviet ire in the past.

⁵⁷ Later, Edward Martin sent a telegram to “All ARA Diplomatic Posts,” 27 October 1962, pointing out that the no-invasion pledge could be waived “if [Cuba’s] breaking of accepted norms becomes flagrant, [for] US would feel . . . free to take whatever measures might be required” (CSF, Box 48, Sorensen Papers). This telegram, as well as the memorandums cited in note 56 and ExComm minutes, suggests that the no-invasion pledge raised fewer problems for the president and the ExComm than did a trade involving removal of the Jupiters from Turkey.

⁵⁸ “Summary Record, ExComm, No. 6, Oct. 26, 1962, 10:00 A.M.”; John McCone to Mac [Bundy], 22 November 1962, NSF, Countries: Cuba: General File, 11/21–11/30, JFKL; and evidence presented for attitudes of some members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on Sunday, in Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, p. 119. Alexander George has argued that a no-invasion pledge was a major concession that could protect Khrushchev from humiliation (George to Bernstein, 18 May 1979).

⁵⁹ “Summary Record, ExComm, No. 6, Oct. 26, 1962, 10:00 A.M.”

⁶⁰ Possibly the ExComm did not learn of the shoot-down of the U-2 until later in the day, for no reference to the event appears in the minutes by Bundy and Smith *until* the second Saturday session (4:00 P.M.). See “Summary Record, ExComm, No. 7, Oct. 27, 1962, 10:00 A.M.” and “Summary Record, ExComm, No. 8, 4:00 P.M.”; and Bundy, “NSC Executive Committee Record of Action, Oct. 27, 1962, 10:00 A.M. Meeting No. 7” and “NSC Executive Committee Record of Action, Oct. 27, 1962, 4:00 P.M., No. 8,” NSF: ExComm Meetings, JFKL.

require removal of the Jupiters from Turkey. "It was the blackest hour of the crisis," later recalled Roger Hilsman.⁶¹

How would America's NATO allies, other than Turkey, have responded if the administration had met the Soviet terms and agreed publicly to withdraw the Jupiters? Could Kennedy have negotiated a private trade before the Soviets made their public demand? Had there been more flexibility in the NATO alliance than he had chosen to act upon?

The leaders of most of the NATO allies understood the military liabilities of the Jupiters, so the issues were not primarily strategic (the loss of weapons) but psychological and political: the significance of an American concession on weaponry in Europe in order to deal with problems in the Caribbean.⁶² Would Kennedy be viewed as a leader who sold out allies for U.S. interests? Or as a leader who sought peace and would pay some reasonable price to avoid plunging NATO and the United States into war?

There is considerable evidence on the attitudes of the German, French, British, Italian, and Canadian governments, and scattered evidence for Belgium, the Netherlands, Greece, Denmark, and Norway. A formal trade, especially a public one, would have unnerved some governments, particularly the German and British, and probably the Dutch; it would have confirmed the analysis of President Charles de Gaulle of France, delighted Canada, and probably pleased the Italian, Belgian, Greek, Danish, and Norwegian governments.

Konrad Adenauer, the steadfast chancellor of West Germany, who always feared that American concessions anywhere might betoken abandonment of Berlin, would undoubtedly have opposed even a private trade.⁶³ But he had no real leverage and could not threaten to leave NATO or even acknowledge its weaknesses. Unwilling to move toward rapprochement with the Soviet Union, Adenauer and his party depended upon the United States and NATO for both military protection and political prestige. Any trade would have eroded his trust in Kennedy, but it would not have altered Adenauer's policies on the larger issues—Berlin, East Germany, the Warsaw Pact, and the Soviet Union. True, at home, he would have been compelled to defend himself and his party against charges that the United States would also sell out Berlin and thus against demands that an approach to the East was essential. But Adenauer would have succeeded, partly for his own reasons. Like Kennedy, Adenauer could have distinguished between Berlin and the Jupiters, for he could have defined the

⁶¹ Hilsman, *To Move A Nation*, p. 220. The Soviet message of October 27 mentioned the missiles in Britain and Italy but specified only those in Turkey as a requirement for a trade. So far as the available materials indicate, no one in the ExComm speculated on why the Soviets added the Jupiters in Turkey to the deal and not *also* those in Italy. Could the Soviets have desired both to raise the ante and to keep the "price" within what seemed acceptable limits? Perhaps Walter Lippmann's suggestion of a Turkey-Cuba missile trade (*Washington Post*, 25 October 1962, p. A-25 and 23 October 1962, p. A-10) seemed to the Soviets an oblique administration offer.

⁶² Sorensen, memorandum, 17 October 1962, Cuba files, President's Official Files (hereafter POF) 115, JFKL; Sorensen, *Kennedy*, pp. 680–82.

⁶³ *New York Times*, 28 October 1962, p. 31; CIA, "The Crisis: USSR/Cuba," 27 October 1962.

missiles in Turkey as marginal but Berlin as essential to West Germany and the United States.

Charles de Gaulle's position was different. Already moving toward French withdrawal from NATO on the grounds that the alliance meant American domination and blocked France from an independent foreign policy, de Gaulle could use the missile crisis—whatever the outcome—to support his analysis. America had acted independently, without consultation with allies, he noted. The implication, which he would later exploit, was familiar: “annihilation without representation.” In turn, had Kennedy publicly traded the missiles in Turkey, that act also would have confirmed de Gaulle's analysis: the United States would act on its own interests and abandon allies whenever convenient. Probably no likely action by Kennedy in the missile crisis—whether he traded or not—could have blocked de Gaulle's ambitions for establishing France as an independent force. That conception, so intimately related to his quest for national and personal grandeur, would not be punctured by U.S. decisions during the missile crisis.⁶⁴ While he technically supported the president in the crisis, the aged French leader hinted that immaturity had led Kennedy and the United States to overreact. President de Gaulle's chiding words, as summarized by the American ambassador, were these: “The French for centuries had lived with threats and menaces, first from the Germans and from the Russians, but he understood the US had not had a comparable experience.”⁶⁵

Britain's Prime Minister Harold Macmillan had been a strong supporter of the quarantine and worried, especially in the early days, that Khrushchev would wring concessions that would weaken the alliance. He feared that Khrushchev might have installed the missiles “to trade Cuba for Berlin.” Fretting that the quarantine might be inadequate, Macmillan wrote in his diary, Kennedy may “‘miss the bus’—he may *never* get rid of Cuban rockets except by trading them for Turkish, Italian, or other bases. Thus Khrushchev will have won his point.” But by Friday, October 26, when the Soviets seemed to be seeking a way out of the crisis, Macmillan was conciliatory. “If we want to help the Russians save face,” he asked Kennedy, “would it be worthwhile our [temporarily demobilizing the Thor missiles] in England during the . . . conference [proposed by the Soviets]?” Kennedy found the suggestion attractive, wanted to mull it over, but feared that it might provoke the Soviets to insist on dismantlings in Turkey and Italy. Though Macmillan had proposed a temporary demobilization of his Thor missiles, he later claimed that, despite the obsolescence of the Jupiters, he would not have agreed to the Soviet proposal on October 27 for their removal. Was this bravado created after the settlement? Probably not. “All America's allies would feel,” wrote Macmillan in 1973, “that to avoid the Cuban threat the U.S.

⁶⁴ Cyrus Sulzberger, *The Last of the Giants* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1970), pp. 20–22, 1004–06; Charles E. Bohlen, *Witness to History, 1929–1969* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973), pp. 504–09.

⁶⁵ Ambassador Bohlen to Secretary of State, No. 1970, 27 October 1962, VP Security File: Cuba, folder VI, LBJL.

... had bargained away their protection."⁶⁶ Nonetheless, as much as Macmillan would have opposed a public trade, as the dependent ally in the "special relationship" with the United States, he and his party would have probably defended such a trade. Loyalty to the United States would have shaped the Conservative government's public statements.

During that week in late October, American analysts concluded that Norway and Denmark would welcome a trade of the Jupiters to end the crisis.⁶⁷ They were probably correct about these two Scandinavian allies, who had steadfastly resisted the emplacement of any nuclear weapons on their soil. When the Soviets made their public demand for including the Jupiters in a settlement, Norwegian government officials endorsed removal of the weapons.⁶⁸

Italy's center-left coalition government reluctantly supported the quarantine, tried to improve relations with the Soviets during the crisis, and anxiously urged Kennedy to negotiate with Khrushchev. On October 27, when an American attack on Cuba seemed imminent, Premier Amintore Fanfani of the Christian Democrats wanted Kennedy to extend his deadline and probably favored the trade of Turkey's Jupiters. The Italian Socialist party, upon which the uneasy government coalition depended, had condemned the quarantine and probably welcomed the trade to end the crisis.⁶⁹

In Canada, Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, long unhappy about U.S. dominance, was publicly tactful but privately critical of the president's actions. So troubled was Diefenbaker by Kennedy's unilateral decisions during the crisis and so fearful that Canada might be dragged into war that he barred U.S. Strategic Air Command bombers from the use of Canadian airfields during the crisis.⁷⁰ His devout hope was that war could be avoided, and he did not seem to fear that concessions—and certainly not on the Jupiters—would seriously weaken the NATO alliance.

On Thursday, October 25, Andrew de Staercke, the Belgian ambassador to

⁶⁶ Macmillan, *End of the Day*, pp. 187, 210, 212–13. Some British officials did flirt with a Cuba-Turkey missile deal during the early days of the crisis (Bohlen to Secretary of State, No. 2082, 11 November 1962, NSF, RSF: NATO-Weapons, JFKL). For Labour and Liberal party responses, see Manchester *Guardian*, 25 October 1962, p. 2; *Times* (London), 25 October 1962, p. 8. For editorials suggesting a trade, see *Times* (London), 24, 26, and 28 October (accepting the Soviet offer) and Manchester *Guardian*, 23, 24, and 25 October 1962. On British press opinion, also see *Washington Post*, 30 October 1962, p. A-8.

⁶⁷ Roger Hilsman, "Trading US Missile Bases in Turkey for Soviet Bases in Cuba," 27 October 1962, NSF, Box 36, JFKL.

⁶⁸ *New York Times*, 28 October 1962, p. 31. The Norwegian officials approved the Soviet-proposed deal only if removal of the Jupiters would not strategically impair NATO's defenses. Probably they knew that this criterion was clearly met, for the issue was psychological and political, not strategic.

⁶⁹ William Brubeck [through Bundy] to Schlesinger, Jr., "Italy's Center-Left Government and the Cuban Crisis," 20 November 1962, with attachment of same title, 26 November 1962, NSF, Countries: Cuba, JFKL; compare Hilsman, "Trading US Missile Bases in Turkey."

⁷⁰ Robert Redford, *Canada and Three Crises* (Lindsay, Ontario: John Deyell, 1968), pp. 184–85; Peyton V. Lyon, *Canada in World Affairs* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 43, 53–55.

NATO, privately proposed the deal that the Soviets demanded two days later. He thought, wrote Cyrus Sulzberger, "we [U.S.] should take the initiative in making such an offer." The bases were obsolete, the ambassador argued, and he did not see how the Russians would withdraw their weapons unless the United States reciprocated.⁷¹ He apparently was not worried about the loss of prestige to the United States or the impact on NATO and seemed to believe that these matters were less important than a settlement. Unlike de Staercke, and presumably the Belgian government, Dutch officials privately opposed a trade on the grounds that it would undermine NATO's morale.⁷² But Greek officials, while publicly discreet, seemed to lean toward de Staercke's analysis. When the Soviets demanded removal of the Jupiters, Greek officials privately indicated that this was an acceptable solution. "Compromise can be the only way out," one government official explained.⁷³

In some important Latin American nations, despite their public statements supporting Kennedy, there was probably strong sentiment for a compromise involving the Jupiters, in either a public or private deal. The U.S. government did win unanimous support for the quarantine from the Organization of American States (OAS), but that unanimity was secured, in at least a few cases, by some deft coercion. The main item on the OAS agenda was U.S. economic aid, and Washington first moved for a vote of support for the quarantine. The American message was clear: Aid could depend upon an affirmative vote.⁷⁴ Even then, some governments—including Brazil, Mexico, Bolivia, and Uruguay—feared providing full support for Kennedy's actions, as the State Department knew at the time.⁷⁵ Hostile to U.S. military intervention in Latin America, many governments there also worried about the backlash in their own countries from radical

⁷¹ Sulzberger, *Last of the Giants*, pp. 921–92.

⁷² *New York Times*, 28 October 1962, p. 31. The Dutch, because of their role as a sea power, were very troubled by the blockade (*Manchester Guardian*, 24 October 1962, p. 15).

⁷³ *New York Times*, 28 October 1962, p. 31. Significantly, the NATO Council never officially broke ranks to support the trade of the Jupiters over American objections, and the council actually endorsed JFK's public position (Finletter to Secretary of State, Polto 512, 28 October 1962, NSF,RSF:NATO-Weapons, JFKL).

⁷⁴ Ronald Hilton, "A Note on Latin America," *Council for Correspondence Newsletter*, no. 21, October 1962, pp. 42–44. Also see *Manchester Guardian*, 24 October 1962, p. 15, and *Times* (London), 27 October 1962, p. 8.

⁷⁵ These four nations did not support an OAS resolution to allow the use of force to remove the missiles (*Washington Post*, 24 October 1962, p. A-1). For other evidence on negative Latin American attitudes, see Rusk to Embassy, Rio De Janeiro, 30 October 1962, VP Security File: Cuba, folder III, LBJL; CIA, "The Crisis: USSR/Cuba," 24, 27, and 28 October 1962; and *Hispanic American Report* (Stanford, Calif.) 15 (October 1962), pp. 943–44, 957, 964, 1064. Obviously, an analysis of the likely impact of an American deal might also consider the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) (which included Turkey but not the United States) and the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), but the declassified documents reveal almost no specific attention to these two alliances. CIA, "The Crisis: USSR/Cuba," 27 October 1962, noted that two CENTO members—Iran and Pakistan—"have been slow to come out with solid public support of United States action."

groups if the United States attacked Cuba. A trade, even a public one, for the Jupiters was attractive if an invasion was the alternative.

The United States's complex alliance systems did rest partly upon faith in its credibility, but many governments also feared that efforts to affirm credibility could be rash and dangerous. They did not usually expect the United States to maintain blind allegiance, and, as the history of recent American foreign relations demonstrated, discretion, tempered force, and the willingness to compromise were also essential to operating the far-flung alliances.

THE SATURDAY CRISIS

Saturday was the most painful day of the crisis. For the ExComm and the president, there were no easy answers. Should America bomb the SAM site in Cuba, as the ExComm had previously planned, if a U-2 was shot down? Should the administration yield to the additional demand of exchanging the Jupiters to settle the crisis? The minutes for Saturday's three sessions reveal that the ExComm easily disposed of the first question and devoted agonizing attention to the second.

Some advisers wanted to arrange a way of pulling out the Jupiters without making a clear trade. A trade would injure Turkey, NATO, and the United States, according to their analysis. Was there some way of inducing Turkey to suggest withdrawal of the weapons? Or of placing their withdrawal in some broad context of disarmament? At various points, President Kennedy indicated that he did not want to yield to Soviet pressure but that he would favor some cosmetic arrangement to get rid of the Jupiters in order to settle the crisis. At a few points, he seemed desperate and prepared to countenance a trade. Work on the Soviet missile sites in Cuba must soon stop, Kennedy periodically emphasized, and his lingering implication was that an American attack on Cuba might otherwise become necessary in the next few days.

At times in the Saturday meetings, some ExComm members urged an attack—possibly first on the SAM sites and then on the MRBM and IRBM sites, to be followed by an invasion. Such counsel raised profound questions: Would the Soviet Union then respond against Berlin or elsewhere? Would not NATO and especially Turkey become Soviet targets? Could all-out war then be avoided? An anxious group of men, hardly more than a dozen, assessed actions that might lead to war or peace. And the president, listening to their counsel and trying out his own notions, ultimately had the constitutional and actual power of decision. The vigorous disputes over strategy left him *reasonably* free to choose. In the ExComm, he never faced a monolith, only shifting majorities. He could move toward peace or war. But if he chose the route of concessions, he would risk antagonizing the military chiefs, who were not his natural allies.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ For JFK's fears of the military, see Paul Fay, *The Pleasure of His Company* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), pp. 189–190.

At first, according to the minutes of the morning meeting, the opponents of a trade of the missiles came to the fore. Assistant Secretary of Defense Paul Nitze, an ardent cold warrior dating back to the Truman years, forcefully objected to the Soviet proposal: "It would be anathema to the Turks to pull the missiles out. . . . the next Soviet step would be a demand for denuclearization of the entire NATO area." Concessions would only beget demands for more concessions. Where would the United States draw the line? Why should allies trust American promises? Both Rusk and Bundy also resisted the trade, with Bundy stressing, according to the minutes, "we cannot get into the position of appearing to sell out an ally . . . to serve our own interests, i.e., getting the Soviet missiles out of Cuba."⁷⁷

President Kennedy regretted, as the minutes put it, that "the Russians had made the Turkish proposal in the most difficult possible way." Now, he said, because their demand is public, "we would have no chance to talk privately to the Turks about the missiles." He favored removing the weapons but did not want to appear to be yielding to a Soviet demand, lest he lose prestige and credibility, injure Turkey and NATO, and give the Soviets a public victory.⁷⁸ Could the crisis be settled without risking some American, and presidential, credibility and prestige?

The suggested trade of forty-two Soviet MRBMs (representing one-third of the entire Soviet strategic arsenal) for fifteen obsolete Jupiters was attractive on military grounds, Kennedy acknowledged. How, he worried, could he "justify risking nuclear war in Cuba and Berlin over missiles in Turkey which are of little military value?" It would even be hard to get political support for such a position, he acknowledged. Yet, he thought, there might be a way out: "We cannot propose to withdraw the missiles, . . . but the Turks could offer to do so. [They] must be informed of the great danger . . . and we have to face up to the possibility of some kind of a trade over the missiles."⁷⁹

The minutes of the morning meeting, like those for later in the day, reveal a sense of desperation, a fear that events were hurtling beyond control, that action was restricted to unpalatable alternatives, and that an attack on the missile sites in Cuba might soon be necessary. Even though the forty-two MRBMs (and even with the addition of twelve or thirty-six IRBMs) did not alter the strategic balance or militarily imperil the United States, no ExComm member (so far as the minutes disclose) challenged the dominating assumption: the United States could not dally more than a few days.⁸⁰ But if the work on the sites ceased, Kennedy noted, "we could talk to the Russians."⁸¹

The two-hour morning meeting ended with agreement on a brief public reply

⁷⁷ "Summary Record, ExComm, No. 7, Oct. 27, 1962, 10:00 A.M."

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Sorensen, memorandum, 17 October 1962, POF 115, JFKL; Bernstein, "Week We Almost Went to War," pp. 16–20.

⁸¹ "Summary Record, ExComm, No. 7, Oct. 27, 1962, 10:00 A.M."

to Khrushchev's demand. The White House statement, widely interpreted in the press as an outright rejection, was actually more subtle and elusive.⁸² It left the door open for some future agreement on the Jupiters but never specifically mentioned them. It sidestepped the Soviet demand, asserted that negotiations were impossible until work stopped on the missile sites and they were rendered inoperative, declared that the current crisis in Cuba and European security could not be linked, but mentioned the possibility of postsettlement discussions on arms limitation in Europe, and thus hinted at a willingness to consider removal of the Jupiters after the resolution of the crisis.⁸³

That afternoon, a small, weary group met at the State Department to prepare the president's formal reply to Khrushchev. The strategy was to disregard the most recent Soviet message (dismantling the missiles in Turkey) and accept the Friday suggestion: withdrawal of the Soviet missiles and on-site inspection in return for termination of the quarantine and a pledge not to attack Cuba.⁸⁴

When the ExComm reconvened at 4 P.M., the president revised the draft to stress his offer to discuss, after the resolution of the crisis, the reduction of general tensions, a halt to the arms race, and a détente between NATO and the Warsaw Pact countries. As the minutes indicate, this section was designed as an oblique way of offering to discuss withdrawal of the Jupiters later without specifying them and thus avoiding angering the Turks and appearing weak. According to the minutes, Kennedy "felt that we would not be in a position to offer any trade for several days. . . . if we could succeed in freezing the situation in Cuba and rendering the strategic missiles inoperable, then we would be in a position to negotiate with the Russians." When Bundy, who still opposed the trade, warned of a backlash in NATO countries, "the president responded that if we refuse to discuss such a trade and then take military action in Cuba, we would also be in a difficult position."⁸⁵

It was a tortuous, three-hour meeting. The discussion rambled. Like broken shuttlecocks, the proposals ranged widely. Often mixing proposals, ExComm members considered attacking Cuba, or convening a special NATO meeting, or outrightly rejecting the Turkey-Cuba missile trade, and even disarming the Jupiters and then attacking Cuba. In calling for a NATO meeting on Sunday, President Kennedy wavered between supporting a bid for peace and opting for a course toward war. "If the Russians do attack the NATO countries," Kennedy explained on one occasion, "we do not want them to say that they had not been consulted about the actions we were taking." Toward the end of the session, he returned to his earlier theme: persuading the Turks "to suggest to us that we

⁸² White House press release, 27 October 1962. The statement was similar to Stevenson's proposal. (MVF [Forrestal] to President, 27 October 1962, NSF, Countries: Cuba, JFKL).

⁸³ "Summary Record, ExComm, No. 7, Oct. 27, 1962, 10:00 A.M." and Bundy, "NSC Executive Committee Record of Action, Oct. 27, 1962, 10:00 A.M." both reveal that the statement was approved at the morning session.

⁸⁴ "Summary Record, ExComm, No. 8, Oct. 27, 1962, 4:00 P.M."

⁸⁵ Ibid.

withdraw our missiles."⁸⁶ That would not be easy, he acknowledged, since they had just issued a statement sharply rejecting the Soviet demand for an explicit trade.

Probably in the last thirty minutes of the meeting, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, presumably McNamara, and some others offered a zany solution: defuse the Jupiters in Turkey, inform the Soviets, and then attack Cuba.⁸⁷ That plot is outlined in part of a chilling draft message to NATO: "Wishing to minimize the possibility of . . . an attack upon Turkey, and possibly upon other NATO countries, the United States is willing, if the other members of NATO so desire, to render the Jupiter missiles . . . inoperative . . . and [thus] to notify the Soviet Government before moving against the Soviet missiles in Cuba."⁸⁸ The theory seemed to be that dismantling the Jupiters would meet part of the Soviet demand for a trade, emphasize that Kennedy was trying to restrict military activities to this hemisphere, reduce Soviet anger and fear, and probably protect Turkey and NATO from reprisals. The attack would remove the Soviet missiles and pay a bonus: elimination of Castro ("the bone in our throat"). The obvious liability was that the attack might kill 15,000–20,000 Soviets and thus compel the Soviets to retaliate—probably in Europe. As a majority in the ExComm seemed to be shifting to this plot, the president adjourned the meeting.⁸⁹

At least a few lingered in the room to discuss the bizarre course of the meeting. According to the minutes, Vice-President Lyndon B. Johnson asked, "Why were [we] not prepared to [accept the Soviet trade] if we were prepared to give up the use of U.S. missiles in Turkey?" The arguments of maintaining credibility, of keeping faith with NATO, of meeting obligations to Turkey did not seem to impress him. His chief aim was peace. Undersecretary Ball agreed, noting "that last week we thought it might be acceptable to trade the withdrawal of the missiles in Turkey if such action would save Cuba." Why not now? he asked. Accept the Soviet terms, he suggested, and replace the Jupiters with a Polaris sub.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Robert McElroy interview with Donald Wilson, 18 December 1974 (copy of transcript in my possession); Wilson to Bernstein, 20 February 1979. Both Sorensen and Bundy denied any knowledge of the plan, and Sorensen implied that ExComm had never considered it (McElroy interviews with Sorensen, 18 December 1974, and Bundy, 27 February 1975; Bernstein interview with Bundy, 31 July 1979; compare Sorensen, *The Kennedy Legacy* [New York: Macmillan Co., 1969] p. 190.) Because the minutes have been "sanitized," one cannot be sure of McNamara's position ("Summary Record, ExComm, No. 8, Oct. 27, 1962, 4:00 P.M."). Because of his presidency of the World Bank, he will not discuss American policy in which he participated (McNamara to Bernstein, 6 August 1979).

⁸⁸ "Message to the North Atlantic Council and the Governments of all NATO Countries," [27 October 1962], NSF, Countries: Cuba, Box 36, JFKL.

⁸⁹ Sorensen, *The Kennedy Legacy*, p. 190; McElroy interview with Wilson, 18 December 1974. Robert Kennedy states that the president ordered the Jupiters defused "so that he personally would have to give permission before they were used" (Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, p. 98).

⁹⁰ "Summary Record, ExComm, No. 8, Oct. 27, 1962, 4:00 P.M." On Johnson, also see handwritten notes, item 143A [probably Oct. 27], VP Security File: Cuba, folder V, LBJL.

When the ExComm met for an hour that evening at 9 P.M., the advisers talked of an invasion of Cuba, planned ways of adding pressure on the Soviets, prepared for a NATO meeting on Sunday, and again discussed the Turkey-Cuba missile trade. Kennedy decided to activate twenty-four air reserve squadrons (14,000 men) in preparation for the invasion and to frighten the Soviets. If any more surveillance planes were fired on over Cuba, Kennedy decided that "we should take out the SAM sites by [bombing them]."⁹¹

The group agreed not to raise with Turkish officials the question of withdrawing the Jupiters and instructed Ambassador Finletter to inform NATO that an American attack on Cuba was near but that the president still hoped that the crisis could be settled "within the framework of the Western Hemisphere." Finletter was directed to warn NATO delegates that an American attack might unleash a Soviet attack against their nations, but to encourage free expression, while reminding them that elimination of the missiles in Cuba was essential to maintaining NATO's strategic strength (not just the United States's). Finletter was instructed not to "hint of any readiness to meet [the] Soviet Jupiter proposal."⁹²

Given the fears of some NATO allies, did not these instructions encourage them to push for a compromise? Had the ExComm devised tactics to lead NATO to suggest acceptance of the Turkey-Cuba missile exchange? Or was the ExComm sincerely willing to be further limited if NATO made a different recommendation and even opposed the trade? Perhaps the answer is that approval of a public trade would have enabled the administration to yield with dignity ("for the sake of allies upon their request") but opposition would not have blocked a secret deal.⁹³

War seemed near. Shortly after midnight, Kennedy sent special messages to Adenauer and de Gaulle: "The situation is clearly growing more tense and if satisfactory responses are not received from the other side in forty-eight hours, the situation is likely to enter a progressively military phase."⁹⁴ The hedged implication: invasion of Cuba on Tuesday. Adenauer loyally supported Kennedy, but de Gaulle, having retreated into privacy until the French voters cast their ballots, refused to see the American ambassador. Even with war near, the French leader, ever disdainful, would not modify his ways and thus reinforced, at least for himself, his sense of olympian superiority.⁹⁵

What neither the NATO delegates nor the United States's chief European allies could know was that Kennedy was still mulling over a trade. Toward the close of the Saturday night meeting, according to the minutes, the attorney general

⁹¹ "Summary Record, ExComm, No. 9, Oct. 27, 1962, 9:00 P.M."

⁹² Rusk (drafted by Bundy and U.A. Johnson) to Finletter (with copies to U.S. ambassadors to all NATO nations), 28 October 1962, NSF, JFKL.

⁹³ Finletter to Secretary of State, Polto 512, 28 October 1962, NSF, JFKL.

⁹⁴ President to Bohlen, 28 October 1962, and President to Dowling, 28 October 1962, VP Security File: Cuba, folder VI, LBJL.

⁹⁵ Bohlen to Secretary of State, Nos. 1975 and 1976, 28 October 1962, VP Security File: Cuba, folder VI, LBJL.

summarized the strategy: "We would . . . hold off one more day a decision on accepting the Turkish/Cuban missile trade offer of the Soviets."⁹⁶ Then what? Was there any significance that the taker of minutes had not cast the matter in the negative: We will delay on *rejecting* the offer?

So far, this discussion has omitted one important set of events that evening: Robert Kennedy's secret meeting with Soviet ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin, at 7:45 P.M., before the evening session of the ExComm. Acting on the instructions of the president and Secretary Rusk, the attorney general invited Dobrynin to a private meeting at the Justice Department. Two points seem reasonably clear: the attorney general delivered both a virtual ultimatum and a loose private promise. According to his memoir, the ultimatum was: "if the [Soviets] did not remove those [missiles], we would remove them."⁹⁷ And in response to Dobrynin's question about America's withdrawing the Jupiters from Turkey, according to Robert Kennedy's secret memorandum and confirmed by his memoir: "there could be no quid pro quo—no deal of this kind could be made [on removal of the Jupiters]. It was up to NATO to make the decision. I said it was completely impossible for NATO to take such a step under the present threatening position. . . . If some time elapsed—and per . . . instructions—I said I was sure that these matters could be resolved satisfactorily."⁹⁸

To frighten the Soviets, the attorney general may have dramatized the pressures on the president to invade Cuba. According to Khrushchev's first memoir in 1970, the meeting with Dobrynin, based on the ambassador's report, went, in Khrushchev's own words, "something like this: Robert Kennedy looked exhausted [and said], 'The President is in a grave situation, and he does not know how to get out of it. We are under very severe stress. In fact we are under pressure from our military to use force against Cuba. . . . an irreversible chain of events could occur against his will.'" And, still according to Khrushchev, the attorney general also warned: "If the situation continues much longer, the President is not sure that the military will not overthrow him and seize power."⁹⁹

⁹⁶ "Summary Record, ExComm, No. 9, Oct. 27, 1962, 9:00 P.M."

⁹⁷ Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, pp. 107–08.

⁹⁸ Robert Kennedy to Dean Rusk, 30 October 1962, quoted in Schlesinger, *Robert F. Kennedy*, p. 522; and Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, 108–09; compare, O'Donnell and Powers, "Johnny, We Hardly Knew Ye," pp. 337–39. Robert Kennedy actually implied removal also of the thirty missiles from Italy (Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, p. 109).

⁹⁹ Nikita Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, trans. Strobe Talbott (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown, 1970), pp. 497–98; compare, idem., *Khrushchev Remembers: The Last Testament*, trans. Strobe Talbott (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown, 1974), pp. 509–14. Also see Anatoly Gromyko, "U.S. Manipulations Leading to Cuban Missile Crisis," in *USSR International Affairs* (FBIS) (7 September 1971): G6–7. Gromyko's article, which originally appeared in *Voprosy Istorii* [Problems of history] 8 (August 1971), cites *Thirteen Days* as the source but calls Kennedy's agreement to remove the Jupiters from Turkey and Italy "a specific promise." Khrushchev makes the same claim (*The Last Testament*, p. 512), as does Anatoly Gromyko, "The Caribbean Crisis," in *Mezhdunarodnye konfliktly* [International conflicts], eds. V.V. Zhurkin and Ye. M. Primakov (Moscow: Institute of World Economics and International Relations and the Institute of USA Studies, 1972), pp. 70–95. (This is available in translation from the Joint Publications Research which is published by the U.S. Department of Commerce. Office of Technical Services, Washington, D.C.)

Probably this last theme (fear of military overthrow) was Khrushchev's or Dobrynin's embroidery, or perhaps one or the other misunderstood why Kennedy felt under pressure from the military to act.¹⁰⁰ This theme, published well after the end of the crisis, also had another advantage: It allowed Khrushchev to present himself as a man of peace—a leader who had rescued Kennedy from his bellicose generals and admirals—and thus to obscure his acquiescence in response to a virtual ultimatum.

WHAT IF THE SOVIETS HAD NOT YIELDED?

After Robert Kennedy delivered his virtual ultimatum and loose pledge, painful questions lingered for the Kennedy brothers that Saturday night and through the dawn of Sunday: Would Khrushchev and his associates accept this hedged, private offer (of future withdrawal of Jupiters) when the Soviets had demanded a firm public pledge?

For the Soviets, as the Kennedys understood, there were difficult questions: Why should the Soviets rely upon Kennedy's and NATO's future approval? Turkey had opposed withdrawal in the past. Why not again? Would the United States coerce Turkish officials if they were recalcitrant? Moreover, since the main value of the removal of the Jupiters for the Soviets was symbolic, what would be the value of this private, hedged promise? Would it give Khrushchev even a small victory in the Soviet hierarchy? Certainly, it could not help him save face internationally, since no one would know of the deal. Publicly, he was still confronting a clear American demand: back down and face public humiliation; or delay, have Cuba attacked and Soviet soldiers killed, and then back down or escalate. Ultimately, the choices were retreat or escalation.

What would Kennedy have done in Khrushchev's place? Critics of the missile crisis have stressed JFK's fears of an electoral and bureaucratic backlash and also his own lust for combat and victory.¹⁰¹ In view of these needs and pressures, would he have backed down on Sunday, October 28, or at any time, if their roles had been reversed? Probably not. Did he expect Khrushchev to do so? In his memoir, Robert Kennedy states: "The President was not optimistic nor was I. [We had] a hope, not an expectation [that Khrushchev would retreat]."¹⁰²

If Khrushchev had not retreated, what would the president have done? A few of the memoirists, Robert Kennedy included, have asserted that the United States would soon have attacked Cuba.¹⁰³ Can the memoirists be trusted on

¹⁰⁰ For disconcerting evidence suggesting that the president *might* have had fears, see Fay, *Pleasure of His Company*, pp. 189–90.

¹⁰¹ Bernstein, "The Cuban Missile Crisis"; and Steel, "End Game."

¹⁰² Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, p. 109.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 830; compare, Sorensen, *Kennedy*, pp. 715–16. Alexander George, "The Cuban Missile Crisis," in *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy*, Alexander George et al. (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown, 1971), pp. 126–31, doubts that the president would have attacked Cuba without first trying other tactics. Chayes, *Cuban Missile Crisis*, p. 100, leans in this direction.

such a matter? Or were they reaffirming credibility after the fact to prove the president's (and possibly their own) toughness? After all, Robert Kennedy, after his meeting with Dobrynin, had summarized the administration's position late Saturday night: Delay a decision one more day *on accepting* the Turkish-Cuba missile deal. Does that frail evidence indicate that President Kennedy would have offered a *public* pledge in order to avoid the attack?

Such a pledge would have been painful for him. It might have denied him the appearance of victory and even confirmed that the Soviet deployment was analagous to the installation of the missiles in Turkey. Would that have made the quarantine of Cuba appear reckless? Perhaps. Certainly the hawks, especially in the Pentagon and CIA, would have been embittered.¹⁰⁴ They would have tried to thwart his future foreign policy. The Republican party would have condemned him for "selling out" United States and NATO interests.¹⁰⁵ His party might have suffered a sharp setback in the November congressional elections. That electoral defeat would have imperiled his foreign policy and further emboldened the hawks in the bureaucracy.

The United States's—and Kennedy's—international prestige and credibility would have been somewhat weakened, at least briefly, even though some NATO governments would have endorsed the settlement. Kennedy could have blunted some of the criticism at home and abroad by encouraging European allies to support the trade publicly. He might have called upon Latin American powers for similar assistance. There were also other ways of shoring up that prestige and credibility: for example, a public announcement a few days or weeks later that a Polaris submarine would replace the Jupiters. That act would not have violated the agreement with Khrushchev, but it might have punctured charges that Kennedy had made a great concession. In fact, in April 1963, when the administration quietly withdrew the Jupiters from Turkey,¹⁰⁶ it did send a Polaris submarine to the area.

¹⁰⁴ See Hilsman, letter, *New York Review of Books*, 9 May 1979, pp. 36–37.

¹⁰⁵ *New York Times*, 28 October 1962, p. 24; Sorensen, "G.O.P. Charges that," 28 October 1962, Box 41, Sorensen Papers. On later Soviet-American difficulties, see Bernstein, "Kennedy and Ending the Missile Crisis: Bombers, Inspection, and the No Invasion Pledge," *Foreign Service Journal* 56 (July 1979):8–12.

¹⁰⁶ McNamara to President, 25 April 1963, POF 115, JFKL, informed Kennedy that "the last Jupiter missile came down yesterday" and that it would be flown out at the end of the week. On the administration's earlier (October 29) commitment to removal, see Chayes, *Cuban Missile Crisis*, p. 98, n. 52.

On October 29, the State Department informed Ambassadors Hare and Finletter that they could assure embassies that "no 'deal' of any kind was made involving Turkey" (Rusk to Embassy, Ankara and Paris, 29 October 1962, NSF, RSF: NATO-Weapons, JFKL). In 1963, McNamara told the House Appropriations Committee, "without any qualifications whatsoever there was absolutely no deal, as it might be called, between the Soviet Union and the United States regarding the removal of the Jupiter weapons from either Italy or Turkey" (U.S., Department of Defense, *Appropriations for 1964*, 88th Cong., 1st sess., 1963, pt. I, 57).

Still, the unanswerable questions linger: What would Kennedy have done? Would he have risked appearing weak? Was he strong and brave enough? Could he have escaped the "credibility trap"? Or would he have succumbed to the expectations of voters, to the needs of his party and the foreign policy he hoped to pursue, and to the demands of hawks in the bureaucracy? How free did he feel to choose the path of public concession?*

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