

Burden of Nuclear Responsibility: Reflections on the Critical Oral History of the Cuban Missile Crisis

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Results are presented from a multiyear project on the Cuban Missile Crisis that involved high-level U.S., Russian, and Cuban former officials, declassified documents, and scholarly specialists. This method, called *critical oral history*, is described as an applied phenomenological psychology; its goal has been to reconstruct the psychological reality of decision makers in October 1962. The missile crisis was found to be more dangerous than previously believed, largely due to U.S. and Russian ignorance of, and disregard for, the crisis as viewed from Cuba. Substantive and methodological lessons are drawn from the study.

I think that you and I, with our heavy responsibilities for the maintenance of peace, were aware that developments were reaching a point where events could have become unmanageable.

*John F. Kennedy to Nikita Khrushchev, October 28, 1962
(quoted in Larson, 1986, p. 194)*

Thank you for the sense of proportion you have displayed and for the realization of the responsibility which now devolves on you for the preservation of the peace of the world.

Nikita Khrushchev to John F. Kennedy, October 28, 1962
(quoted in Larson, 1986, p. 189)

No, Comrade Khrushchev ... we knew, and do not presume that we ignored it, that we would have been annihilated, as you insinuate in your letter, in the event of nuclear war. However, that didn't prompt us to ask you to withdraw the missiles; that didn't prompt us to ask you to yield.

Fidel Castro to Nikita Khrushchev, October 31, 1962
(quoted in Blight, Allyn, & Welch, 1993a, p. 490)

Nearly 10 years ago, we were two psychologists seeking to make policy-relevant contributions to issues of war, peace, and international conflict. That is, we wished ultimately to speak not only or primarily to other psychologists, but rather to policymakers. We therefore posed the following questions, first to ourselves, then to fellow psychologists. First, what is the fundamental question? Our answer: How do we prevent a nuclear holocaust in a world with tens of thousands of nuclear weapons and widespread enmity among nations and states? Second: What is the closest call to the event we wish most to prevent, and from which relevant lessons should be most plentiful? The almost universal answer: The Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. Third: How might we, as psychologists, illuminate that closest call for policymakers? Our answer: By showing what it was really like to have nuclear responsibility when, as in October 1962, everything seemed to be at stake. This article surveys nearly a decade of our efforts to penetrate the psychological reality of American, Russian, and Cuban decision makers associated with the momentous events we collectively refer to in the United States as the Cuban Missile Crisis.

In 1986, Cohen published a provocative article titled "Why We Should Stop Studying the Cuban Missile Crisis" (Cohen, 1986). According to Cohen, the events of October 1962 were absolutely singular in the following ways:

the real or imagined imminence of nuclear war, the condition of American military superiority in nuclear and conventional arms, the absence of the use of force, the directness of the clash between American and Soviet forces, and the brevity and simplicity of the event. (p. 6)

Cohen wrote during a time when U.S.-backed forces were fighting "proxy" wars against Soviet-backed forces in Nicaragua, Angola, Ethiopia, El Salvador, Cambodia, and elsewhere, conflicts whose characteristics, as he saw it, bore no resemblance to the missile crisis. According to Cohen, the putative science of crisis management arising from the study of the missile crisis

derives from an event whose uniqueness renders its alleged "lessons" nearly useless. Those who are guilty of the "ceaseless pondering of the events of October 1962" (Cohen, 1986, p. 13; Falcoff, 1989) had, in Cohen's view, unwittingly become solipsistic and irrelevant to the world as it is. Cohen's advice: Move away from October 1962 and into the study of other events, other analogies, with which to understand the present.

For those who, like Cohen, were primarily interested in the uses of American conventional forces, his advice was sound. But the mid-1980s was a time not only of widespread proxy warfare in the Third World, but also of considerable worry about the risk of another superpower crisis escalating, this time, to nuclear war (see Weart, 1988). For those who took this risk seriously—and many students of international affairs took it very seriously—it was natural to turn toward the reexamination of the missile crisis, rather than away from it. After all, it appears to have been the only episode of its kind: It began with a crisis that seemed manageable, but then threatened to escalate beyond the control of leaders and into a superpower war, perhaps leading to nuclear war (see, e.g., Allison, Carnesale, & Nye, 1986).

Yet by the mid-1980s, the study of the missile crisis offered as little aid to students of nuclear risk as it did to students and practitioners of conventional warfare. Although the event centrally involved three countries—the United States, Soviet Union, and Cuba—virtually all the literature on it was written about Americans, by Americans. The most influential American memoirs (R. F. Kennedy, 1971; Schlesinger, 1965; Sorensen, 1965) espoused a more or less identical point of view: Khrushchev's inexplicable blundering caused the crisis, Kennedy's courage and skill resolved it, and Castro's Cuba was irrelevant either to its causation or its resolution. Moreover, none of these works contained a single footnote or reference to real-time documents, with which scholars typically evaluate the validity of interpretive recollection.

On the scholarly side, the literature tended to follow the conceptual lead of Allison's (1971) *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*. Allison's subtitle accurately summarized what most scholars had been attempting to do with the episode. They set out to explain it, in terms for example, of competing models of explanation (Allison, 1971); one all-encompassing model of deterrence and crisis management (George & Smoke, 1974); or as an event explained by various principles borrowed from academic or clinical psychology (Janis, 1982; Jervis, 1976; Lebow, 1981). That was the extent of it: brilliant and persuasive, but one-sided, somewhat self-justifying, and wholly undocumented memoirs on the one hand and, on the other, somewhat abstract, theory-driven academic treatises "explaining" October 1962, often by comparing it to many other events unconvincingly alleged to be "like" it.

Cohen gave eloquent voice to a large number of policy-oriented analysts disturbed by the irrelevance of the pervasive study of 1962 to issues of conventional warfare (and other American security interests less cosmic than those that appeared to some to be on the line in October 1962). Cohen and

his colleagues could simply dump the missile crisis and pursue historical analogies believed to be more relevant and fruitful. Escaping the missile crisis is not an option, however, for students of nuclear risk. One must begin with it and even dwell on it, or run the risk of drawing conclusions in an utterly fact-free environment conducive to wild and woolly speculation, as was often done in the mid-1980s, some of it, alas, by political psychologists (see Blight, 1986/87, 1987). Students of nuclear risk must move into the missile crisis, rather than away from it. Faced with this imperative in the mid-1980s, the question was "how?" How might one get figuratively "inside" the archetypal encounter with nuclear risk? How might one break through the celebratory rhetoric of those close to Kennedy, and the stony silence of those in his inner circle who opposed him, to say nothing of the Soviets and Cubans, about whose decision making we knew almost nothing? How might we begin to describe the inner, complex, multinational nature of the experience of so awesome a reckoning? These were some of the questions that could not be escaped by those of us who, with Cohen, saw by 1986 little assistance deriving from the study of the missile crisis but who, because of our focus on the problem of escalation to nuclear war, had to try to devise a means with which to understand it more thoroughly than before.

OCTOBER 1962 REEXAMINED

Thus was the systematic reexamination of the missile crisis driven by the same need that drove scholars like Cohen to repudiate it: the need for historically based policy relevance. We were looking for clues from actual human experience as to how a crisis looks and feels from the inside, when it appears to be evolving into catastrophic nuclear dimensions. It is useful to recall now the connection we made then between the raw, evolving experience of the missile crisis and what we took to be policy relevance. We acknowledged that the world of October 1962 is in many ways increasingly remote, thus its relevance is diminishing (see Blight, Nye, & Welch, 1987, p. 188). But the psychological reality of bearing the burden of responsibility for trying to manage the crisis must contain useful guidelines, perhaps even some invariants, that would likely apply if such a crisis should ever occur again. Why? Because human nature, human psychology, the perceptual dimensions of "being there" under conditions of such moral extremity—call them what you will—are likely to remain relatively constant. This, then, was the goal: linking the psychology of nuclear experience in the missile crisis with contemporary concerns regarding nuclear crisis prevention and management.

In this way, the political psychology used to reexamine October 1962 necessarily became a nuclear phenomenology (Blight, 1986/87, 1987, 1988). This is not the place for a lengthy digression on phenomenological psychology and its pertinence to the missile crisis (see Blight, 1990). But fundamentally, we and our colleagues made a psychological pilgrimage back to

fundamentals, back to the fountain-head of nontechnical, utilitarian phenomenology—William James (1890). We organized our plan of research around the search for descriptions of the *stream of thought*, as James (1890, Vol 1., pp. 224–290) called it. We would look for streams of thought of leaders in the missile crisis. We also followed James in distinguishing between two complementary characteristics of evolving mental life: its *intentionality*, or what the mental life is all about, and its *subjectivity*, or what it must be like to have such thoughts and feelings within just those situations (in our case, a nuclear crisis) that a person is experiencing (James, 1890, Vol. 1, p. 1; Wollheim, 1984, pp. 33–42).

These two sets of descriptions together constitute an attempt to pry open the meaning a given pattern of thought and feeling has for a person. Phenomenologists begin with this proposition: If you seek to understand an action, ask the actor what he or she was trying to do. Actors can often give helpful reasons for acting as they did. Here is the second proposition: If the reasons actors give for actions still perplex you, try to understand the meaning the situation and action had for the individual actors. This, in outline, is the psychological foundation on which the reexamination of the missile crisis has been based.

When we began to apply this approach to leaders who managed the missile crisis, we found ourselves asking variants of these questions: first, what events signified to you that risk of nuclear war was stable, rising, or diminishing? Second, what is it actually like to confront such risks when you share responsibility for the outcome? We asked just such questions throughout 1986 and early 1987 of former Kennedy administration officials. However, this first foray into nuclear phenomenology flopped. Many answers were standard, boilerplate presentations, sagging with empty generalizations and putative “lessons.” Others were simply lacking in content because the respondents simply did not remember. Still other answers were so fantastically precise as to be a bit incredible, after the intervention of nearly a quarter century. Something was lacking, something that would help propel these veterans of nuclear risk back into October 1962 and, in effect, hold their feet to that recollected fire until they found it possible to communicate credibly to others what it was about and what it was like, then and there.

Again, we went back to basics, back to James. We found very instructive James’s distinction between two complementary categories of human knowledge: knowledge of acquaintance, derived from direct, concrete experience—from life; and knowledge about, derived from books or other written or oral means for conveying information (James, 1890, vol. 1, pp. 221–223). We came to understand that whereas the veterans alone had the direct experience we were trying to fathom, we had neglected to provide real-time documentation to them deriving from the missile crisis that might stimulate the recollection of that experience: newspaper articles, television reports and—most important—declassified materials from the U.S. government that probably affected (or reflected) their own mental evolution during the mis-

sile crisis. We also came to see that, even among Americans, views were diverse, and that merely mentioning the views of others in the interviews often inspired the veterans to respond in more detail and with greater conviction. We had discovered, in other words, that to get more fully reacquainted with a given experience in October 1962, the veterans must be provided with information about their own views, and those of others, reflected in documents and in oral testimony.

This, then, became the basic goal of the enterprise: to juxtapose these two kinds of knowledge—direct acquaintance with the look and feel of nuclear danger in October 1962 and detailed knowledge about the events derived from a close reading of real-time documents. We called it *critical oral history* and, as we developed it, it seemed both helpful and legitimate to characterize our effort as an applied, dynamic phenomenological psychology of the missile crisis. Beginning in late 1986, working out of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, we began recruiting advisers to Kennedy during the crisis, including so-called "hawks" (such as General Maxwell Taylor and Douglas Dillon) and "doves" (such as Robert McNamara and Dean Rusk). Because in 1986 participation by former Soviet officials was out of the question, we recruited American Sovietologists known for their acumen on Soviet motivation in the crisis. Our colleagues at the National Security Archive in Washington, DC began to provide us with the latest and most important declassified materials on the crisis from the U.S. government, in addition to successive editions of an item that has become absolutely essential to critical oral history: an annotated chronology of events, derived from all sources, public and declassified. Finally, scholars and journalists whose knowledge of the "literature" of the missile crisis was exhaustive were invited to join the enterprise.

In early March 1987, at Hawk's Cay, FL, we tossed these ingredients into the "stew" of a conference on the missile crisis to see what would emerge. We had no intention, before the conference, of doing anything further on the crisis. Most of the participants believed that although the experiment in critical oral history was worth a try, there wasn't all that much left to learn about this (even then) most extensively studied crisis of the post-War era.

As it happened, however, the conference in Hawk's Cay turned out to be the first of five meetings on the missile crisis, each designed to fulfill the requirements of critical oral history, each evolving out of its predecessor. There seem to have been two fundamental reasons for the surprising fruitfulness of the critical oral history of the crisis. First, the method itself produced unexpected discoveries from declassified documents and data-based recollection by veterans that was far more detailed and credible than anything derived previously. And, the participants often witnessed barely managed confrontations between former colleagues and/or adversaries whose resolutions, if achieved, were often both moving and illuminating.

Second, the critical oral history of October 1962 became entangled with events in the Soviet Union that would eventually revolutionize international

politics. The highest levels of the governments of the United States, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR; and later the Russian Federation), and Cuba got increasingly interested in the outcomes of the various meetings. In the summer of 1987 we decided to act on a hunch that present and former officials in both the United States and USSR might see in the process an opportunity to push back the leading edge of glasnost, then in its infancy with regard to the Soviet Union's foreign relations.

Thus, a second meeting was held in October 1987 in Cambridge, MA, the first in which knowledgeable Soviets had participated (Blight & Welch, 1990, Part 3). A third, larger meeting was held in Moscow in January 1989, at the height of enthusiasm for Mikhail Gorbachev's *glasnost* and *perestroika*, and attended by former Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, former Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Dobrynin, and other senior Soviet officials. The American delegation was led by McNamara, McGeorge Bundy, and Theodore Sorensen (see Allyn, Blight, & Welch, 1989/90; Allyn, Blight, & Welch, 1992). Cubans also participated in the conference, though in a subsidiary role. Their enthusiasm for the process was fired, however. They issued an invitation in Moscow to the Americans and Soviets to come to Havana to a conference focused on the Cuban perspective on the crisis. In January 1990, the project moved to the Center for Foreign Policy Development at the Thomas J. Watson, Jr. Institute for International Studies at Brown University. Following a preliminary planning conference in Antigua in January 1991 (see Blight, Lewis, & Welch, in press), the final conference in the series was held in Havana in January 1992, hosted by Castro, who participated fully in all sessions (Blight et al., 1993a).

What was initially conceived as a heuristic "collision" of veterans, scholars, and documents quickly assumed another dimension—cross-examination by former adversaries. (Even at Hawk's Cay, with only Americans present, the extent of the adversarial nature of the hawks and doves around Kennedy quickly emerged). This has had all sorts of repercussions for those of us who organize and try to manage the meetings. But it has political-psychological significance as well: veterans of the crisis, having reimmersed themselves in the historical moment, began to understand how their decisions and actions derived from, and gave rise to, the decisions and actions of former adversaries. Often, they were surprised by the extent of their own misperceptions and those of others.

But the most striking feature of this process has been the evolution in views from seeing oneself as an effect and the adversary as the cause, to seeing how the process was driven by decisions and actions of all sides. This leads to various kinds of learning. The veterans learn things they didn't know at the time (as do scholars), veterans begin to see the interactive nature of decision making, and it becomes possible to begin to construct a rough psychological chronology of the thoughts and feelings underlying the evolution of political and military events.

For the veterans, however, there is more at stake. The Cuban Missile Crisis is regarded almost universally as the closest call ever to all-out nuclear war. The inadvertent slide to that confrontation is thus their joint burden of nuclear responsibility. Together, they put the world at greater risk of nuclear catastrophe than at any time before or since. For the veterans, therefore, the critical oral history presents both opportunities and risks regarding their personal reputations, the possibility of political reconciliation with former adversaries, and an assessment of one's place in history. Much of the cross-questioning throughout the critical oral history can be seen as, at various points, attempts to avoid, shift, or finally to assume this burden of nuclear responsibility during the missile crisis. This is true in the exchanges between American hawks and doves, Americans and Soviets, Americans and Cubans, and even, to an extent, between Soviets and Cubans. All of these cross-examinations tend first to be characterized by attempts to assign responsibility to the other and, finally, if the process is successful, to accept mutual responsibility for events leading to October 1962.

This issue, the burden of nuclear responsibility, is the focus of the following reflections on the critical oral history of the Cuban Missile Crisis. This is far from the only issue around which one might conduct a "tour" of the five conferences. Others have, for example, dealt with new findings on the Soviet side (Garthoff, 1989, 1992), discoveries and new interpretations of U.S. actions (Bundy, 1988), implications for our understanding of the Kennedy-Khrushchev relationship (Beschloss, 1991), and Castro's role in the crisis (Brenner, 1990; Brenner & Blight, in press).

But the issue of responsibility for the crisis goes directly to many of the most startling and troubling findings deriving from the project, including gross misperception by all three parties far in excess of anything previously believed. Each side, responding in what was felt at the time to be a completely justified, defensive reaction to actions of one or both of the other two, had its intentions misjudged. This pattern reiterated until it was almost too late to reverse the perverse momentum of misperception. These data, detailed and multifaceted, provide a field day for peace psychologists interested in how inadvertent escalation really works, in an almost moment-to-moment fashion. Each leadership, seeking to discharge its responsibilities honorably, unwittingly collaborated with the others in a process that could have led to the initiation of a nuclear holocaust for which all would have shared responsibility if, indeed, anyone had remained to assign relative blame.

Most disturbing, but most interesting, of all these data bearing on the burden of nuclear responsibility is the previously unknown discrepancy between the way in which nuclear risks were viewed in Washington and Moscow, on the one hand and, on the other, in Havana (Belkin & Blight, 1991; Blight, Lang, & Belkin, 1991). At the very moment Khrushchev risked humiliation to avoid war, by agreeing to withdraw the missiles, Kennedy, as has become clear in the critical oral history, would also have done whatever

was necessary to avoid war with the Soviets (see Bundy & Blight, 1987/88; Welch & Blight, 1987/88). Yet it is also clear that Castro, along with Soviet forces serving in Cuba, preferred to initiate nuclear war if there should be an American invasion of the island. Moreover, Cuban and Soviet forces in Cuba felt it was their solemn responsibility to do so. This is why each of the sections that follow have subsections labeled "Washington and Moscow" and "Havana." So absolutely discrepant were the views of the leaders of the superpowers from those on the ground in Cuba on the issue of responsibility in October 1962, that it is little wonder we came so close then and that, even now, three decades later, the process of assuming mutual responsibility for those events is still incomplete.

OCTOBER 1962 IN REAL TIME

None but the leading participants in the missile crisis will ever know what it was really like to bear the burden of responsibility in real time, as the event was unfolding, caught up in the raw experience of receiving what was known to be very imperfect, perhaps even incorrect information, and on that basis make what were also known to be momentous decisions. Looking back at October 1962, we are keenly aware of the terrible stakes, but also of the peaceful outcome. Looking forward into a situation that seemed to be spiraling out of control, the actors knew only the stakes, and many began to doubt, before the crisis reached its peak of tension and remarkable conclusion, that they would be equal to the task of managing it.

It is important, however, to stress an elementary but fundamental psychological point: no one, not even the actors, will ever be able to reenter that experience with anything approaching complete cognitive and emotional accuracy. Memory is foremost a reconstructive process, and the reconstructions occur in light of experience subsequent to that which one seeks to revisit. That is why documentary evidence is so central to the task of accurate revisitation of the past especially, in the present case, using declassified documents containing thoughts committed to paper in real time. Of course, real-time documents do not reveal anything like the whole of real-time psychological reality either. But they are where practitioners of critical oral history must start their engagement with the past.

Washington and Moscow

The burden of responsibility felt by Kennedy and Khrushchev in October 1962 is seared into their crisis correspondence, and its unbearable weight is supremely exemplified by the extent to which they tried to shift it back and forth to one another's shoulders. The letters reveal that both men were shocked by what they took to be the irresponsible, precipitate action of the

government of the other and, unable or unwilling to take responsibility for causing a crisis with such dire potential consequences, the two leaders faulted one another for causing the crisis, even as they ultimately found it within themselves to admire one another for collaborating on its peaceful conclusion. In the space of scarcely a week, the two adversaries had to become allies in manufacturing a joint escape from the bind into which they had gotten and they were able to accomplish this by facing their unexpected common enemy: the shattered crystal ball (Blight, 1990), the belief that nuclear holocaust, long understood to be possible, had become frighteningly probable.

The Cuban Missile Crisis was thrust on the world at 7 p.m., Eastern Standard Time, on October 22, 1962, in a televised speech by Kennedy. The President announced the imminent imposition of a naval "quarantine," or blockade, of Cuba and preparations for military action against the missiles in Cuba, should the Soviets refuse to remove them. These measures were portrayed as having been made necessary by Khrushchev's irresponsibility. The crisis, according to Kennedy, had been caused by

the secret, swift and extraordinary buildup of Communist missiles in an area well-known to have a special and historical relationship to the United States and to the nations of the western hemisphere ... this sudden, clandestine decision to station strategic weapons for the first time outside the Soviet Union ... [was] a deliberately provocative and unjustified change in the status quo. (J. F. Kennedy, 1962a, p. 807)

Kennedy declared that the "atmosphere of intimidation" resulting from these Soviet actions must be eliminated and he explained to the Soviet leader what was required: "I call upon Chairman Khrushchev," he said, "to halt and eliminate this clandestine, reckless and provocative threat to world peace and to stable relations between our two nations" (J. F. Kennedy, 1962a, p. 808). The crisis thus launched, known ever since in the United States as the Cuban Missile Crisis, was not about Cuba as such, which was described by Kennedy as merely "that imprisoned island" (J. F. Kennedy, 1962a, p. 806). Rather, it was about the latest and most dangerous evidence to date of what was regarded in the West as the central character flaw in Soviet Communists—secrecy and deceit in pursuit of world domination—now a potentially catastrophic flaw, because the Soviet Union had become a nuclear superpower. With regard to the concerns and motivation of the Kennedy administration, therefore, the crisis was misnamed. This was a Soviet missile crisis. To the American government, it was caused by the movement of Soviet missiles to a merely convenient piece of Caribbean property, in service of familiar and despised Soviet goals. It was an effective speech. Kennedy had held his serve.

The day after Kennedy's speech, Khrushchev served up his own litany of accusations in his message to the President. "We reaffirm," he said, "that the

armaments which are in Cuba, regardless of the classification to which they may belong, are intended solely for defensive purposes in order to secure the Republic of Cuba against the attack of an aggressor" (Khrushchev, 1962a, p. 637). Khrushchev thus attempted to send responsibility for the crisis back into Kennedy's court. The missiles that were sent to Cuba, according to Khrushchev, were done so in response to a whole series of aggressive acts by the United States against the Socialist government of Castro, most important Kennedy's decision to authorize the invasion at the Bay of Pigs in April 1961. The crisis was thus caused not by Soviet missiles, the deployment of which was purely defensive, but by U.S. policy in the Caribbean, which in regard to Cuba was offensive in the extreme, and which is why the crisis has been known ever since by the Soviets as the "Caribbean crisis."

Kennedy sent the burden of responsibility for causing the crisis right back to Khrushchev later the same day. "I think," he said in his message to the Soviet Chairman, "you will recognize that the step which started the current chain of events was the action of your government in secretly furnishing offensive weapons to Cuba" (J. F. Kennedy, 1962b, p. 637). But of course Khrushchev did not "recognize" any such thing. Like Khrushchev, Kennedy professed to be puzzled and shocked by the actions and statements of his counterpart and, also like Khrushchev, keen to assign all the responsibility for the dangerous crisis to the other. The Kennedy administration did not expect Soviet missiles in Cuba; indeed they thought they had been perfectly clear as to their unacceptability. Khrushchev and his colleagues did not expect a blockade—an act of war, as they saw it—in response. Jolted by the recognition of how wrongly they had judged their adversaries, and with the stakes as high as they appeared to be in October 1962, leaders in Washington and Moscow responded instinctually to their failed predictions with renewed insistence on their righteousness.

In a matter of days, however, the crystal ball effect—assent to the intellectual proposition that war between the superpowers would be catastrophic folly—yielded to a mutual feeling that the crystal ball might be about to shatter—the fear of sliding imminently into a nuclear war. As this occurred, the shock, anger, and rigidity that characterized the initial responses of each gave way very shortly to circumspection and compromise. Accusation and denial of responsibility gave way to self-reflection and eagerness to reach a solution that would leave a face-saving way out for leaders in both Washington and Moscow. Thus, the deal: the United States promised publicly not to invade Cuba (and privately promised to destroy North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO] missiles in Turkey within a few months), and the Soviets promised to withdraw the missiles (and eventually some bombers and boats) from Cuba.

By October 28, the day of the Kennedy–Khrushchev "understanding," the Soviet leader had been transformed from the belligerent warrior he had appeared to be just 5 days earlier into a genial diplomat. He said,

Dear Mr. President: I have received your message of October 27, 1962. I express my satisfaction and appreciation for the sense of proportion you have displayed, and for your understanding of the responsibility you now bear for the preservation of peace throughout the world." (Khrushchev, 1962b, p. 652)

Kennedy responded in kind in a statement issued to the press the same day. The President said,

I welcome ... Chairman Khrushchev's statesmanlike decision to stop building bases in Cuba and to begin dismantling offensive weapons and returning them to the Soviet Union under United Nations verification. This is an important and constructive contribution to peace. (J. F. Kennedy, 1962c, p. 815)

In his personal letter to Khrushchev later that day, Kennedy said: "I think that you and I, with our heavy responsibilities for the maintenance of peace, were aware that developments were reaching a point where events could have become unmanageable" (J. F. Kennedy, 1962d, p. 654). This seemed to be the psychological point at which the two leaders converged. Before the crisis each had peered into the nuclear crystal ball and found nuclear war to be unthinkable because events would always be manageable. Each had subsequently, at the peak of the crisis, discovered that nuclear war had become all too thinkable, because events were becoming unmanageable.

Though they learned quickly that they must share responsibility for ending the missile crisis, the moral common ground on which Kennedy and Khrushchev stood at its flash-point conclusion proved insufficiently spacious to accommodate an end to the Cold War, or anything close to it. For this to have happened, the U.S. and Soviet governments would have had to assume their respective shares of the responsibility not only for concluding the crisis, but also for causing it, and this they could not do. An exchange between the two leaders in December 1962 demonstrated that each still believed the mutual heroics of October were made necessary by the subterfuge and aggressiveness of the other, and that they still—their shared moment of nuclear fear and illumination aside—did not trust one another. In a speech to the Supreme Soviet on December 12, Khrushchev blamed the crisis on "American imperialists [who] were sharpening the knives and threatening Cuba with a massed attack. In the face of this highwayman's policy," said Khrushchev, "we could not remain indifferent bystanders" (quoted in Pope, 1982, pp. 82–83). In a televised interview on December 17, Kennedy reacted to Khrushchev's accusations by holding that at the root of the crisis was the fact that "The Cuban effort ... was done in secret and steps were taken really to deceive us by every means they could" (J. F. Kennedy, 1962e, pp. 897–898). The Cuban Missile Crisis did not end the Cold War. Yet the profundity of each experience produced eloquence unexcelled in the rhetoric of statesmanship in the nuclear age. The missile crisis moved Khrushchev and Kennedy to make remarks that would provide direction and

hope for a generation that would have to live with the knowledge that nuclear crises may indeed happen, thus rendering nuclear war entirely too thinkable, whereas the Cold War conditions that produced the most dangerous episode of the nuclear age still prevailed.

Khrushchev meaningfully chose the divided, disputed, and dangerous city of Berlin in which to demonstrate that he had learned the great lesson of the missile crisis. The man who had previously become infamous for nuclear sabre-rattling, duly sobered and transformed in the crucible of October 1962, now said this in January 1963:

The effects of a nuclear war would continue to tell throughout the lifetime of many generations causing disease and death and the worst deformities in the development of people ... As for Marxist-Leninists, they cannot propose to establish a Communist civilization in the ruins of centres of world culture, on land laid waste and contaminated by nuclear fall-out. We hardly need add that in the case of many people the question of Socialism would be eliminated altogether, because they would have disappeared bodily from our planet. (quoted in Crankshaw, 1984, p. 93)

The following June, Kennedy used the occasion of a commencement address at The American University to record his agreement with Khrushchev. He had in his inaugural address asked the American people to "bear any burden," and to "pay any price" in the world-wide struggle against Communism (J. F. Kennedy, 1961, p. 1). Now he said this:

If we cannot now end our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity. For, in the final analysis our most basic common link is the fact that we all inhabit this planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's future. And we are all mortal ... confident and unafraid, we labor on—not toward a strategy of annihilation, but toward a strategy of peace. (J. F. Kennedy, 1963, pp. 462, 464)

These are the most successful rhetorical attempts by Kennedy and Khrushchev to derive from their experience in October 1962 their responsibilities to future generations.

Havana

The correspondence between Khrushchev and Cuban leader Castro on the final weekend of the missile crisis reveals that, whereas Castro felt a heavy weight of responsibility, the burden he felt had little in common with that of leaders in Washington and Moscow. For Castro, the enemy was neither unexpected nor was it fear of inadvertent disaster brought on by the momentum of crisis. It was rather his (by then) traditional and implacable foe, the United States. By late in the evening of October 26, Castro became con-

vinced, not without reason, that a U.S. attack on Cuba was only hours away. According to Cuban and Soviet documents and testimony, Castro and Soviet Ambassador Aleksander Alekseev spent the entire night at the Soviet embassy, drafting and redrafting a message for Khrushchev. Finally agreeing on the precise wording, they sent a cable to Khrushchev at approximately 7 a.m. Eastern Daylight Time on October 27, containing the following assessment:

From an analysis of the situation and the reports in our possession, I consider that the aggression is almost imminent within the next 24 or 72 hours. ... There are two possible variants: the first and likeliest one is an air attack against certain targets with the limited objective of destroying them; the second, less probable although possible, is invasion. I understand that this variant would call for a large number of forces and it is, in addition, the most repulsive form of aggression, which might inhibit them.

If the second variant is implemented and the imperialists invade Cuba with the goal of occupying it, the danger that that aggressive policy poses for humanity is so great that following that event the Soviet Union must never allow the circumstances in which the imperialists could launch the first nuclear strike against it.

I tell you this because I believe that the imperialists' aggressiveness is extremely dangerous and if they actually carry out the brutal act of invading Cuba in violation of international law and morality, that would be the moment to eliminate such danger forever through an act of clear legitimate defense, however harsh and terrible the solution would be, for there would be no other.

However, up to the last moment we will maintain the hope that peace will be safeguarded and we are willing to contribute to this as much as we can. But at the same time, we are ready to confront a situation which we view as quite real and quite close. (quoted in Blight et al., 1993a, pp. 481-482)

Lest there be any doubt in Khrushchev's mind about what Castro was requesting, Alekseev sent a report of his all-night session with Castro to Moscow, after the original cable from Castro had been sent. It contained the following account:

I asked him directly, "Do you mean to say that we should be the first ones to strike a nuclear blow against the enemy?" "No," answered Castro; "I do not want to say this directly. But under certain circumstances, we should forestall them without waiting to experience ourselves the perfidy of the imperialists and the first nuclear blow from their side. *If they attack Cuba, we should wipe them off the face of the earth.*" He was positive that an attack was inevitable, and he said that there were only five chances in a hundred that it would not happen. (quoted in Blight et al., in press)

Thus was Khrushchev informed from Havana, as he was groping in the dark with Kennedy for a way out of the crisis short of war, that the war was about

to begin, that the United States may well have decided to mount a full invasion of the island, and that, because the Soviets would in the event be unable to save Cuba, they should instead redeem Cuba's martyrdom by responding to an American invasion with an all-out nuclear attack on the United States.

Khrushchev was horrified, in part because he seems to have incorrectly interpreted Castro's request as a call for a preemptive nuclear attack, that is, before any invasion of Cuba had taken place. By the time Khrushchev drafted his response, he and Kennedy had struck their deal, via radio messages, to save time. Following his response to Kennedy, Khrushchev cabled Castro on October 28, counseling the Cuban leader "At this moment of change in the crisis, not to be carried away by sentiment" (quoted in Blight et al., 1993a, p. 482). Khrushchev was evidently elated at having gotten a pledge from the United States not to invade Cuba, and he obviously thought he was conveying good news to Castro.

But this was not good news to the Cubans, for several reasons, including the provision in the Kennedy-Khrushchev understanding for on-site inspection of missile sites in Cuba. Castro cabled back late on October 28: "Yesterday the American government tried to make official the privilege of violating our airspace at any hour of the day and night. We cannot accept that" (quoted in Blight, 1993a, p. 484). In a long response sent to Havana on October 30, Khrushchev tried to address what he took to be the growing list of grievances laid at his doorstep by the Cubans, including the lack of consultation with the Cubans, Soviet concessions to the United States, the inspection issue, the credibility of the U.S. noninvasion pledge and, most of all, Castro's request, as Khrushchev apparently still mistakenly understood it, for a preemptive nuclear attack, a request the Soviet leader found incomprehensible because, as he pointed out to Castro, "Cuba would have been burned in the fire of war" (quoted in Blight, 1993a, p. 486).

Castro's response was bitterly caustic. He had apparently resigned himself to Khrushchev's inability or, perhaps, unwillingness to comprehend Cuba's situation and requirements. It appears to have become obvious to Castro that Cuba's security interests, as perceived by the Cubans themselves, were not part of the Soviets' calculations in deciding to end the crisis. Castro particularly resented Khrushchev's apparent attempts to shift responsibility to the Cubans for the speed and nature of the conclusion to the crisis, by repeatedly referring to Castro's "alarming" cables reaching Moscow during the crisis (quoted in Blight, 1993a, p. 489). On October 31, Castro tried once more to explain to Khrushchev what the Cubans thought the crisis was about—what it was like in the trenches of the crisis and, finally, why the removal of the missiles represented abandonment:

What we did in the face of events, Comrade Khrushchev, was to prepare ourselves and get ready to fight. In Cuba there was only one kind of alarm, that of battle stations.

No, Comrade Khrushchev ... we knew, and do not presume that we ignored it, that we would have been annihilated, as you insinuate in your letter, in the event of nuclear war. However, that didn't prompt us to ask you to withdraw the missiles, that didn't prompt us to ask you to yield. Do you believe that we wanted that war? But how could we prevent it if the invasion finally took place?

I spoke not as a troublemaker but as a combatant from the most endangered trenches. ... There are not just a few Cubans, as has been reported to you, but in fact many Cubans who are experiencing at this moment unspeakable bitterness and sadness. The imperialists are talking once again of invading our country, which is proof of how ephemeral and untrustworthy their promises are. (quoted in Blight, 1993a, p. 489–491)

In refusing to take Castro's request for a nuclear strike on the United States in the event of an invasion seriously, and in neglecting to consult him about the terms of the conclusion to the crisis, Khrushchev seemed to Castro to have abandoned Cuba in its hour of supreme emergency. Facing a pivotal and risky choice in the crisis, Khrushchev had not chosen Cuba, leaving Castro, who had chosen the Soviets as protectors, to bear the burden of what he believed in that moment was responsibility for the potential destruction of the Cuban Revolution and possibly the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Cuban people.

Khrushchev, alarmed that the deal struck with Kennedy might come undone due to (what he feared would be) Cuban intransigence, dispatched Anastas Mikoyan, his First Deputy Premier, to Havana to persuade the Cubans to agree to the terms of the U.S.–Soviet arrangement. Notes of the conversations in Cuba between Mikoyan and Castro provide clues as to what the Cuban leader imagined when his crystal ball began to shatter, as well as the responsibility he felt for what he feared was about to happen. On November 3, the day of Mikoyan's arrival in Cuba, Castro explained to the Soviet envoy what lay at the core of his bitterness:

Tension rose and rose. The whole Cuban people were prepared to defend [their country].

And then suddenly—concessions.

For this our people were not psychologically prepared. They felt deep disappointment, bitterness, pain. As though we were being deprived not of missiles but of the very symbol of solidarity. Our people thought the news about the withdrawal of the missiles was a lie. For they did not know about the agreement [between the USSR and Cuba], that the missiles still belonged to the Soviet side. They assumed that the missiles had been transferred to us and were now our property. ... So the news produced great confusion. Nor did the people understand what Turkey had to do with it. ... I went out onto the streets and to military units and saw that this was so.

For some 48 hours this feeling of bitterness spread among the whole people. ... We were very worried by the sharp fall in the people's moral spirit. It affected

their fighting spirit as well. We were asked not to open fire on U.S. planes invading our airspace. All this was badly demoralizing. These feelings could have been used by the counterrevolution to incite anti-Soviet moods. (Alekseev, 1962)

Knowingly or not, Castro had vastly over-sold the value of the Soviet missiles to the inhabitants of a country still in the grip of civil war at the time of the missile crisis. He had cast his lot with Marxism–Leninism, asked the Soviets to assume responsibility for the protection of Cuba, and had accepted the nuclear missiles, thus transforming Cuba into a target for an attack that the missiles were, in theory, deployed to deter.

Thus, at precisely the moment Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the world at large breathed a sigh of relief, Castro believed he and his revolution faced oblivion in one of two ways: either from a U.S. attack and invasion in violation of the pledge to Khrushchev; or (as the notes of the conversations with Mikoyan reveal) because Cuba would as a result of the missile withdrawal erupt in anti-Soviet, ultimately anti-Castro rebellion, which would inevitably lead to a U.S. intervention, which would in turn destroy the revolution. Castro still felt this way on November 19, the day before the crisis was officially concluded at a press conference called in Washington by Kennedy. Mikoyan, attempting to improve the spirits of the young Cuban leader, told him “you enjoy such great authority and trust that you will be able to bring about the desired change in the people’s mood” (Mikoyan, 1962). To which Castro could only respond: “I myself am to blame for the situation that has been created” (Mikoyan, 1962). How ironic that Castro should conclude by the end of the missile crisis that he had unwittingly done perhaps the only deed that guaranteed the destruction of the Cuban revolution: he had accepted Soviet nuclear missiles, whose presence invited an immediate American invasion, and whose withdrawal played directly into the hands of anti-Castro rebels in Cuba and elsewhere, seeking his downfall. If either were to occur, he would bear the burden of responsibility.

Castro’s “October crisis” (as the event is referred to in Cuba) was thus utterly unlike that of Kennedy and Khrushchev. It was not an omen of inadvertent nuclear catastrophe, narrowly averted, from which one should derive the central responsibilities to succeeding generations. In the peak of tension and denouement of October 1962, Castro’s crisis was a disaster about to occur not by accident, but due (as he saw it) to a deliberate attack by his enemy and the unexpected cowardice of his ally. Desperate, deeply regretful of his own ignorance of nuclear weapons and Soviet intentions with regard to them, and feeling suddenly helpless in their absence, he could only rage at the U.S. planes overflying Cuba at will, waiting for the final end from which there would be no escape, and for which there would be no redemption. Is it any wonder that Castro, believing his soldiers, people, country, and cause to be at risk of meaningless slaughter should have, in that moment, felt great bitterness toward Khrushchev and his Soviet colleagues in Moscow?

OCTOBER 1962 REVISITED

By the afternoon of October 28, 1962, the intense phase of the Cuban Missile Crisis was over in Washington. That morning, Khrushchev had announced over Radio Moscow the imminent withdrawal of all nuclear missiles from Cuba, in exchange for an American pledge not to invade Cuba. Kennedy and his circle of advisers, many of whom had on the previous evening worried that war was at hand, rejoiced with their families at a "picnic" hastily arranged in the White House for the officials and their families (M. L. Bundy, personal communication, August 13, 1987). The President sent his brother, Robert Kennedy, the Attorney General, to confirm the details of the understanding with Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin. Returning to the White House, Robert Kennedy and the President spent a few minutes alone, discussing the events of the previous 13 days.

The President, according to his brother, wanted to discuss Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War, a subject with which he had been much occupied for, among other reasons, public remembrances of 100th anniversaries of Civil War events occurred almost daily during his presidency. Robert Kennedy later recalled that as he was about to leave the President said, "this is the night I should go to the theater," referring to the night Lincoln was assassinated (quoted in R. F. Kennedy, 1971, p. 88). Former Kennedy White House aide Walt Rostow has written that

Kennedy was not a morbid man. But those close to him knew he was haunted by the fear that he might be the man whose decisions led to nuclear war. It was a good deal to ask of a human being—to protect the possibility of civilization by putting it at risk ... the burden was most harsh and explicit in Kennedy's time. (Rostow, 1972, pp. 297–298)

Just the day before Kennedy's conversation with his brother he had, in Sorensen's phrase, stared down "the gun barrel of nuclear war" (Sorensen, 1965, p. 274). By connecting his own experience to that of Lincoln, Kennedy conveyed in one typically ironic phrase his sense of relief, his feeling that events for which he was supremely responsible might have turned out far worse than they had, and that if he were to go out heroically, this was the day to do so.

The critical oral history of the missile crisis began as an inquiry into the nature of Kennedy's experience of that burden of responsibility, and those close to him who shared it to some degree. Those involved in the inquiry have from its inception taken the goal of revisiting October 1962 seriously, not merely remembering it or reading about it, or drawing lessons from it. To revisit is actually to be there as it was in the event, not literally, for this is impossible. But the participants have understood one of their principal goals to be the creation of contexts conducive to an accurate and multidimensional revisitation of a burden of responsibility at once so difficult to verbalize, but so essential to understand.

The approach was fruitful. For example, in the conference at Hawk's Cay, FL, in March 1987, Thomas Schelling expressed to Kennedy's Secretary of Defense McNamara his own real-time experience of the missile crisis. Schelling was in the basement of the Harvard Faculty Club, watching Kennedy's October 22 speech on television with his colleagues in the Harvard-MIT Arms Control Seminar. Schelling recounted how he and the group celebrated on hearing the speech, because Khrushchev, as they saw it, had fallen into his own trap, and the only question was "how bad a fall we were going to give him" (quoted in Blight & Welch, 1990, p. 132.). Schelling remembered feeling no anxiety whatever, only exuberant anticipation of Khrushchev's humiliation. Schelling noticed, apparently for the first time, that McNamara and many of his former colleagues gathered at the conference had felt tremendous anxiety even while the speech was being delivered, and more later in the week. In a moment of belated illumination Schelling said: "My guess is that the ... stress of responsibility may simply make a very great deal of difference" (quoted in Blight & Welch, 1990, p. 132). This, from a nuclear strategist and economist in whose calculations, to that point, such a "variable" as responsibility had no place, and who had once said that one of the chief oddities of the missile crisis was the "irrationality" of Kennedy and his advisers, like McNamara, who felt anxious about the risk of nuclear war (T. C. Schelling, personal communication, October 3, 1984).

The approach also proved to be timely. It was clear from the start that the main perplexities for all U.S. participants in the process concerned Soviet motivation. For example, the Hawk's Cay discussions began with a series of questions concerning Khrushchev's intentions in putting missiles in Cuba, posed by historian Ernest May. Sorensen responded: "I don't know now, and I didn't know then. None of us knew. We could only speculate about what Khrushchev was up to" (quoted in Blight & Welch, 1990, p. 28). The list of possible motives for the Cuban missile deployment was expanded at Hawk's Cay but, in the absence of knowledgeable Soviets willing to share what they knew, the speculation noted by Sorensen continued unabated, informed, as before, mainly by U.S. Sovietological theorizing.

Although none of us at Hawk's Cay knew it in March 1987, the Gorbachev-Shevardnadze revolution in the discussion and conduct of Soviet foreign policy would by the following October create an entirely new possibility—a private discussion in Cambridge, MA, in October 1987, for the public record, between Americans close to Kennedy and Soviets who had worked with Khrushchev. The intellectual and emotional context of that meeting is in certain respects almost as difficult to revisit as the event whose unprecedented, bilateral revisitation was its purpose. For on the 25th anniversary of the Cuban Missile Crisis, we did not know that the Cold War really was ending; we had no clue as to how profound and immediate might be the effects of glasnost, especially in the theretofore taboo area of Soviet foreign policy in which, according to the Soviets' statements and writings, they had yet to commit their first mistake; and we had no idea that the ending

of the Cold War would produce an opportunity to engage in U.S.–Soviet, later U.S.–Soviet–Cuban, discussions of the events which, many years before, had begun the long dormant process.

Washington and Moscow

In the 25 years between October 1962 and the Cambridge conference of Americans and Soviets in October 1987, Soviet literature on the missile crisis claimed uniformly that the United States had unilaterally caused the missile crisis through its aggressive imperialist actions against Cuba, requiring the Soviets to become involved in order to protect Cuba. Khrushchev expressed this view in his December 12, 1962 speech to the Supreme Soviet defending his deployment and subsequent withdrawal of the missiles (cited in Pope, 1982, pp. 71–107). He repeated it in his memoirs, the first volume of which was published in the West in 1970 (see Khrushchev, 1970, p. 493; 1990, p. 170). The Soviet line was developed at book length in Anatoly Gromyko's account of the role of his father, Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, in the missile crisis (Gromyko, 1973). Khrushchev, who had been *persona non grata* since his forced retirement in October 1964, is never mentioned by name. In this account, American imperialism is the cause of the missile crisis, Kennedy its tool and the author's father its unsung hero, the man who tried in vain to get a mendacious Kennedy to come clean about his intention to provoke the crisis, and also the man who provided wise counsel to other, unnamed Soviet officials.

During the same period, Western scholars and memoirists had sought to convey just the opposite impression, though usually in somewhat less ideologically driven, and in less heavy-handed prose: that the missile crisis was Khrushchev's crisis. He put the missiles in Cuba, a move that seemed then and thereafter to lack common sense. Why did he do it? And why did he think he could get away with it? These were the questions that Americans most often asked, during the crisis and ever since. Not surprisingly, therefore, the Americans present began the conference in Cambridge by posing to their Soviet counterparts just these questions hoping, but lacking compelling reasons for expecting, that they would at last receive answers with sufficiently thick texture, balance, and credibility to warrant taking them seriously.

Why did Khrushchev do it? His former speech-writer Fyodor Burlatsky began by saying what most Americans had always believed, but which no Soviet had ever admitted publicly: "it was," he said, "to be the first step to strategic parity" (quoted in Blight & Welch, 1990, p. 229). But the issue was complicated by Khrushchev's psychology, said Burlatsky, who had travelled with Khrushchev on his visit to Bulgaria, during which Khrushchev reported in his memoirs having the inspiration to put missiles into Cuba. According to Burlatsky:

Let me say that there is a first mistake, only trying to find rational reasons. There are some *irrational* reasons—psychological or emotional reasons ... Khrushchev was a “risky man” [*azartnyi*]. ... The Cuban story is connected with Khrushchev feeling “now we have become a superpower.” We have enough rockets and warheads to compare our forces with American forces. We also had responsibilities to the Cubans, especially after the Bay of Pigs—maybe not so connected. I also believe Khrushchev’s aim was to begin detente with the U.S. But it is very difficult to imagine how placing rockets in Cuba can support this. I am not sure Khrushchev thought out the aims. From my point of view, it was more an emotional than rational decision. He talked a lot about United States bases around the Soviet Union. (quoted in Blight & Welch, 1990, pp. 233–235)

Thus, in the space of not more than 2 minutes, Burlatsky had become the first Soviet official in more than two decades to discuss Khrushchev’s motivation. Further, he had done so critically, implying that in certain respects the decision to deploy the missiles was irresponsible, poorly conceived, and motivated by deficiencies in Khrushchev’s character. Finally, he had disagreed with the long-held Soviet official line on the reason for the deployment—defense of Cuba—and in so doing he openly contradicted the line he himself had helped Khrushchev to articulate in the Soviet leader’s speech in December 1962. Such strikingly self-critical interventions by Russians are now commonplace. In October 1987, on this subject, they were unheard of, which is why the veteran Sovietologists and former Kennedy administration officials present took notes like freshmen.

Burlatsky then addressed the second canonical American question: why did Khrushchev think he could get away with it? The answer, he said, must lie in the impression Kennedy made on him at the Vienna summit of June 1961. According to Burlatsky, who had transcribed and organized the notes taken at the Vienna meetings, Kennedy seemed to Khrushchev to be a reasonable man, almost a kind of intellectual, not weak, but a leader likely to understand the basic justice in putting missiles in Cuba which was simply, as Burlatsky understood Khrushchev, to achieve detente as quickly as possible between two nuclear equals (Blight & Welch, 1990, p. 236). Burlatsky admitted that there was in this conclusion the unmistakable air of self-delusion and wishful thinking and that Khrushchev’s firm, if “irrational” convictions, combined with his (by 1962) highly concentrated power in the party and government, led to the irresponsible decisions in the spring of 1962.

Whereas Burlatsky had made Khrushchev’s psychology central to the fact of the deployment, Sergo Mikoyan, who had been an assistant to his father Anastas Mikoyan during the missile crisis, addressed head-on the issues that had most troubled U.S. officials and scholars in 1962 and ever since—Soviet secrecy and deception. Mikoyan meticulously told the story of the extraordinary secrecy, the idea having been known to only six men for a considerable period; the terribly self-serving and ultimately disastrous advice Khrushchev got from his military commanders who, it seemed, would have said almost

anything to convince Khrushchev that the deployment would succeed; and the Soviets' arrogance, which Mikoyan called "absolutely Russian," in ignoring all the good advice the Cubans tried to give them with regard to such problems as camouflage, location of the sites, and much else (Blight & Welch, 1990, p. 241).

Georgy Shakhnazarov, the senior member of the Soviet delegation (and long-time Central Committee staff member), hinted as well that, as Americans had long suspected, the Soviet leadership systematically deceived all the members of their foreign service corps, excepting Gromyko, so that their representatives in Washington, at the United Nations, and elsewhere could therefore unwittingly "lie" all the more convincingly, because they were told there were no missiles in Cuba. He did so by conveying a message from former Soviet Ambassador to the United States Dobrynin, explaining that he had been informed of the missile deployment by Rusk 1 hour before the President's speech on October 22 (Blight & Welch, 1990, p. 256). Before that, he had not known. It was here that all three Soviet participants laid the charge of irresponsibility heavily on the Soviet leadership. For no contingency plans had been made in case the missiles were discovered prematurely, nor could there have been such plans, because many officials who would have been central to their execution did not know of the existence of the missiles.

In this way, Soviets at the Cambridge conference began to redress the massive imbalance between what Soviets knew about U.S. decision making and what Americans knew about Soviet decision making. They had done more than this. They had taken a step that neither Khrushchev nor Kennedy had been able to take in real time, nor had U.S. and Soviet officials and scholars been able to take in the interim: a first step toward a mutual revisitation of October 1962, one based on the assumption of mutual responsibility for the initiation of the crisis, a joint examination of the ways in which decisions on each side led interactively to the crisis that neither side desired. Kennedy and Khrushchev had in the event tried repeatedly, like two tennis players in a long volley, to return responsibility for causing the crisis back to the other side. Conversely, the Soviet participants at the Cambridge conference offered to join their American counterparts in an exercise more like a game of catch, requiring each side to accept the possibility of its share of the responsibility, before tossing it back to the other side. The Soviets had begun the process courageously by "catching" a considerable and highly specific degree of responsibility, and only then did they attempt gently to toss the ball of responsibility across the table.

The Americans accepted the challenge on a wide variety of issues, including agreement with Shakhnazarov, who contended that the Soviets had legal and moral grounds for stationing missiles in Cuba (Blight & Welch, 1990, pp. 247-248) and they engaged in spirited discussion, especially with Burlatsky, on the likelihood of Khrushchev's removing the missiles if the United States had tried private diplomacy, rather than confrontation (Blight

& Welch, 1990, pp. 244–245). But the issue on which the mutual revisitation of October 1962 proved most revealing was that of American intentions regarding Cuba following the Bay of Pigs invasion. It began with a shock of mutual recognition: that without the Bay of Pigs, according to all Soviet participants, Khrushchev would never have been moved to deploy missiles in Cuba, no matter how many other reasons his advisers might have given in favor of the move; whereas, according to the Americans, the fiasco at the Bay of Pigs was the most important event in convincing the Kennedy administration that, however frustrated they might be by Castro's Cuba, an attack on the island was a terrible idea, not to be pursued. For example:

Mikoyan: I think all the [Soviet] participants in the discussion agreed that the United States was preparing for the liquidation of the Castro regime ... there were invasion plans.

Nye: There was also a covert operation at the time code-named "Mongoose," whose aim was to destabilize or overthrow the Castro regime. I don't believe the public knew about it, but the Soviets certainly would have. Mac?

Bundy: I remember that in the fall of '62 there was great frustration about Cuba and considerable confusion about what we should do. In my opinion, covert action is a psychological salve for inaction. We had no intention to invade Cuba, but it seems from what you say that there was a very solid picture in Moscow that we were going to do something more than we were.

McNamara: Let me say that we had no plan to invade Cuba, and I would have opposed the idea strongly if it ever came up.

Sorensen: Well, that's the wrong word.

McNamara: Okay, we had no intent.

Shakhnazarov: But there were subversive actions.

McNamara: That's my point. We thought those covert operations were terribly ineffective, and you thought they were ominous. We saw them very differently.

Nye: That's an important point for our discussion of lessons. Small actions can be misperceived in important ways, with disproportionate consequences.

McNamara: That's absolutely right. I can assure you that there was no intent in the White House or in the Pentagon—or at least in my Pentagon—to overthrow Castro by force. But if I were on your side, I'd have thought otherwise. I can very easily imagine estimating that an invasion was imminent.

Shakhnazarov: I do not wish to turn the meeting into reciprocal accusation. I am inclined to believe you had no plan. But surely this is very important for lessons. (Blight & Welch, 1990, pp. 249–250)

At the end of the Cambridge conference, Mikoyan was able to say that he was just beginning to believe it possible that the U.S. leadership had had no

intention, following the Bay of Pigs fiasco, to invade Cuba (Blight & Welch, 1990, pp. 314–315).

A second U.S.–Soviet conference regarding October 1962 convened in Moscow in January 1989 at the invitation of Shakhnazarov, who had by then become a personal aide to President Gorbachev. The conference benefitted from the presence of the highest level living Soviet participants in the crisis, including Andrei Gromyko and Dobrynin. Cubans were also involved in the conference (a subject discussed later). Many more chapters in the common chronology of U.S.–Soviet intentions were added. Together, these meetings showed what is possible in a post-Cold War atmosphere, one in which both sides try to get a little closer to the mutual truth of the matter in their darkest hour (Allyn et al., 1989/90, 1992).

At the Moscow conference it was suggested by the Soviet hosts that the participants be differentiated according to whether they were scholars or veterans. With regard to the missile crisis, the latter seemed altogether preferable to the terms by which former decision makers are usually known: actors, or simply participants. One of those American veterans, Sorensen, brought the Moscow conference to a close with the theme of the conference: *the project: the act of responsible reflection on the Cold War*. He cautioned veterans and scholars alike to resist “a tendency on the part of all of us, in assessing blame, to speak in terms of national interest and self justification, and always to put the blame on some other country. In fact,” he said, “there is plenty of blame to be shared by all three countries represented here today” (quoted in Allyn et al., 1992, p. 188), a view with which no U.S. or Soviet veteran revisiting October 1962 in that Moscow conference room registered any dissent.

Havana

Cuban participation in the joint revisitation of October 1962 began at the Moscow conference and immediately caused difficulties for the American veterans and scholars. At first, the problems were relatively superficial. For example, the members of the delegation sent by President Castro were absolutely unknown to the Americans, even though it included the Communist Party Secretary in charge of international affairs, Jorge Risquet (leader of the delegation), and two senior Cuban officials from the crisis: General Sergio del Valle, Chief of Staff of the Cuban Army and Emilio Aragonés, member of the (then) ruling six-man Secretariat (see Allyn et al., 1992, pp. 2–4). The utter unfamiliarity of the Americans with these Cuban officials served to illustrate to the Americans just how exclusively the U.S and Soviets had been in their view of the missile crisis, from 1962 onward.

After the conference began, mere confusion became genuine consternation at the Cuban interventions. As the meeting progressed, it gradually became clear that the event the Cubans came to discuss was fundamentally

different from that which the Americans and Soviets had gathered to revisit. Americans and Soviets most wanted to discuss the famous 13 days; the Cubans began the conference by discussing U.S. covert action against Cuba in operations deriving from the Eisenhower administration (Allyn et al., 1992, p. 20). Americans and Soviets were enthusiastic in their mutual probing about perceptions of the risk of nuclear war; Cubans had little interest in this, choosing instead to emphasize the joint Cuban–Soviet preparedness to fight a conventional war against the United States in Cuba (Allyn et al., 1992, p. 96). Americans and Soviets spent a great deal of time addressing questions to each other regarding critical moments during the conclusion of the crisis; Cubans made it clear that they deeply resented the way the crisis was concluded, the Kennedy–Khrushchev understanding having been, as the Cubans saw it, a result of panicky Soviet capitulation to a U.S. ultimatum that potentially compromised the viability of the Cuban revolution (Allyn et al., 1992, pp. 51–52).

It rapidly dawned on the Americans in Moscow that, with the entry of the Cubans, they had entered a new kind of exercise. To the Cubans, the Cold War was far from over. In April 1961, just before the invasion at the Bay of Pigs, the Kennedy administration had published a “White Paper” explaining why the Castro regime in Cuba was unacceptable: it had betrayed the Cuban revolution and become another dictatorship, it had permitted the establishment of a Communist bridgehead in the Western hemisphere, it had become an ally of the Soviet Union, and it had unleashed a subversive assault on the Western Hemisphere (Department of State, 1961). All U.S. administrations since Kennedy’s have, in one way or another, endorsed that statement. The United States has not had full diplomatic relations with Cuba since they were broken by a directive from President Eisenhower on January 3, 1961.

Moreover, to the Cubans, even the October crisis (as they call it) is itself unresolved. On October 28, 1962, Castro publicly rejected the Kennedy–Khrushchev accord unless five conditions were met: ending the economic embargo, ending covert action in Cuba, termination of naval attacks against vessels bound for Cuba, cessation of overflights of Cuban territory, and return of the Guantanamo naval base to the Cuban government (see Larson, 1986, pp. 197–198). In the Cuban view, these requirements have never been addressed, much less discussed or resolved. And so, by common consent, Cuba remains locked in a Cold War with the United States, in an atmosphere as close to perpetual crisis as is sustainable short of war. The Cuban officials who came to Moscow, therefore, came to revisit the origins of their present grievances. They came most of all, so it seemed to the Americans, to present themselves as victims of U.S. aggression, which they held responsible for the October crisis, and the fact of its unfortunate, continuing relevance. It was clear, therefore, that if there was to be a meaningful U.S.–Cuban revisitation of October 1962, the Americans must take the first step by openly declaring, as the Soviets had done in Cambridge, their share of the responsibility for the crisis.

McNamara took the initiative at the Moscow conference by attempting to place himself in the shoes of the Cubans, implicitly challenging the Cubans to do the same. This led to the following exchange between McNamara and Risquet:

McNamara: I want to state quite frankly that with hindsight, if I had been a Cuban leader, I think I might have expected a U.S. invasion. Why? Because the U.S. had carried out what I have referred to publicly as a debacle—the Bay of Pigs invasion—we'd carried it out in the sense that we'd supported it. We did not support it militarily—and I think this should be recognized and emphasized, as it was specifically the decision of President Kennedy not to support it with the use of U.S. military force—but in any event we'd carried it out, and after the debacle, there were many voices in the United States that said the error was not in approving the Bay of Pigs operation; the error was in the failure to support it with military force, the implication being that at some point in the future, force would be applied. ... There were [also] covert operations. The Cubans knew that. There were covert operations extending over a long period of time ... from the late 1950s into the period we're discussing, the summer and fall of 1962. ... [Finally], there were important voices in the United States—important leaders in the Senate, important leaders of our House—who were calling for the invasion of Cuba. The second point I want to make—and I think it shows the degree of misperception that can exist and can influence both parties to a dispute, and by implication the danger when that degree of misperception can exist in the nuclear age, the danger to all of us—it was a misperception on the part of the Cubans and Soviets. ... I can state this categorically, without qualification, and with the certainty that I am speaking not only of my own knowledge, but of my understanding—and I think it was complete—of the mind of President Kennedy ... we had *absolutely no intention* of invading Cuba ... therefore, the Soviet action to install missiles ... was, I think, based on a misconception—a clearly understandable one, and one that we, in part, were responsible for. I accept that (quoted in Allyn et al., 1992, pp. 7–9).

Risquet: I am amazed at Mr. McNamara's frankness in acknowledging that if he had found himself in the Cubans' shoes, the Cuban side had every right to think that there could be a direct invasion by the Americans. (quoted in Allyn et al., 1992, p. 14)

Much discussion followed, as it had in Cambridge, about whether the Americans could have had no intention to invade Cuba, when so many of its preparations seemed to point to it. But the more significant point had been made: Via McNamara, leader of the American delegation to Moscow, U.S. officials from the Kennedy administration had stated publicly, to Cubans, the United States' responsibility to Cuba for actions that with benefit of hindsight may be seen to have led straightaway to the crisis of October 1962. The Cuban delegation was pleased by exchanges such as the one between McNamara and Risquet and, before the conference had ended, Risquet and del

Valle had raised the possibility of subsequent meetings at which this very topic—U.S.–Cuban responsibilities for the missile crisis—would occupy center stage, with the Soviets also participating, though in a supporting role (see Allyn et al., 1992, pp. 182–183).

But would a sustained mutual revisitation of the missile crisis be possible between Americans and Cubans, whose governments had anomalously continued to wage their Cold War? This question was put to the test at a subsequent meeting in Antigua, in January 1991. The Cubans, who had begun their presentation in Moscow by reading aloud from declassified U.S. sources regarding covert operations in Cuba, led off with a highly detailed report on U.S. covert operations drawn from Cuban sources. It was a self-conscious attempt to refute the claim McNamara had made in Moscow—that the Cubans, however understandably, had been victims of misperception in drawing the conclusion that the United States intended to use military force to destroy the Cuban regime, leading to the chain of events that resulted in the Soviet missile deployment. The presentation was made by General Fabian Escalante of the Cuban Ministry of Interior, who summarized his point as follows:

War is not only combat with tanks, aircraft, machine guns, cannon and missiles; war is the placing of bombs, war is generalized terrorism, war is indiscriminate murder—war is all of this. War is armed groups, war is people being trained in the U.S. How many people did the CIA have at its base in Miami? Documents say that over 3,000 Cubans were agents, collaborators at the CIA base in Miami. Well if this is not a war, ladies and gentlemen, may God judge us. (quoted in Blight et al., in press)

Escalante's point, powerfully presented, was that from the Cuban point of view the United States had already declared war on Cuba long before October 1962. Thus, the causes of the crisis can be traced back to U.S. aggression. The Americans were responsible for the crisis we had come to the meeting to discuss.

The Cubans, having by means of Escalante's presentation put themselves back in the shoes they occupied by October 1962, were then challenged by McNamara to take another step: to try to put themselves in the shoes of officials in the U.S. government at precisely the same time:

Our action with respect to Cuba, the economic action, and so on—Mongoose; Mongoose was stupid, I accept that, but it did not occur in a vacuum—these actions—these attitudes—were based on the belief that Cuba was seeking to subvert a democratically-established government in the hemisphere [Venezuela], and that wasn't the only one. ... My question is, what action was being taken? Why did we hold that belief? Was it absolutely without foundation? There can be no question in my mind that I held it. (quoted in Blight et al., in press)

McNamara's point was made in reference to a Cuban document stating that the Venezuelans had requested an emergency meeting of the Organization of

American States (OAS) on November 6, 1962 "to accuse Cuba of directing terrorist activities being carried out by the opponents of the Betancourt regime" (quoted in Blight et al., in press). It was a pointed attempt to encourage the Cubans to understand that, just as they believed they had to respond to a war already declared on Cuba by the United States, American officials believed they had to respond to a war the Cubans had declared on the pro-U.S. governments in Latin America. That was how they saw it at the time although, as McNamara admitted, he cannot in retrospect defend an operation like *Mongoose*. It was a mistake. But it was a mistake committed not, as perhaps Escalante's presentation would lead one to conclude, simply by perverse men in Washington. Rather, it emerged from a context in which Cuban actions played an important causal role in U.S. decision making and for which, therefore, Cuba bore some responsibility.

McNamara was answered by Risquet, who countered the American's presentation of the American perception of Cuban-inspired "subversion" with some remarks on the Cuban perception of American-inspired subversion:

I'd like to remind you that after Cuba's expulsion from the OAS, and after the rupture of diplomatic relations by many countries in Latin America with Cuba ... many of these other countries started to support the Cuban counterrevolution. In other words, I think that any act of Cuba to help the revolution in a country that was helping the counterrevolution was an act of legitimate defense ... if such a thing took place. I perfectly understand, to put myself in the Americans' shoes, as my friend McNamara said, that the U.S. would be worried by this activity, by the Cuban response. (quoted in Blight et al., in press)

Risquet failed to address the central request made by McNamara, which was for specific details on Cuban support for terrorism in Venezuela in the period in question, and in general for an overview of (what the Americans took at the time to be) Cuban subversion in the hemisphere generally. Later in the conference, Schlesinger, former White House Aide who followed Latin American affairs for Kennedy, crystallized what the Americans were asking for as a Cuban Church Committee Report, alluding to the hearings in the mid-1970s during which the *Mongoose* operation became widely known. This the Cubans were not prepared to do in Antigua, for several stated reasons, including the paucity of documentation on these issues at so early a point in the revolutionary period, and not excluding the possible impact such revelations might have on present Cuban relations with countries such as Venezuela. To their credit, however, the Cubans showed no lack of eagerness to discuss the issue, although they preferred to defend such actions as they may have taken, rather than to describe any that they actually did take.

Subsequently, for example, Risquet evinced perplexity at the drift of the discussion. He pointed out that "economic and friendly relations of Cuba with the Soviet Union are no longer viewed in the context of an East-West division" (quoted in Blight et al., in press). Moreover, he reminded his U.S.

interlocutors, "Latin America is now characterized by elected regimes that emerged after the liquidation of tyrannies. ... These countries have diplomatic relations with Cuba ... therefore, Cuba has no need to respond" (quoted in Blight et al., in press). Another member of the Cuban delegation, José Antonio Arbesú, Chief of the Cuban Interests Section in Washington, DC then added: "I think that this is important, because if this is avoided, we might perhaps be able to resolve an issue that I think was very important at the beginning of the Cuban revolution" (quoted in Blight et al. in press). That is, although it is undoubtedly true, as McNamara and others argued, that both the United States and Cuba engaged from an early point in attempts to subvert the interests of one another, we should also recognize, as Risquet suggested, that the conditions that seemed in the early 1960s to warrant policies of mutual destabilization have evaporated with the end of the U.S.–Soviet Cold War. "It is important," Arbesú concluded, "[that] something like this is not repeated," by either the U.S or Cuba (quoted in Blight et al., in press).

But it is also important, all agreed, to have a clearer understanding of what the "this" is that should not be repeated, especially on the Cuban side. It is important because historical accuracy is always to be preferred to innuendo or fading memories. But it is also important because, in mutually coming clean on subversion by the United States and Cuba, it would be possible to understand in detail how the responses of one side led to responses from the other side until, as an unintended consequence of any single act in the chain, the world was brought closer than it has ever come to catastrophic nuclear war.

OCTOBER 1962: WESTERN HEMISPHERE

The meeting in Antigua had been intense, even bitter at times, as members of the U.S. delegation continued to press the Cubans relentlessly for details of their decisions to support leftist movements in the western hemisphere. The Cubans, however, continued to refuse to reveal such information, repeatedly claiming that, whatever they may have done, they were only responding to U.S. aggression. This infuriated McNamara, Schlesinger, and others on the U.S. delegation, who claimed to want from the Cubans only information, not excuses, apologies, or (certainly) accusations.

Indeed, it seemed odd that the Cubans, particularly Risquet, leader of the delegation, were concerned enough to establish the absolute sovereignty and autonomy of Cuba in the period of the missile crisis (and ever since) while, in addition, claiming victim status for Cuba at every opportunity. This led many Americans in Antigua, and some Soviets, to conclude that the critical oral history of the missile crisis had reached a dead end. Western hemispheric issues such as covert activities on the part of Cuba and the United States and mutually hostile rhetoric, having been admitted to a discussion of

the course of events leading to October 1962, might just be too sensitive, even in January 1991, for Cubans and Americans to discuss fruitfully.

The Cubans, however, moved ahead with plans for a conference in Havana. To attract the (by now) skeptical former members of the Kennedy administration, the organizers promised the full participation of President Castro who, it was said, would come prepared to make a full disclosure of whatever information the U.S. side requested regarding Cuban support for revolutionary movements in Latin America between January 1959, when the revolution triumphed, and October 1962. Castro would, the Americans were told, proudly take responsibility for Cuba's revolutionary activities. Attracted by this possibility, the Americans, led by McNamara, agreed to go to Havana in January 1992 for a fifth and final conference on the missile crisis (now redefined to include a wide array of highly contentious U.S.-Cuban issues). The key question in the minds of everyone on the U.S. delegation was: would Castro take responsibility for Cuban subversion (as the United States typically referred to Cuban covert action in the hemisphere in the early Castro period), thereby recognizing some Cuban responsibility for American decisions that led inadvertently to the missile crisis?

Washington and Moscow

In the statement with which he opened the conference, McNamara went straight to the heart of the matter. As Castro listened and took copious notes, McNamara listed the four major concerns of the Kennedy administration regarding Cuba:

Our principal concern was Cuba's military relationship with the Soviet Union. ... Our second concern was Cuba's support for armed groups whose goal was to overthrow many, if not all, of the governments in Latin America and the Caribbean. Our third concern was the constant, hostile rhetoric directed at the United States and other governments in the hemisphere. ... Our fourth concern was that the Cuban government betrayed its promise of a free election and began to establish a dictatorship. (quoted in Blight et al., 1993a, pp. 44-45)

McNamara concluded by saying to Castro: "We need to know how you expected us to react to your policies" (quoted in Blight et al., 1993a, p. 46). That was the challenge McNamara put before Castro and his Cuban colleagues. Failing to get an adequate response, the U.S. delegation had agreed ahead of time to walk out and end the conference at an appropriate moment.

The conference was by design focussed on U.S.-Cuban episodes that, in the view of Americans or Cubans (or both), were connected with the missile crisis. Decision making in Moscow, therefore, played a subsidiary role in the conference, just as it played a subsidiary role in the deterioration of U.S.-Cuban relations 30 years before. Thus, Oleg Troyanovsky, a former high-

ranking assistant to Khrushchev, opened up the meeting for the Russians (no longer Soviets, as the USSR had officially ceased to exist less than 2 weeks before the conference). As he did, he expressed "The hope that our meeting will be a further contribution to the normalization of the situation in this important region of the world" (quoted in Blight et al., 1993a, p. 52). In other words, the central purpose of the presence of a Russian political delegation, led by Troyanovsky, was to facilitate the U.S.-Cuban discussion, rather than to reveal new facts about political decision making in Moscow.

Havana/Soviets

The conference agenda did not, however, call for Castro to respond immediately to McNamara's blunt challenge. Instead, the conference was addressed next by General Anatoly I. Gribkov, former head of the Warsaw Pact and, in 1962, head of "Operation Anadyr," the code name for the secret deployment of Soviet troops and missiles to Cuba. Participants in the conference were already familiar with Khrushchev's horrified response to Castro's contingent request, on October 27, 1962, for a launch of its nuclear arsenal against the United States if the United States should invade the island. As we have seen, Castro believed such a step would redeem Cuba's martyrdom for the socialist cause. Gribkov would now argue convincingly that Soviet military leaders serving in Cuba during the crisis agreed totally with Castro, not with Khrushchev.

Gribkov, in the most shocking single intervention of the five conferences, stunned the American delegation by demonstrating in detail that Soviet forces in Cuba, over 40,000 in all, "were ready and willing to fight to the last man" (quoted in Blight et al., 1993a, p. 62). Gribkov revealed that if the United States had invaded and occupied Cuba, "we would have formed guerrillas. ... We did not have anywhere to withdraw to. There was no retreat possible" (quoted in Blight et al., 1993a, p. 62). He then asserted that Soviet forces in Cuba were ready and authorized to initiate nuclear war, in Cuba, by the use of tactical nuclear weapons, whose authority for use had been delegated to the field commander on the island, General Issa Pliyevev. The existence of tactical nuclear weapons in Cuba during the crisis was completely unknown to the Americans before Gribkov spoke. Indeed, none of the former Kennedy administration officials recalled even speculating about such a possibility in October 1962. Pointing his finger across the room at McNamara, his voice ringing with conviction, Gribkov concluded: "Allow me to say that ... the world was on the brink of a nuclear holocaust" (quoted in Blight et al., 1993a, p. 62).

Thus it was revealed that whereas the Soviets in Moscow and Americans in Washington were rushing to a fear-driven resolution of the crisis, Soviets and Cubans in Cuba were willing and, according to Gribkov, able to launch their nuclear weapons, killing thousands of invading Americans on the

beaches of Cuba, knowing virtually for certain that the Americans would respond massively against the island and perhaps elsewhere as well. For the former members of the Kennedy administration who were present, and who would have had to recommend an invasion to Kennedy, this was the most sobering moment in the entire critical oral history process. For in October 1962, there was much concern in the Kennedy EXCOMM about the possible implications of killing significant numbers of Russians in Cuba. Most thought Khrushchev would have to escalate the crisis, perhaps by seizing Berlin or attacking the NATO missile sites in Turkey, should the United States move massively on Cuba. But what they never considered, until they heard Gribkov speak in Havana, were the implications of having horrendous numbers of dead American marines on Cuban beaches. As McNamara said after the conference, the probability of an American nuclear response to Soviet use of tactical nuclear weapons in Cuba was a "certainty" (quoted in McDonald, 1992, p. A9).

When Gribkov pointed his finger accusingly at the American delegation he was, in effect, saying this: You threatened Cuba; Cuba requested protection; we, the Soviets, took that responsibility very seriously; thus if you had attacked Cuba in late October 1962, responsibility for the consequences would have been borne by you, the Americans (whom he referred to repeatedly as "the aggressor"). For although Gribkov's portrayal of the Soviet military in Cuba as a group of nuclear age Robin Hoods was obviously idealized and one-sided, his revelations tended to add weight to the claims made by the Cubans at the Moscow and Antigua conferences. At those meetings, the Cubans had, as if with one voice, argued that the burden of responsibility for the missile crisis rested with the United States, whose actions at the Bay of Pigs, and in its covert action campaign called Operation Mongoose, had initiated the chain of events that eventually led, as Gribkov said, to "the brink of nuclear holocaust." Because Gribkov's revelations showed the Americans that their actions led to even greater nuclear danger than they had previously imagined, but because the Americans also believed that Cuban actions were inextricably linked to the chain of events leading to the crisis, the forthcoming Cuban response to McNamara's initial challenge—particularly Castro's response—became even more pivotal. Gribkov had raised the stakes by appearing to increase the overall burden of nuclear responsibility to be shared (Blight, Allyn, & Welch, 1993b).

Havana/Cubans

The Cubans began inauspiciously. Edwin Martin, Kennedy's Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs had, in a short intervention, sharpened McNamara's challenge by providing details from the period on two issues: hemisphere-wide opposition to Cuba's policy of subversion, localized in the OAS, which expelled Cuba in January 1962; and (what Martin

presented as) a firm decision following the Bay of Pigs not to use military force to invade Cuba (quoted in Blight et al., 1993a, pp. 137–146).

Several members of the Cuban delegation reacted immediately and angrily to Martin's presentation. Carlos Lechuga, Cuba's OAS ambassador at the time, expressed the view that Martin was lying. He said simply: "Mr. Martin ... history is different" (quoted in Blight et al., 1993a, p. 148). Risquet said bitterly that "for many years the OAS was the Ministry of Colonies for the United States. That is a historical reality" (quoted in Blight et al., 1993a, p. 150). Escalante, Vice-Minister of Interior, drew the logical conclusion from Martin's remarks, a conclusion he found incorrect and odious: "If all this is taken as true ... then ... all the steps that Cuba took during 1962, and which it had taken at the end of 1962 ... were practically warmongering actions. We were provoking a confrontation." On the contrary, said Escalante, "The intention of the United States in 1962, in early 1962 ... was the total annihilation of Cuba!" (quoted in Blight et al., 1993a, p. 151).

To many members of the American delegation, these remarks of Lechuga, Risquet, and Escalante were indistinguishable from what was taken by some to be their unvarnished mud-slinging at the Antigua conference. Martin had tried to get across the point of view of the American government in the early 1960s, and he had done so effectively. But instead of providing facts regarding the kinds of activities mentioned by Martin, the Cubans responded only with accusations. The absence of interest in supplying facts to the discussion seemed to imply that the Cubans were, most implausibly, continuing to deny that they ever taken part in covert operations in the hemisphere. McNamara therefore responded to the outbursts by the Cubans by reiterating his original request for information about Cuban actions that the U.S. government felt, at the time, deserved a hostile response. He said, correctly, that "we haven't had one word on that subject" (quoted in Blight et al., 1993a, p. 155). The session ended with swords crossed. At lunch, the U.S. delegation agreed unanimously that if Castro did not respond to McNamara's and Martin's challenge in the afternoon session, they would terminate our participation.

The Cuban president did not disappoint. He first explained (unconvincingly) that he was previously unaware that he would be asked to speak about subjects not directly—in his opinion—connected with the subject of missiles in Cuba. But, he said defiantly, warming to the subject: "If there is any intention to put Cuba on trial, then Cuba will accept that trial, but it won't just be the October crisis. It will be Cuba before and after" (quoted in Blight et al., 1993a, p. 174). Castro then followed with a 1-hour critique of the four concerns as expressed by McNamara and Martin. Working from notes he had taken during their presentations, he dissected the Americans' remarks point by point, and with considerable animation. On the first three points—Cuba's relations with the Soviets, subversion, and hostile anti-U.S. rhetoric—Castro argued with considerable historical erudition that Cuban actions were all

defensive. This was much more than any of the other Cuban participants had admitted. Whereas in Moscow and Antigua and (thus far) in Havana, the Cubans held uniformly that they did nothing to provoke the United States, Castro now asserted that what the Cubans did (and they did quite a lot, he asserted), was done as a response to U.S. actions. It was a start, a good start.

On the critical issue of subversion or export of revolution, Castro got very specific:

We can admit that we would have liked to see a revolution in the rest of the countries [of Latin America]. ... What we did was support. We didn't export revolution, because the concept of exporting revolution is impossible and since, of course, in dealing with us there was no respect for any law or standards, as far as we were concerned, we felt that we had the right to support the revolutionary movement in the rest of the countries of Latin America where they were supporting the counterrevolutionary movement against Cuba. Because where did the Bay of Pigs invasion come from? Guatemala. Nicaragua. Where did the pirate attacks come from? From Costa Rica and other countries in the Caribbean, to attack Cuba, from the Dominican Republic. No one has mentioned the pirate attacks. They existed before and after the October crisis. So, what is the question, then? Did we support revolutionary movements? Do we admit it? Yes, we admit it. We supported the revolutionary movements. And I believe a country attacked and harassed as Cuba was then had every right to act the way it did, very simply. (quoted in Blight et al., 1993a, p. 182)

Castro then added, parenthetically, that "there's a new situation in Latin America. Have we changed? Yes, we've changed ... therefore that kind of activity by Cuba no longer exists" (quoted in Blight et al., 1993a, p. 182). This was one of several such interventions by Castro, each more detailed than the last, each drawing a distinction between Cuba's past support for subversion, and its new policy of friendship with all the countries of Latin America.

Castro's response to McNamara's fourth concern, the betrayal of a democratic revolution and the establishment of a dictatorship, was utterly defiant. He argued, in part, that Cuba has a democracy, a point no one on the U.S. delegation was willing to grant. He also argued that human rights, such as education and health care, should count heavily when one evaluates the human responsiveness of a political system. On this score, he asserted, credibly, Cuba is a leader in the hemisphere and indeed in the Third World. But he also heaped scorn on the very idea of the United States sitting in judgment of Cuba's internal political arrangements, then or now, and he localized his attack on the 30-year U.S. embargo (or economic blockade, as the Cubans call it) of the island:

There was no blockade for Pinochet, but there was a blockade of Cuba; no blockade against the military government Argentina, but a blockade against Cuba; no blockade against South Africa, there was no cessation of investments,

while our soldiers were fighting in Angola to fight for their liberation, to help the disappearance of Apartheid. Ask Mandela, the leader of the black South Africans—ask him his opinion of Cuba, and what his assessment of Cuba is, and how much he appreciates the blood shed by Cuba over there. ... So, then, you can't talk about morality or about a political philosophy when you have two sets of laws, two sets of principles, two standards. (quoted in Blight et al., 1993a, p. 184)

With that, Castro stated that he was ready to “talk about the October crisis again, unless you want to go on with the trial against Cuba” (quoted in Blight et al., 1993a, p. 185). Thus, on the concern with internal Cuban political arrangements, it was touché. Indeed, the issue remains the central intractable issue dividing Cuba from the United States.

Following Castro's “trial” intervention, there was no longer any talk in the American delegation of walking out of the conference. In fact, there was agreement that Castro had gotten their point, as embodied in McNamara's opening salvo. If, as the Cubans had demanded at the 1989 Moscow conference, the definition of the “missile crisis” was to be enlarged to include the period of the Bay of Pigs (April 1961) and the launching of Operation Mongoose (February 1962), both sides—Cubans and Americans—must come clean on their hemispheric activities designed to undermine the security of one another. Both sides must own up to the facts as they are known, justifying them or not as they might, to instruct each other regarding how their perceptions fit into the causal chain that would lead, by late October 1962 (as Gribkov said) “to the brink of a nuclear holocaust.”

Castro's main presentation on Cuban decision making regarding the Soviet missiles, the crisis itself and the aftermath, took place the following day. It lasted just over 2 hours and was a judicious presentation, making use of several theretofore secret documents, which Castro then declassified and released at the end of his presentation (Binder, 1992). It was a remarkable performance, in many ways, one that has already had the effect of putting Cuba and Cuban issues, for the first time, into the American understanding of the missile crisis (Lukas, 1992; Newhouse, 1992; Schlesinger, 1992). A putatively bilateral turning point in history has thus been shown to be thoroughly trilateral. An event whose danger has been held by many to have been mostly (or even entirely) imaginary has been shown to be, due to the situation on the island of Cuba, much more dangerous than anyone previously imagined. Most important for those of us who seek durable understandings from critical oral history, the causal linkage from relatively innocent, trilateral defensive actions to the verge of nuclear holocaust has been established in fine-grained, multifaceted detail.

Let us return to where we began, with Cohen's explanation as to “why we should stop studying the Cuban missile crisis” (Cohen, 1986, p. 3). The problem with the literature of October 1962, in his view, was that whatever

drama or romance one may derive from pondering the missile crisis, there is nothing in it for serious students of contemporary international affairs. According to Cohen:

If we accept the Cuban Missile Crisis as the paradigmatic political-military event of our age, we accept a host of assumptions: that the short dominates the long term; that conventional forces, like their nuclear counterparts, have utility only in nonuse; that we have no real enemies, but simply misunderstood, if ambivalent neighbors. (pp. 10-11)

This is the object of his scorn, the missile crisis of yore: lasting but 13 days, with one known casualty (an American pilot shot down over Cuba); and so frightening to the leaders of the superpowers that they have ever after understood the need for peaceful coexistence. That missile crisis may perhaps be thought of as something of a superpower confirmation or bar mitzvah, a nuclear coming of age in the nuclear age. Cohen would no doubt agree that, as with all such milestones, it is good and necessary that they happen but, in the nature of things, they only happen once.

But for participants in the critical oral history of the missile crisis, some funny things have happened on their way into October 1962. First, its duration must now be measured in years, even in decades, to capture its U.S.-Cuban dimension accurately. (At the Havana conference, Castro discussed events going back to the 19th century. Moreover, the crisis remains unresolved even today because the "five conditions" for settlement demanded by the Cubans in October 1962 remain unmet.) Second, far from being the bloodless scare it seemed formerly to be, we must admit into the picture tens of thousands of casualties from the covert action campaigns backed by the United States and Cuba before, during, and after October 1962. Moreover, the missile crisis has become the only episode of the nuclear age in which preparation for conventional warfare was significant and the use of nuclear weapons, tactical and strategic, was at various times seriously considered. Finally, we have discovered that the events of October 1962 can no longer be understood apart from the implacable hostility between the United States and Cuba since 1959, when the revolution came to power, and which still continues. (For example, Cuba is near the top of the U.S. Treasury Department's "Trading With the Enemy" list, while Cubans are presently building a tunnel system around the island in which to retreat, and from which to fight, during the anticipated U.S. invasion.)

What should we conclude from this surprising turnabout in the way we view the darkest hour of the nuclear age? That the missile crisis is an event for all seasons? Perhaps. Certainly, there is an eerie contemporary resonance in the tale of a small, beleaguered Third World nation, suddenly gaining access (of a sort) to weapons of mass destruction, having no history of their management or the theory of their alleged "utility," and becoming desperate enough in a crisis to want to use them. Substantively, therefore, we would do

well to look again at October 1962 for instruction as to how to proceed in our "new world disorder" (Blight & Belkin, 1993).

But methodologically, particularly for political psychologists, the "nuclear phenomenology" with which the missile crisis has been reexamined may be just as instructive. Proto-phenomenologist James once lamented "the same old story ... concepts, first employed to make things intelligible, are clung to often when they make them unintelligible" (James, 1909/1977b, p. 560). When this happens, according to James, what we need is a good dose of what he called *radical empiricism*, or what we who are involved in the critical oral history have called *nuclear phenomenology*. We must, said James, "turn our backs on our winged concepts altogether and busy ourselves in the thickness of the passing moments over which they fly" (James, 1909/1977a, p. 573). The Cuban Missile Crisis, widely believed as recently as 1986 to be simple, short, clean, salutary, and, alas, irrelevant has now been transformed in our understanding into a significant slice of an epoch: complex, immense, horribly violent, ongoing, and thus, (again) alas, highly relevant to the difficult security issues in the present moment.

When one considers how entrenched the old view of the missile crisis was just a few years ago, and how radically it has changed under the scrutiny of critical oral history, one wonders: what other events that we believe we understand, and that continue to inform our views on policy, derive more from our clever "winged concepts" than from historical reality? What other former adversaries might learn, in the crucible of critical oral history, to share the burden of responsibility for some of recent history's most contentious, dangerous, and just possibly, most instructive moments?

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