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# The Cuban Missile Crisis

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## Reader's guide

Lessons drawn from the Cuban Missile Crisis, or interpretations of it, continue to shape the thinking of American leaders, and others, about the risks of nuclear war, crisis confrontation, and foreign policy. The opening of extensive records, including tape recordings of most White House meetings and notes from previously secret files of many of the Soviet deliberations, makes it possible to reconstruct the calculations of both nations in addressing the three central questions: Why did the Soviet Union attempt to place offensive missiles in Cuba? Why did the USA choose to respond to the Soviet missile emplacement with a blockade of Cuba? Why did the Soviet Union decide to withdraw the missiles? These questions are tackled in the first part of the chapter. In the conceptual epilogue, the chapter provides readers with a précis of the three decision-making models first used in 1971 to examine the Cuban Missile Crisis in greater detail. Foreign policy students are urged to think critically about the predictability of foreign policy behaviour from rational, organizational, and governmental perspectives, and to apply their ideas to both the Cuban Missile Crisis and a host of other foreign policy dilemmas.<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

The Cuban Missile Crisis stands as a seminal event.<sup>2</sup> History offers no parallel to those thirteen days of October 1962, when the USA and the Soviet Union paused at the nuclear precipice. Never before had there been such a high probability that so many lives would end suddenly. Had war come, it could have meant the death of 100 million Americans and more than 100 million Russians, and millions of Europeans as well. Other catastrophes and inhumanities of history would have faded into insignificance. Given the odds of disaster—which President Kennedy estimated as ‘between one out of three and even’—our escape is staggering (Steel 1969: 22).

In retrospect, this crisis proved a major watershed in the Cold War. For thirteen days, the USA and the Soviet Union stood ‘eyeball to eyeball’, each with the power of mutual

destruction in hand. Having peered over the edge of the nuclear precipice, both nations edged backwards towards détente. Never again was the risk of war between them as great as it was during the last two weeks of October 1962. Thus an understanding of this crisis is essential for every serious student of foreign affairs.

## Operation Anadyr

American sources and newly available material from the Soviet Union now permit us to reconstruct the Soviet arms build-up that culminated in the conversion of Cuba into a major strategic missile base.<sup>3</sup>

The Soviet government first gave arms to Cuba in the autumn of 1959. The Soviets and Cubans negotiated the next phase of military assistance in early 1962. The Soviet Presidium approved Cuban requests for additional weapons in April 1962, and the Soviets resumed arms shipments at a markedly increased pace in late July. By 1 September, Soviet arms in Cuba included surface-to-air missiles, coastal defence Sopka cruise missiles, patrol boats armed with anti-ship missiles, and more than 5000 Soviet technicians and military personnel.

The first Soviet nuclear ballistic missiles reached Cuban soil on 8 September. The **medium range ballistic missiles** (MRBMs) were secretly transported to Cuba beneath the decks of Soviet ships.<sup>4</sup> Additional MRBMs, missile trailers, fuelling trucks, special radar vans, missile erectors, and nuclear warhead storage bunkers arrived and were rushed to construction sites. Similar equipment to set up longer-range **intermediate range ballistic missiles** (IRBMs) soon followed. Unknown to the USA, Cuba received nuclear warheads for the MRBMs on 4 October, along with dozens of nuclear warheads for the Sopka coastal defence cruise missiles, six nuclear bombs for IL-28 medium jet bombers, and twelve nuclear warheads for short-range tactical nuclear rockets. (See Figure 14.1.)

The final decision to put missiles in Cuba was made in the Soviet Presidium, but the details of the operation—that is, the path from the general decision to the actual appearance of operational missiles in Cuba—were delegated to appropriate Soviet organizations. Standard Soviet operations, particularly where nuclear weapons were involved, imposed secrecy beyond anything approached in the American government. Secrecy deprived each organization of information about other organizations and made it impossible to keep the whole operation in view. Forced to take a narrower perspective, each organization tended to ‘do what it knows how to’.

The clandestine shipping, unloading, and delivery of the missiles to the construction sites was a major organizational success, eluding all methods of detection until missiles were deployed in the field. This part of **Operation Anadyr** was planned by a specially created subunit of the operations branch of the Soviet General Staff, working closely with Soviet intelligence agencies. But once the weapons and equipment arrived in Cuba, the Group of Soviet Forces in Cuba took over.

At the sites, each team did what it knew how to—emplace missiles—literally according to the book. They had never installed MRBMs or IRBMs outside the Soviet Union before Cuba. A serious effort to camouflage the operation was possible. However, the units constructing the missiles had no routine for camouflage, never having camouflaged construction activity



**Figure 14.1** Missile range map

Source: Reprinted by permission of the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, MA.

in the Soviet Union. Moreover, the command had two competing goals: to be ready for action and to conceal its activity. The field organization had to choose which had priority. Camouflage would have created extreme discomfort for people working under the netting or plastic covers in the tropical heat. Working stealthily at night would have slowed the pace of construction and put the work even further behind schedule. An intelligence agency would probably have made a different choice, but a field organization in the business of deploying missiles could be expected to focus first on completion of preparation for possible combat, particularly when that directive came with a deadline.

When Gribkov, one of the Soviet staff planners, arrived in Cuba on 18 October to inspect the work, General Issa Pliyev, the Group of Forces commander, had some bad news: the missiles had very probably been discovered by the Americans. A U-2 had flown over the areas where the missiles were deployed on 14 October. Soviet air defences had observed the

overflights but had taken no action. There had been more overflights on 15 and 17 October, which presumably were observed too.

Why were the U-2 flights not fired upon? Surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) were operational. But, Gribkov recalled, 'Moscow had sent them to Cuba to defend against air attack, not actual espionage. With no invasion thought imminent, the SAM commanders were not even allowed to use their radars to track your spy planes overhead' (Gribkov and Smith 1994: 58). Gribkov apparently had no inkling of Khrushchev's reported desire to use the SAMs against prying U-2s, despite the fact that Khrushchev himself had made sure that SAMs would go to Cuba before the missiles, to be ready to protect Cuban skies against overflying U-2s (Fursenko and Naftali 1997: 192-4). Pliyev was presumably equally ignorant. Standing orders to air defence units told them to fire only if attacked, perhaps to avoid provoking any incident or unwanted attention before everything was ready. The standing orders were undoubtedly written by someone who was not present when Khrushchev expressed his concerns, so the Soviet leader's intentions never entered the operational directives to the relevant implementing organizations.

There is evidence that, on 14 October, Pliyev suspected that the missiles had been discovered. On 18 October, Gribkov was told about this suspicion. But there is no evidence that the 'Soviet government' learned of these suspicions. Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko met with Kennedy on 18 October and saw no sign that the Americans knew what was going on, confidently predicting that 'a USA military adventure against Cuba is almost impossible to imagine' (Gromyko 1995: 66-7). The Kremlin did not start seriously worrying about the American discovery of the missiles until 22 October, when they heard the news bulletins advertising Kennedy's forthcoming television address to the nation (Fursenko and Naftali 1997: 237-38, 242).

On 22 October, worried that Kennedy was about to announce an invasion of Cuba, the Presidium actually drafted an instruction authorizing Pliyev to use tactical nuclear weapons to repel it. Only after Soviet Defence Minister Malinovsky warned that the Americans might intercept the message and therefore use nuclear weapons first did the Kremlin step back to more conservative instructions directing Pliyev not to use the nuclear weapons without authorization from Moscow (Fursenko and Naftali 1997: 241-3; Kramer 1996-1997: 348-9).

Yet until the message from Moscow arrived, 'the tactical weapons were Pliyev's to deploy and, if he were cut off from contact with Moscow, to use as a last resort' (Gribkov and Smith 1994: 63). On 26 October, acting on his own authority, Pliyev ordered the movement of a number of nuclear warheads closer to the missiles that would carry them. Pliyev then reported his move to his superiors in Moscow. Unsettled, they sharply reminded him that he must wait for central authorization before using any weapons. But there were no technical safeguards to physically prevent nuclear use by field units. They relied instead on Pliyev's obedience.

The Americans did not even know that Soviet forces in Cuba had tactical nuclear weapons until late in the crisis. The American 'planners saw no sense in the island's defenders employing battlefield atomic weapons and thereby risking escalation' (Gribkov and Smith 1994: 141). Yet on 22 October, Khrushchev contemplated announcing not only that tactical nuclear weapons were lodged in Cuba, but that they were being turned over to Castro and the Cubans who would declare their readiness to use them against attack (Gribkov and Smith 1994: 28). Fortunately, Khrushchev reconsidered.

## Why missiles in: four hypotheses

When, on 15–16 October, Kennedy and his advisers were informed that the USA had discovered Soviet **ballistic missiles** in Cuba, the President and most of his advisers were shocked. What Kennedy called ‘this secret, swift, and extraordinary build-up of communist missiles’ posed troubling questions indeed. Why did the Soviet Union undertake such a reckless move? What Soviet objective could justify a course of action with such a high probability of nuclear confrontation? Kennedy’s senior advisers considered these questions when they convened at 11:50 a.m. on Tuesday, 16 October. Their discussion focused on four principal hypotheses.

### Hypothesis one: Cuban defence

An analyst who knew nothing about the Soviet Union, except that it was a powerful country and that one of its important allies, Cuba, was at risk of attack by a large threatening neighbour, might infer that the powerful country would come to the aid of its weak friend. One of the first memos the CIA produced after the discovery of missiles in Cuba explained: ‘The Soviet leaders’ decision to deploy ballistic missiles to Cuba testifies to their determination to deter any active US intervention to weaken or overthrow the Castro regime, which they apparently regard as likely and imminent’ (McAuliffe 1992: 141). Although the 1961 effort to invade Cuba with a force of CIA-trained Cuban exiles had failed disastrously, the Soviet Union had substantial reason to believe that the USA might return to do the job right.

Certainly Khrushchev and other Soviet officials defended the deployment of Soviet arms to Cuba in 1962 in just these terms, arguing that Soviet aid to Cuba was ‘exclusively designed to improve Cuba’s defensive capacity’ (Larson 1986: 72). In support of the Cuban defence hypothesis, it is clear that Cuba was surely on Khrushchev’s mind.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, for the Soviet General Staff, Khrushchev’s plan ‘was like a roll of thunder in a clear sky’ (Gribkov and Smith 1994: 13). The only options they had examined relied on conventional arms alone.

Although persuasive, attempts to explain Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba with the Cuban defence hypothesis will not withstand careful examination. If **deterrence**, meaning the prevention of a major attack, had been the objective, the presence of a sizeable contingent of Soviet troops would have been a better solution. If for some reason the Soviets believed that a nuclear deterrent was necessary, tactical nuclear weapons (i.e. weapons with a range of less than 100 miles) were available that could have been emplaced more quickly, at less cost, and with considerably less likelihood of being discovered before they were ready. In the end, Castro did accept longer-range missiles, but he worried that the deployment could provoke an intense crisis. So a final problem with the Cuban defence hypothesis is that the move actually made Cuba’s position more, not less, perilous.

### Hypothesis two: Cold War politics

The defining feature of the **Cold War** was the global competition between American and Soviet values and interests. Whenever one side lost, the other gained—and was seen to do so by others around the world. A rival might seize the opportunity to display the extent of its global power, especially so near its enemy’s shores.

President Kennedy fell back on just this hypothesis of global politics when he responded to Defense Secretary Robert McNamara's initial assessment that the Soviet missiles in Cuba had little military significance. 'Last month,' Kennedy speculated, 'I said we weren't going to [allow it]. Last month I should have said that we don't care. But when we said we're *not* going to, and then they go ahead and do it, and then we do nothing, then I would think that our risks increase . . . After all, this is a political struggle as much as military' (May and Zelikow 1997: 92).

Intelligence experts around the government joined a few days later, estimating that '[a] major Soviet objective in their military buildup in Cuba is to demonstrate that the world balance of forces has shifted so far in their favor that the U.S. can no longer prevent the advance of Soviet **offensive power** even into its own hemisphere' (US Intelligence Board 1962: 214). If the USA accepted the build-up, it would lose the confidence of its allies in Latin America and around the world. Secretary of State Dean Rusk concluded that 'the hard line boys have moved into the ascendancy. So one of the things that we have to be concerned about is not just the missiles, but the entire development of Soviet policy as it affects our situation around the globe' (May and Zelikow 1997: 255).

Kennedy felt such global stakes keenly. On 21 October, Arthur Schlesinger Jr asked Kennedy why the Soviets had put missiles in Cuba. Kennedy gave three reasons. First, the Soviet Union would demonstrate that it was capable of bold action in support of a communist revolution, impressing China and healing a split between Moscow and Beijing that had widened since 1959. Second, the Soviets would radically redefine the context of the Berlin



The Cuban leader Fidel Castro giving a speech.

Source: © PA photos.

problem. Third, the Soviet Union would deal the USA a tremendous political blow (Schlesinger 1965: 742).

Despite the persuasiveness of Cold War arguments, this hypothesis ignores five key aspects of the situation. First, as Robert McNamara wondered publicly on several occasions, why did the Soviet Union need to probe the firmness of American intentions after the strong American stand on Berlin in 1961? Second, the size and character of the Soviet deployment went well beyond a mere political probe. To challenge American intentions and firmness, even a few MRBMs threatening the entire southeastern USA (including Washington) should suffice. What could the IRBMs or the planned deployment of submarine-launched ballistic missiles possibly add to the achievement of this objective? Third, the deployment of MRBMs and IRBMs, plus plans for a nuclear submarine base, jeopardized the essential requirement for a successful move on the Cold War chessboard, namely that it be a *fait accompli*. A small tailored nuclear deployment that became operational *before* it was discovered could have given the Soviet Union a Cuban enclave no less defensible than the Western enclave in Berlin. But the specific features of the deployment undermined this objective.

Fourth, the question of timing: Why launch such a provocative probe of American intentions at that moment, in the autumn of 1962? Was there some particular reason to try and humble the Americans at that particular time? What tangible gains could justify the risks? This remains unclear. Finally, why choose Cuba as the location of the probe? At no point on the globe outside the continental USA were the Soviets so militarily disadvantaged *vis-à-vis* the USA as in the Caribbean. If the Soviet probe provoked a forceful American riposte, a vivid Soviet defeat would make the whole venture counterproductive.

### Hypothesis three: missile power

At the first meeting with his advisers, on the morning of 16 October, President Kennedy speculated that the **strategic balance of power** motivated the Soviet Union. 'Must be some major reason for the Russians to set this up,' he mused. 'Must be that they're not satisfied with their ICBMs.' Maxwell Taylor, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, thought that Kennedy's guess was on target (May and Zelikow 1997: 59).

Objectively, the Soviet Union faced a serious and widening 'window of vulnerability'.<sup>6</sup> In 1962 the Soviet government found itself with only twenty **intercontinental ballistic missiles** (ICBMs) capable of launching nuclear weapons that could reach American territory from bases inside the Soviet Union. The Soviets also had well-founded doubts about the technical reliability and accuracy of these missiles. In addition, Soviet strategic forces included 200 long-range bombers and only six submarines with **submarine-launched ballistic missiles** (SLBMs). The American strategic nuclear arsenal in 1962 was substantially more robust, consisting of at least 180 ICBMs, twelve Polaris submarines (each carrying twelve missiles), and 630 strategic bombers stationed in the USA, Europe, and Asia, from which they could attack Soviet targets from all angles. This arsenal was rapidly being expanded by the Kennedy administration.

A clear-eyed strategic analyst could quite reasonably conclude that in 1962 the Soviet Union had a problem. Moving their existing nuclear weapons to locations from which they could reach American targets was one option. As one of the staff planners, General Gribkov, later wrote, 'In one stroke he [Khrushchev] could readdress the imbalance in strategic nuclear



forces' (Gribkov and Smith 1994: 13). Soviet missiles placed in Cuba would also outflank America's existing systems for early warning which were oriented towards the Arctic and other flight routes from the USSR.

There are two major objections to the missile power hypothesis. First, why did Khrushchev feel such extraordinary urgency to redress the strategic balance, rather than wait to develop his ICBM force into something more formidable? Second, why was Khrushchev willing to run such extraordinary risks to solve this problem? Director of Central Intelligence John McCone argued that Khrushchev had some great political prize in mind elsewhere in the world, and that he would use the missiles in Cuba in order to win it (McAuliffe 1992: 95).

#### **Hypothesis four: Berlin—win, trade, or trap**

President Kennedy was not satisfied with the missile power hypothesis, and wondered aloud to his advisers: 'If it doesn't increase very much their strategic strength, why is it—can any Russian expert tell us—why they . . . ?' (May and Zelikow 1997: 106). For Kennedy, a more plausible answer dawned on him shortly afterward. It must be Berlin. Khrushchev would use the missiles to solve the Berlin problem—on his terms. As a prelude to a confrontation over Berlin, Khrushchev's manoeuvre made sense. If the Americans did nothing, Khrushchev would force the West out of Berlin, confident that the missiles in Cuba would deter the Americans from starting a war. If the Americans tried to bargain, the terms would be a trade of Cuba and Berlin. Since Berlin was immeasurably more important than Cuba, that trade would also be a win for Khrushchev. If the Americans blockaded or attacked Cuba, Khrushchev could then use this as the excuse for an equivalent blockade or attack on Berlin. 'So that whatever we do in regard to Cuba,' Kennedy said, 'it gives him the chance to do the same with regard to Berlin' (May and Zelikow 1997: 256). Worse yet, Kennedy thought, America's European allies would then blame the loss of Berlin on the USA, since they would not understand why America felt the need to attack Cuba. The Alliance would be split and again Moscow would be the winner. In bargaining terms, Kennedy admired Khrushchev's move. 'The advantage is, from Khrushchev's point of view, he takes a great chance but there are quite some rewards to it' (May and Zelikow 1997: 256).<sup>7</sup>

#### **The four hypotheses reviewed**

Against this backdrop, the missile power and Berlin hypotheses offer the most satisfactory explanation of the thinking behind the Soviet move to send nuclear missiles to Cuba. Khrushchev would gain a quick and relatively cheap boost to Soviet missile power, and the Berlin crisis might be pressed to a successful conclusion. Foreign policy triumph in hand, Khrushchev could return to his hopes for Soviet domestic renewal, now better able to move resources from defence and heavy industry to the needs of his people. 'The Cuban missile venture,' Richter concludes, 'offered him the prospect, however slim, that he could emerge from this situation and salvage his already declining authority' (Richter 1994: 150).

But it must be acknowledged that the missile power and Berlin hypotheses, as well as the others considered above, fail to account for many other features of what the Soviets actually did. First, each of the four hypotheses assumes that the Soviet decision to emplace missiles



necessarily led to a plan for *implementing* that decision, by installing air defences first to protect the bases and deter photographic reconnaissance, and then sending in nuclear weapons. But Soviet actions seemed inconsistent with this plan. It appeared to the Americans that the MRBMs were installed *before* the cover of SAMs was in place. Kennedy's adviser and speechwriter, Theodore Sorensen, expressed forcefully the bewilderment of the White House over this fact: 'Why the Soviets failed to coordinate this timing is still inexplicable' (Sorensen 1965: 673). We now know that in fact the Soviet Union did install the air defence cover on time, before the missiles were put in place, in order to shield the missiles from being discovered. Why, then, did the Soviet forces in Cuba permit the U-2 to fly over Cuba and spot the missiles?

Khrushchev's grand plan for unveiling his *fait accompli* presents a second difficulty. He planned to visit the USA and announce the true situation in the second half of November. Presumably by then the installation of the missiles would be complete. But even on the round-the-clock construction schedule adopted after the US announcement that the missiles had been discovered, only the MRBMs would be in place. The IRBM complexes would not have achieved operational readiness until December (McAuliffe 1992: 237). This further failure of coordination is difficult to understand.

A third puzzle arises over the Soviet omission of camouflage at the missile sites. At the White House meeting on the evening of 16 October, the intelligence briefer explained that they could spot the launchers, in part because 'they have a four-in-line deployment pattern . . . which is identical . . . representative of the deployments that we note in the Soviet Union for similar missiles' (Carter, in May and Zelikow 1997: 79). But a Soviet desire to be found out hardly squares with the extensive and effective camouflage and deception that shielded the transport of the missiles to Cuba and then from the docks to the sites.

Finally, why did the Soviet Union persist in the face of Kennedy's repeated warnings? Khrushchev did not ask his ambassador in Washington or any other known experts on the USA for a considered analysis of their judgement. Foreign Minister Gromyko later wrote that he had warned Khrushchev privately that 'putting our missiles in Cuba would cause a political explosion in the USA' (Gromyko 1989). According to Gromyko's account, Khrushchev was simply unmoved by this advice. Ambassador Dobrynin later complained that Khrushchev 'grossly misunderstood the psychology of his opponents. Had he asked the embassy beforehand, we could have predicted the violent American reaction to his adventure once it became known. It is worth noting that Castro understood this . . . But Khrushchev wanted to spring a surprise on Washington; it was he who got the surprise in the end when his secret plan was uncovered' (Dobrynin 1995: 79–80).

## Why American blockade

According to Robert Kennedy, 'the fourteen people involved were very significant—bright, able, dedicated people, all of whom had the greatest affection for the US . . . If six of them had been President of the US, I think that the world might have been blown up' (Steel 1969: 22). The men advising President Kennedy differed sharply about what should be done. Given the difficulty of the challenges they confronted and the differences in their jobs and backgrounds, who should expect otherwise?

After discovering ballistic missiles in Cuba, the American government organized its crisis decision making around an informally selected inner circle of advisers who met either at the White House or at the State Department from 16 to 19 October. This process assumed a more regular formal quality in successive meetings of the National Security Council on 20, 21, and 22 October. The decision makers then narrowed again to an inner circle designed as the Executive Committee of the National Security Council, also known as the 'ExComm'. They met at the White House for the duration of the crisis. Because of the centrality of this crisis to the presidency of John F. Kennedy, evidence about what members of the US government were seeing, doing, and even thinking is much greater than for most events. With the publication of the secret tapes and most of the classified documents of the crisis, one can follow the perceptions and preferences of individual players with more confidence than usual. Unfortunately, even with the new evidence about the Soviet side of the equation, the Soviet decision-making process remains more opaque.

On Monday, 15 October, just as he finished delivering a speech to the National Press Club addressing the Soviet activity in Cuba and arguing that the build-up was 'basically defensive in character', Assistant Secretary of State Edwin Martin received a phone call. The caller informed Martin that offensive missiles had been discovered in Cuba. The U-2 photographs presented conclusive evidence of Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba.

Kennedy was determined to stand fast. To fail to act forcibly could produce a number of undesirable outcomes. First, it would undermine the confidence of the members of his administration, especially those who in previous weeks had so firmly defended his policy towards Cuba. Second, it would convince the rest of the government that the administration had no leader, encouraging others to challenge his policies and destroying his reputation in Congress. Weakness in the face of the crisis would cut the ground from under fellow Democrats who were standing for re-election on Kennedy's Cuban policy. Failing to act forcibly would also drive the public to doubt Kennedy's word and his will, deepen dismay over the Bay of Pigs, and shake Kennedy's confidence in his own leadership. The entire circle of pressures to which Kennedy as a president had to be responsive pushed him in a single direction—vigorous action.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) wanted an invasion to eliminate this threat. But their new chairman, Maxwell Taylor, wanted to gather more intelligence, pull it all together in the next few days while no one knew the missiles had been discovered, and then take the missiles, the bombers and MiG-21 aircraft, and the SAMs 'right out with one hard crack'. He estimated that it would take about five days to do the complete job from the air (May and Zelikow 1997: 342).

For Dean Rusk, the Secretary of State, the initial issues were diplomatic. His main suggestion was to try to get Castro himself to push the Soviets out. Rusk wanted to warn the Cuban leader that the Soviets were putting his regime in mortal danger and would in the end happily sell him out for a victory in Berlin. Kennedy thought that the proposal had no prospect, and no one outside the State Department spoke up for it.

For Secretary of Defense McNamara, the missiles were principally a political problem. In his view, the overall nuclear balance would not be significantly affected by the Soviet deployment. Therefore, at the start, McNamara was sceptical about the need for military action. He argued that no US air strike could be considered if the Soviet missiles in Cuba were operational and therefore could be launched in a retaliatory strike against the USA. McNamara raised the idea of *blockading* future weapons shipments to Cuba, but his suggestion did

nothing about the missiles already deployed there except to warn the Soviets not to use them. 'Now, this alternative doesn't seem to be a very acceptable one,' he allowed. 'But wait until you work on the others' (May and Zelikow 1997: 113–14).

McGeorge Bundy, the National Security Adviser, was uncharacteristically reticent. Two days later, on 18 October, he advocated taking no action, fearing that the Soviets would retaliate in kind against Berlin. Then the next day, after agonizing further over the question, Bundy changed his mind again and supported an air strike against the missiles.

By 19 October, other positions had hardened. UN ambassador Adlai Stevenson joined McNamara in the ranks of the sceptics. McCone favoured Taylor's plan for an air strike. New overflights revealed for the first time that IRBMs had also been shipped to Cuba. This news tipped Taylor to join his JCS colleagues in support of an invasion to follow up the air strikes. Former Secretary of State Dean Acheson supported an air strike, but called for a narrow strike against the missile sites only, ignoring the Soviet bombers, fighter-bombers, and anti-aircraft units. Robert Kennedy and Rusk objected that any American surprise attack would be immoral, comparing it to Pearl Harbor.

But the most telling argument for President Kennedy, which he repeated in days to come, was the one he outlined for his subordinates on 18 October. An attack on Cuba would cause a retaliatory attack on Berlin which in return would instantly present Kennedy with no meaningful military option but nuclear retaliation. 'So' he said, musing aloud, 'the question really is what action we take which lessens the chances of a nuclear exchange, which obviously is the prime failure' (May and Zelikow 1997: 149, 145).

It is clear from Kennedy's taped recapitulation of a White House meeting on the night of 18 October and from the arguments he made to the unconvinced Joint Chiefs of Staff the next morning that the President was turning away from a surprise strike on the missiles (May and Zelikow 1997:171–2, 175–87). This left the intermediate option of the blockade originally broached by McNamara.

On the morning of 19 October President Kennedy met with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and found them adamant in support of an immediate air attack against Cuba that would retain the military advantages of surprise. Air Force chief of staff Curtis LeMay, confident of his own political base of support on Capitol Hill, was boldest in confronting the President. 'This blockade and political action, I see leading into war. I don't see any other solution. It will lead right into war. This is almost as bad as the appeasement at Munich' (May and Zelikow 1997: 178). Opinion was still generally divided between a blockade and an immediate air strike, with McNamara emerging as the chief advocate of a blockade–negotiate option. President Kennedy returned for a decisive White House meeting on 20 October, where McNamara presented the blockade–negotiate approach. Following the blockade, he said, the USA would negotiate for the removal of missiles from Turkey and Italy and talk about closing the US base at **Guantanamo** in Cuba. McNamara opposed an ultimatum demanding the removal of the missiles, saying it was too risky (US Department of State 1996: 126–36). Taylor, supported by Bundy, presented the case for an air strike to begin two days later on Monday, 22 October. Robert Kennedy agreed with Taylor that the present moment was the last chance to destroy Castro and the Soviet missiles in Cuba. Sorensen, who was sympathetic to the blockade–negotiation approach, disagreed.

Robert Kennedy then argued for a 'combination of the blockade route and the air strike route'. The blockade would be coupled with an ultimatum demanding removal of the

missiles. If the Russians did not comply, the USA would proceed with an air strike. That, he explained, would get away from the Pearl Harbor surprise attack problem. Dillon and McCone then supported this option. Dillon suggested a 72-hour interval between the demand and action; McCone agreed (US Department of State 1996: 126–36). Rusk suggested a fourth option of a blockade. Instead of an ultimatum or an offer to trade US assets, the objective could simply be to freeze the situation. The Soviet missile installations in Cuba would be monitored by UN observation teams.

President Kennedy first sharply ruled out the blockade–negotiation variant, feeling that such action would convey to the world that the USA had been frightened into abandoning its positions. He then ruled in favour of the blockade–ultimatum option, urging that any air strike be limited only to the missile sites. The strike was to be ready by 23 October. The group also agreed that the blockade would be narrowly focused on Soviet arms deliveries, not on all shipments of vital supplies such as oil. Kennedy overruled suggestions that the blockade should be extended to the necessities of life in Cuba, reasoning that the Soviets might be less likely to reciprocate with an identical blockade of Berlin and the danger of an escalation to war would be reduced (May and Zelikow 1997: 237). The basic decision was made.

In the speech draft the next day, Kennedy sided further with the blockade–ultimatum faction. He removed an invitation to Khrushchev to come to a summit meeting to talk about the crisis. First they would see how Khrushchev dealt with the missiles in Cuba. We ‘should be clear that we would accept nothing less than the ending of the missile capacity now in Cuba, no reinforcement of that capacity, and no further construction of missile sites’ (US Department of State 1996: 126–36). The proposed blockade had several advantages. First, it was a middle course between inaction and attack—aggressive enough to communicate firmness of intention, but not as precipitous as a strike. Indeed, no possible military confrontation could be more acceptable to the USA than a naval engagement in the Caribbean. A naval blockade on the American doorstep appeared invincible. By flexing its conventional muscles, a blockade also permitted the USA to exploit the threat of subsequent non-nuclear steps in which the it would enjoy significant local superiority. Lastly, a blockade placed on Khrushchev the burden of choice for the next step. He could avoid a direct military clash simply by keeping his ships away.

At 7 p.m. on 22 October 1962, President Kennedy delivered the major foreign policy address of his career. Disclosing the American discovery of the presence of Soviet strategic missiles in Cuba, the President declared a ‘strict quarantine on all offensive military equipment under shipment to Cuba’ and demanded that ‘Chairman Khrushchev halt and eliminate this clandestine, reckless, and provocative threat to world peace’ (Larson 1962: 59–63). (See Box 14.1.)

The blockade began on the morning of 24 October, 500 miles off the coast of Cuba. The first Soviet ships carrying weapons would pass that line during the night of 23–24 October and, under this plan, they would be intercepted at dawn so that the American navy could conduct operations in daylight. The first Soviet ships approached the quarantine line on Wednesday 24 October, but halted and turned around just before challenging it.

## Why Soviet withdrawal of missiles from Cuba

President Kennedy’s announcement of the blockade emphasized that it was an *initial* step in a series of moves that threatened air strikes or invasion. No attempt was made to disguise the massive build-up of more than 200,000 invasion troops in Florida. Hundreds of US tactical



President Kennedy signs the Proclamation for the Interdiction of the Delivery of Offensive Weapons to Cuba.

Source: Photograph by Abbie Rowe in the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston, MA.

#### BOX 14.1 Excerpt from JFK's address to the American people, 22 October 1962

My fellow citizens, let no one doubt that this is a difficult and dangerous effort on which we have set out. No one can foresee precisely what course it will take or what costs or casualties will be incurred. Many months of sacrifice and self-discipline lie ahead—months in which both our patience and our will will be tested, months in which many threats and denunciations will keep us aware of our dangers. But the greatest danger of all would be to do nothing.

The path we have chosen for the present is full of hazards, as all paths are; but it is the one most consistent with our character and courage as a nation and our commitments around the world. The cost of freedom is always high—but Americans have always paid it. And one path we shall never choose, and that is the path of surrender or submission.

Source: R.F. Kennedy (1969), *Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: W.W. Norton), paragraphs 29 and 30, p. 171.

fighters moved to airports within easy striking distance of targets in Cuba. On 27 October, McNamara called twenty-four troop-carrier squadrons of the Air Force Reserve to active duty—approximately 14,000 men.

After hearing Kennedy's plans to address the American people, the Kremlin plunged into its own crisis deliberations. Unlike Kennedy, Khrushchev continued to rely upon his normal



foreign policy process, consulting a small group of Presidium members aided by the defence and foreign ministers and the leading international expert from the Communist Party's Central Committee staff. When a formal decision was needed, Khrushchev convened the full Presidium.

Deliberations began with news of the impending Kennedy speech. Not yet knowing what Kennedy would say, Khrushchev feared the worst, namely that the Americans would simply attack Cuba. Therefore Kennedy's blockade announcement was greeted not with fear, but with relief by the Soviet leadership which considered it a weaker response that left room for political manoeuvre. The next day they issued a flat unyielding response to Kennedy's demands. Khrushchev's message to Kennedy on 24 October was defiant.

By the morning of 25 October, the Soviet leadership had received a tough terse reply to Khrushchev's defiant pronouncement of the previous day. Kennedy wrote, 'It was not I who issued the first challenge in this case'. Kennedy underscored his 'hope that your government will take the necessary action to permit a restoration of the earlier situation' (May and Zelikow 1997: 421). Khrushchev reconvened the Presidium. He switched to a tone of conciliation. He was ready, he said, to 'dismantle the missiles to make Cuba into a zone of peace'. He suggested the following: 'Give us a pledge not to invade Cuba, and we will remove the missiles'. He was also prepared to allow UN inspection of the missile sites. First, though, he wanted to be able to 'look around' and be sure that Kennedy really would not yield (Fursenko and Naftali 1997: 240–3). Khrushchev was stirred to action the next day by a series of intelligence reports, some false and based on little more than rumour, warning of imminent American military action against Cuba (Fursenko and Naftali 1997 257–8, 260–2). Khrushchev promptly sent instructions to accept UN Secretary-General U Thant's proposal for avoiding a confrontation at the quarantine line, promising to keep Soviet ships away from this line. He also dictated a long personal letter to Kennedy suggesting a peaceful resolution of the crisis. In the letter, he stated that if the USA promised not to invade Cuba, 'the necessity for the presence of our military specialists in Cuba would disappear' (Fursenko and Naftali 1997: 263). (See Box 14.2.)

For reasons that are still obscure, Khrushchev came to a judgement on 27 October that the Americans could be pushed harder. Perhaps he misjudged US resolve because of the way that the Americans were failing to enforce the quarantine. Khrushchev convened the Presidium and explained that he thought that the Americans would no longer dare attack Cuba. 'It is necessary to take into consideration that the United States did not attack Cuba.' Five days had passed since Kennedy's speech and nothing had happened. 'To my mind they are not ready to do it now.' Khrushchev would send another letter on Saturday, making a more concrete offer that acknowledged the presence of missiles in Cuba but which demanded that the USA withdraw its missiles in Turkey into the bargain. With that, 'we would win', he said (Fursenko and Naftali 1997: 274).

Khrushchev's manoeuvre created a significant problem. The lengthy discursive personal 'Friday letter' suggesting the withdrawal of Soviet missiles for a non-invasion pledge was sent secretly and was considered by the ExComm in secret. The 'Saturday letter' not only changed the terms of the deal, adding a new demand—the withdrawal of Turkish missiles as well—but it did so in a *public* message, making it politically impossible for Khrushchev's American counterparts to accept this compromise.

Kennedy had no difficulty accepting the terms proposed by Khrushchev's Friday letter: pledging not to invade Cuba if missiles were dismantled. But how to answer Saturday's

**BOX 14.2 Excerpts from Khrushchev's letters to JFK (26 October 1962) during the crisis<sup>1</sup>**

You are worried over Cuba. You say that it worries you because it lies at a distance of ninety miles across the sea from the shores of the USA. However, Turkey lies next to us. Our sentinels are pacing up and down and watching each other. Do you believe that you have the right to demand security for your country and the removal of such weapons that you qualify as offensive, while not recognizing this right for us?

You have stationed devastating rocket weapons, which you call offensive, in Turkey literally right next to us. How then does recognition of our equal military possibilities tally with such unequal relations between our great states? This does not tally at all.

Source: R.F. Kennedy (1969), *Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: W.W. Norton), paragraphs 6 and 7, p.198.

<sup>1</sup> On Friday 26 October, Khrushchev sent two letters to President Kennedy. The first, not made public, apparently took the 'soft' line that Russia would remove its missiles from Cuba in return for ending the US quarantine and assurances that the USA would not invade Cuba. The second took a harder line in seeking the removal of US missiles in Turkey in return for taking Russian missiles out of Cuba. [A notation from *Congressional Quarterly*]

proposal to trade NATO missiles in Turkey for Soviet missiles in Cuba—that was the problem. The USA could simply reject it, as many members of the ExComm urged. But Kennedy found that unacceptable. Kennedy judged that 'we're going to be in an insupportable position [if we reject Khrushchev's proposition] . . . It is going to—to any man at the UN or any other rational man—it will look like a very fair trade' (May and Zelikow 1997: 498).

If, on the other hand, the USA traded NATO missiles in Turkey for Soviet missiles in Cuba, what would be the consequences for the NATO Alliance and for American commitments elsewhere? As Bundy argued, a trade would make it 'clear that we were trying to sell out our allies for our interests. This would be the view of all NATO. Now, it's irrational and crazy, but it is a *terribly* powerful fact' (May and Zelikow 1997: 500). The struggle to avoid being impaled on one horn or the other of this dilemma made Saturday's deliberation the most intense and difficult of the crisis. As Sorensen recalled: 'our little group, seated around the Cabinet table in continuous session that Saturday felt nuclear war to be closer on that day than at any time in the nuclear age' (Sorensen 1965: 714).

Before the USA had to make the final decisions about military action, Khrushchev moved. Warning signs of imminent combat in Cuba arrived in Moscow during the day of 27 October, waking Khrushchev from his apparent complacency. A message arrived from Castro to Khrushchev. In it, Castro asserted that an American attack in the next twenty-four to seventy-two hours was 'almost inevitable'—probably a massive air strike but possibly an invasion. If the Americans did invade, Castro urged Khrushchev to consider the 'elimination of such a danger', plainly referring to the use of Soviet nuclear weapons against the Americans. 'However difficult and horrifying this decision may be,' Castro wrote, 'there is, I believe, no other recourse' (Castro, in *Cold War International History Project*: 1962). Air defences in Cuba then began shooting at American reconnaissance aircraft, and an American U-2 was shot down by Soviet SAMs in Cuba and its pilot was killed. Khrushchev was unnerved by Castro's message. A few days later, in another message to Castro, Khrushchev referred to this 'very alarming' message in which 'you proposed that we be the first to carry out a nuclear strike



against the enemy's territory'. 'Naturally,' Khrushchev added, 'you understand where that would lead us. It would not be a simple strike, but the start of a thermonuclear world war' (Khrushchev, President's Office Files, 30 October 1962).

Kennedy asked Robert Kennedy and Theodore Sorensen to compose a response to Khrushchev. At 8 p.m., the public message to Khrushchev was simultaneously transmitted to Moscow and released to the press. According to this letter, 'The first thing that needs to be done is for *work to cease* on offensive missile bases in Cuba, and for all weapons systems in Cuba capable of offensive use to be rendered inoperable, under effective UN arrangements' (May and Zelikow 1997: 604). On the Turkish question, the letter said only that 'if the first proposition were accepted, the effects of such a settlement on easing world tensions would enable us to work towards a more general agreement regarding other armaments as proposed in your second letter which you made public' (May and Zelikow 1997: 604).

Kennedy then invited a small group to join him in the Oval Office to discuss the message that Robert Kennedy would convey personally to Ambassador Dobrynin. McGeorge Bundy summarized that meeting as follows:

One part of the oral message we discussed was simple, stern, and quickly decided—that the time had come to agree on the basis set out in the President's new letter: no Soviet missiles in Cuba, and no US invasion. Otherwise, further American action was unavoidable. . . . The other part of the oral message was . . . that we should tell Khrushchev that while there could be no deal over Turkish missiles, the President was determined to get them out and would do so once the Cuban crisis was resolved. (Bundy 1988: 432–3).

Bundy's next carefully chosen words reflect his unease: 'Concerned as we all were by the costs of a public bargain struck under pressure at the apparent expense of the Turks, and aware as we were from the day's discussion that for some, even in our closest councils, even this unilateral private assurance might appear to betray an ally, we agreed without hesitation that no one not in the room was to be informed of this additional message' (May and Zelikow 1997: 606). Reflecting the contract implicit in the proposal, he added: 'Robert Kennedy was instructed to make it plain to Dobrynin that the same secrecy must be observed on the other side, and that any Soviet reference to our assurance would simply make it null and void'. Robert Kennedy left immediately to meet Dobrynin at the Justice Department and deliver the private message. It was a masterful example of diplomatic doublespeak:

I told him that this [the U-2 shutdown] was an extremely serious turn in events. We would have to make certain decisions *within the next 12 or possibly 24 hours* . . . I said those missile bases had to go and they had to go right away. We had to have a commitment by at least tomorrow that those bases would be moved. This was not an ultimatum, I said, but just a statement of fact. He should understand that if they did not remove those bases, then we would remove them. His country might take retaliatory action, but he should understand that before this was over, while there might be dead Americans, there would also be dead Russians. He then asked me about Khrushchev's other proposal dealing with removal of the missiles from Turkey. I replied that there could be no quid pro quo—no deal of this kind could be made . . . If some time elapsed—and . . . I mentioned four or five months—I said I was sure that these matters could be resolved satisfactorily. (Kennedy, President's Office Files, 30 October 1962)

Dobrynin heard the offer clearly and conveyed it to Moscow. A public message from Kennedy to Khrushchev arrived late on Saturday evening, 27 October, in Moscow. It laid out the deal that would entail the verified withdrawal of Soviet 'offensive weapons' in exchange for the non-invasion pledge.

Khrushchev opened the Presidium session on the morning of Sunday, 28 October, with yet another about-face in his assessment of the American danger. This time he told his Presidium colleagues that they were 'face to face with the danger of war and of nuclear catastrophe, with the possible result of destroying the human race'. He went on: 'In order to save the world, we must retreat' (Fursenko and Naftali 1997: 284). On the morning of Sunday, 28 October, Soviet leaders broadcast an urgent message over the radio, announcing that they would withdraw their missiles from Cuba.

In sum, the blockade did not change Khrushchev's mind. Only when coupled with the threat of further action in the form of alternatives did it succeed in forcing Soviet withdrawal of the missiles. Without the threat of air strike or invasion, the blockade alone would not have forced the removal of the missiles. The middle road, i.e. the blockade, may have provided time for Soviets to adjust to American determination to withdraw the missiles. But it also left room for the Soviet Union to bring the missiles to operational readiness. What narrowed that room was Khrushchev's belief that he faced a clear, urgent threat that America was about to move up the ladder of escalation.



President Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev confer at the Soviet Embassy, Vienna, Austria.

Source: Photograph in the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston, MA.

## Analytical epilogue: three conceptual frameworks for analysing foreign policy

The essence of ultimate decision remains impenetrable to the observer—often, indeed, to the decider himself . . . There will always be the dark and tangled stretches in the decision-making process—mysterious even to those who may be most intimately involved. (President J. F. Kennedy, in Sorensen 1963)

In thinking about problems of foreign affairs, professional analysts as well as ordinary citizens proceed in a straightforward non-theoretical fashion. However, careful examination of explanations of events like the Soviet installation of missiles in Cuba, reveals a more complex conceptual substructure. The concluding section of this chapter revolves around three central propositions.

### 1. Professional analysts and ordinary citizens think about problems of foreign policy in terms of largely implicit conceptual models that have significant consequences for the content of their thought.

Explanations show regular and predictable characteristics that reflect unrecognized assumptions about the character of puzzles, the categories in which problems should be considered, the types of evidence that are relevant, and the determinants of occurrences. Bundles of such related assumptions constitute basic frames of reference or conceptual models in terms of which analysts and citizens ask and answer the following questions: What happened? Why did it happen? What will happen? Assumptions like these are central to the activities of explanation and prediction. In attempting to explain a particular event, the analyst cannot simply describe the full state of the world leading up to that event. The logic of explanation requires **conceptual models** to single out the relevant critical determinants of the occurrence—the junctures at which particular factors produced one state of the world rather than another. Moreover, as the logic of prediction underscores, the analyst must summarize the various factors as they bear on the occurrence. Conceptual models not only fix the mesh of the nets that the analyst drags through the material in order to explain a particular action, but they also direct the analyst to cast nets in selected ponds, at certain depths, in order to catch the fish he/she is after.

### 2. Most analysts explain and predict behaviour of national governments in terms of one basic conceptual model, the Rational Actor Model (RAM or Model I).

In what is, in effect, the default posture, events in foreign affairs are understood as purposive acts of unified national governments. For example, in confronting the problem posed by the Soviet installation of strategic missiles in Cuba, the Model I analyst frames the puzzle: why did the Soviet Union decide to install missiles in Cuba? He/she focuses attention on the goals and objectives of the government. The analyst infers: if the government performed an action of this sort, it must have had a goal of this type. The analyst has explained this event when he/she can show how placing missiles in Cuba was a reasonable action, given Soviet strategic objectives. Predictions about what a nation will do are produced by calculating what a rational action in this certain situation would do, given specified objectives.

Although **Model I** has proved useful for many purposes, it is clear that it must be supplemented by frames of reference that disaggregate the government, focusing on the organizations and political actors involved in the policy process. Model I's grasp of national purposes and of

the pressures created by problems in *international* relations must confront the *intranational* mechanisms from which governmental actions emerge. In its simplest form, the RAM links purpose and action. If I know an actor's objective, I have a major clue to his likely action. By observing behaviour and considering what the actor's objective might be, when I identify an objective that is advanced effectively by the action, I have a strong hypothesis about why he/she did whatever he/she did. The full RAM includes not only objectives but also calculations about the situation in which the actor finds him/herself. This context presents threats and opportunities that the agent packages as options with pros and cons. The actor chooses the alternative that best advances his/her interests. Thus in explaining what an agent did, or in making bets about what he/she is likely to do, an analyst must consider not only the actor's objectives but also the options identified, the costs and the benefits estimated to follow from each option, and the actor's readiness or reluctance to take risks. The core questions a Model I analyst seeks to answer in explaining a government action or estimating the likelihood of an action can be summarized succinctly. To explain (or predict) a phenomenon X (e.g. Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba, October 1962):

Assume:

- X is the action of a state.
- The state is a unified actor.
- The state has a coherent utility function.
- The state acts in relation to external threats and opportunities.
- The state's action is value-maximizing (or expected value-maximizing).

Ask:

- What threats and opportunities arise for the actor (e.g. the balance of strategic nuclear forces in 1962)?
- Who is the actor (e.g. the Soviet Union, or its leader in 1962, Nikita Khrushchev)?
- What is its utility function (e.g. survival, maximization of power, minimization of coercion, etc)?
- To maximize the actor's objectives in the specified conditions, what is the best choice (e.g. Soviet installation of nuclear-armed missiles in Cuba)?

**3. Two alternative conceptual models, the Organizational Behaviour Model (Model II) and the Governmental Politics Model (Model III), provide a base for improved explanation and predictions.**

According to the Organizational Behaviour Model, what Model I analysts characterize as 'acts' and 'choices' are thought of instead as *outputs* of existing organizations functioning according to regular patterns of behaviour. Faced with the fact of Soviet missiles in Cuba, a **Model II** analyst focuses on the existing organizations and their standard operating procedures for (1) acquiring information, (2) defining feasible options, and (3) implementing a programme. The

analyst infers: if organizations produced an output of a certain kind at a certain time, that behaviour resulted from existing organizational structures, procedures, and repertoires. A Model II analyst has explained the event when he has identified the relevant Soviet organizations and displayed the patterns of organizational behaviour from which the action emerged. Predictions identify trends that reflect existing organizations and their fixed procedures and programmes.

It is clear that, for some purposes, governmental behaviour can usefully be summarized as action chosen by a unitary rational decision maker: centrally controlled, completely informed, and value maximizing. But we also know that, in fact, a government is not an individual. It is not just the president. It is a vast conglomerate of loosely allied organizations, each with a substantial life of its own. Government leaders sit formally on top of this conglomerate. But governments perceive problems through organizational sensors. Governments define alternatives and estimate consequences as their component organizations process information; governments act as these organizations enact routines. Therefore governmental behaviour can be understood, according to the second conceptual model, less as deliberate choices and more as *outputs* of large organizations functioning according to standard patterns of behaviour.

At any given time, a government consists of existing organizations, each with a fixed set of standard operating procedures and programmes. The behaviour of these organizations—and consequently of the government—in any particular instance is determined primarily by routines established prior to that instance. Explanation of a government action starts from this baseline. Clearly, organizations do change. Learning occurs gradually, over time. Dramatic organizational change can occur in response to major disasters. Both learning and change are influenced by existing organizational capabilities and procedures.

The characterization of government action as organizational behaviour differs sharply from Model I. Attempts to understand problems of foreign affairs in this frame of reference produce quite different explanations. About the Missile Crisis, the Model I analyst asks why 'Khrushchev' deployed missiles to Cuba, or why the 'USA' responded with a blockade and ultimatum. Governments are anthropomorphized as if they were an individual person, animated by particular purposes. In Model II explanations, the subjects are never named individuals or entire governments. Instead, the subjects in Model II explanations are organizations; their behaviour accounted for in terms of organizational purposes and practices common to the members of the organization, not those peculiar to one or another individual.

**Model III** focuses on the politics inside a government. According to this model, events in foreign affairs are characterized neither as unitary choice nor as organizational outputs. What happens is understood instead as a *resultant* of bargaining games among players in the national government. In confronting the puzzle posed by Soviet missiles in Cuba, a Model III analyst frames the puzzle: what bargaining among which players yielded the critical decisions and actions? The analyst focuses on the players whose interests and actions impact the issue in question, the factors that shape each player's perceptions and stands, the established 'action channel' for aggregating competing preferences, and the performance of the players. The analyst infers: if a government performed an action, that action was the resultant of bargaining among players in this game. A Model III analyst has explained this event when he/she has discovered who did what to whom that yielded the action in question. Predictions are generated by identifying the game in which an issue will arise, the relevant players, and their relative power and bargaining skill.

Model II's grasp of government action as organizational output, partially coordinated by leaders, enlarges Model I's efforts to understand government behaviour as the choices of a unitary decision maker. But beyond the Model II analysis lies a further, more refined, level of investigation. The leaders who sit atop organizations are no monolith. Rather, each individual in this group is, in his/her own right, a player in a central competitive game. The game is politics: bargaining along regular circuits among players positioned hierarchically within the government. Thus government behaviour can be understood according to a third conceptual model, not as organizational outputs but as the results of bargaining games. Outcomes are formed by the interaction of competing preferences. In contrast with Model I, the Governmental Politics Model sees no unitary actor but rather many actors as players—players who make government decisions not by a single rational choice but by the pushing and pulling that is politics.

Model III focuses on the players who are engaged in this interaction. Most players represent a department or agency along with the interests and constituencies that their organization serves. Because players' preferences and beliefs are related to the different organizations they represent, their analyses yield conflicting recommendations. Separate responsibilities laid on the shoulders of distinct individuals encourage differences in what each sees and judges to be important.

Model III analysis begins with the proposition that knowledge of the leader's initial preferences is, by itself, rarely a sufficient guide for explanation or prediction. The proposition reflects the fact that authoritative power is most often shared. The primary inspiration for Model III is the work of Richard Neustadt, though his concentration on presidential decision has been generalized to resultants of political bargaining among substantially independent players (Neustadt 1990).

None of the three analysts—Model I: The Rational Actor, Model II: Organizational Behaviour, and Model III: Governmental Politics—simply describes events. In attempting to explain what happened, each distinguishes certain features as the relevant determinants. Each combs out the numerous details in a limited number of causal strands that are woven into the most important reasons for what happened. Moreover, each emphasizes quite different factors in explaining the central puzzles of the crisis.

The outline of a partial ad hoc working synthesis of analysis using these three models begins to emerge as one considers the core questions each model leads one to ask in pursuing explanations or prediction.

**Model I questions include:**

- What are the objective (or perceived) circumstances that the state conceives as threats and opportunities?
- What are the state's goals?
- What are the objective (or perceived) options for addressing this issue?
- What are the objective (or perceived) strategic costs and benefits of each option?
- What is the state's best choice given these conditions?

**Model II questions include:**

- Of what organizations (and organizational components) does the government consist?
- What capabilities and constraints do these organizations' existing standard operating procedures (SOPs) create in producing *information* about international conditions, threats, and opportunities?

- What capabilities and constraints do these organizations' existing SOPs create in generating the menu of *options* for action?
- What capabilities and constraints do these organizations' existing SOPs establish for *implementing* whatever is chosen?
- Which organizations have the greatest stake in the outcome of what is chosen?

**Model III questions include:**

- Who plays? Whose views and values count in shaping the choice and action?
- What factors shape each player's (a) perceptions, (b) preferred course of action, and thus (c) the player's stand on the issue?
- What factors account for each player's impact on the choice and action?
- What is the 'action channel', i.e. the established process for aggregating competing perceptions, preferences, and stands of players in making decisions and taking action?
- Which players have the greatest stake in the outcome of the decisions that are made and the actions that are taken?

The central features of each model are summarized in Figure 14.2.

Thus the models can be seen as complements to each other. Model I fixes the broader context, the larger national patterns, and the shared images. Within this context, Model II illuminates the organizational routines that produce the information, options, and actions. Model III focuses in greater detail on the individuals who constitute a government and the politics and procedures by which their competing perceptions and preferences are combined. Each, in effect, serves as a search engine in the larger effort to identify all the significant causal factors without which the decision or action would not have occurred. The best analysts of foreign policy manage to weave strands from each of the three conceptual models into their explanations. By integrating factors identified under each model, explanations can be significantly strengthened.

The story of the missile crisis provides many opportunities for one to use the alternative lenses in re-analysing questions that members of the US government, and the Soviet government, answered at that time. For example, in preparing for President Kennedy's meeting with Foreign Minister Gromyko on Thursday, 18 October, the question arose whether Gromyko and his colleagues in the Soviet central circle expected the USA to discover missiles being installed in Cuba before they became operational. Would Gromyko reveal the missiles to Kennedy? Should Kennedy say something to him? Evidence of what the Soviets had actually done in constructing missiles in Cuba, including the standardized features of ballistic missiles at each of the sites, the absence of camouflage at the sites, and the near certainty that U-2s flying over these areas would take photographs of the missiles (as in fact they did), led some in the US government to conclude that the Soviet government *must* have expected the USA to discover the missiles. Indeed, the extraordinary and effective disguise of the missiles during shipment from the Soviet Union to sites in Cuba, on the one hand, and the absence of any equivalent camouflage at the sites, on the other, suggested to some that the Soviet government expected the USA to discover the missiles at about this time. If the administration had accepted that judgement, it might have developed a different script for the conversation with Gromyko.



The Paradigm	Model I		Model II		Model III	
	National government	National state Generic state Identified state Personified state	National government Leaders A B C D E F G	What actually occurs Range of choice Structure of situation Innovation	National government A B C D E F G r y z	Players in positions (A-F) Goals, interests, stakes, and stands (n-z) Power Action-channels
Basic unit of analysis	Black box labelled . . .	Notional state Generic state Identified state Personified state	A B C D E F G	What actually occurs Range of choice Structure of situation Innovation	A B C D E F G r y z	Players in positions (A-F) Goals, interests, stakes, and stands (n-z) Power Action-channels
Organizing concepts	Unified National Actor The Problem Action as Rational Choice Goals and Objectives Options Consequences Choice	Governmental action as choice	Organizational actors Factored problems and fractionated power Organizational missions Operational objectives, special capacities, and culture Action as organizational output Objectives-compliance Sequential attention to objectives Standard operating procedures Programmes and repertoires Uncertainty avoidance Problem-directed search Organizational learning and change Central coordination and control Decisions of government leaders	Governmental action as organizational output	Governmental action as political resultant	Governmental action as political resultant
Dominant inference pattern	Action = value maximizing means toward state's ends	Increased perceived costs = action less likely Decreased perceived costs = action more likely	Action (in short run) = output close to existing output Action (in longer run) = output conditioned by organization view of tasks, capacities, programmes, repertoires, and routines Existing organized capabilities influence government choice Organizational priorities shape organizational implementation Special capacities and cultural beliefs Conflicting goals addressed sequentially Implementation reflects previously established routines SOPs, programmes, and repertoires Leaders neglect administrative feasibility at their peril Limited flexibility and incremental change Long-range planning Imperialism Directed change	Governmental action as organizational output	Governmental action as political resultant	Governmental action = resultant of bargaining
General propositions	Increased perceived costs = action less likely Decreased perceived costs = action more likely	Governmental action as choice	Organizational actors Factored problems and fractionated power Organizational missions Operational objectives, special capacities, and culture Action as organizational output Objectives-compliance Sequential attention to objectives Standard operating procedures Programmes and repertoires Uncertainty avoidance Problem-directed search Organizational learning and change Central coordination and control Decisions of government leaders	Governmental action as organizational output	Governmental action as political resultant	Governmental action = resultant of bargaining

Figure 14.2 Summary outline of models and concepts.

Source: Figure 'Summary outline of models and concepts', p 391 of *Essence of Decision* (2nd edn), by Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow. © 1999 by Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers Inc. Reprinted by permission of Pearson Education Inc.

Today, each of us can address this question ourselves. With the evidence available on 18 October, should one conclude that the Soviet government expected, or alternatively that it did *not* expect, the USA to discover the missiles at about this time? Here, Model II competes directly with Model I and yields precisely contrary conclusions.

The Missile Crisis maintains its special claim on policy makers and citizens alike because no other event so clearly demonstrates the awesome crack between the *unlikelihood* and the *impossibility* of nuclear war. The further one gets from the event, the harder it becomes to believe—existentially—that nuclear war could really have happened.

How could this crisis have gone nuclear?<sup>8</sup> To stimulate the reader's imagination, we will summarize what happened in the form of a scenario, and then spell out one path to Armageddon. Actual events are represented by eight steps.

1. The Soviet Union puts missiles in Cuba clandestinely (September 1962).
2. American U-2 flight photographs Soviet missiles (14 October 1962).
3. President Kennedy initiates a public confrontation by announcing the Soviet action to the world, demanding Soviet removal of their missiles, ordering a US quarantine of Soviet weapon shipments to Cuba, putting US strategic forces on alert, and warning the Soviet Union that any missile launched from Cuba would be regarded as a Soviet missile and met with a full retaliatory response (22 October).
4. Khrushchev orders Soviet strategic forces to alert and threatens to sink US ships if they interfere with Soviet ships en route to Cuba (23 October).
5. Soviet ships stop short of the US quarantine line (24 October).
6. Khrushchev private letter says the necessity for the Soviet deployment would disappear if the USA will pledge not to invade Cuba (26 October), followed by a second public Khrushchev letter demanding USA withdrawal of Turkish missiles for Soviet withdrawal of Cuban missiles (27 October).
7. USA responds affirmatively to first Khrushchev letter but says that, first, missiles now in Cuba must be rendered inoperable and urges quick agreement. Robert Kennedy adds privately that missiles in Turkey will eventually be withdrawn, but that the missiles in Cuba must be removed immediately and a commitment to that effect must be received the next day, otherwise military action will follow (27 October).
8. Khrushchev publicly announces that the USSR will withdraw its missiles in Cuba (28 October).

Consider, however, one obvious scenario for nuclear war beginning with steps 1–7 above but then proceeding hypothetically as follows.

1. Khrushchev reiterates that any attack on Soviet missiles and personnel in Cuba would be met with a full Soviet retaliatory response (28 October).
2. Soviet and/or Cuban forces fire upon US surveillance aircraft over Cuba on 28 October. A series of air strikes begins against Soviet missiles (destroying all operational ballistic missiles and killing a limited number of Soviet personnel) (29 or 30 October).
3. Soviet aircraft and/or medium-range ballistic missiles attack Jupiter missiles in Turkey (destroying ballistic missiles and killing a small number of Americans); Soviet and East

German forces interfere with traffic moving into Berlin; nuclear weapons in Cuba are dispersed to remaining operational forces on the island (31 October and 1 November).

4. In accord with obligations under the NATO treaty, US aircraft in Europe attack bases in the Soviet Union from which attacks against the Turkish bases had been launched; Berlin confrontation intensifies; US preparations to invade Cuba advance (4 November).

At this point, if not a step or two earlier, the Soviet government would be intensively considering possible pre-emptive nuclear strikes against the USA, especially command and control centres like Washington, in order to limit the damage inflicted by the overwhelming first strike they fear could come at any moment. If the Soviets preferred to place the burden of first use of nuclear weapons on the Americans, Moscow could use its conventional military forces to seize all of Berlin, thus forcing the Americans to decide whether they would indeed keep their promise to use nuclear weapons first to defend their allies. This scenario moves from frame to frame by a Model I analysis. Use of Model II and Model III would greatly enlarge the menu of nightmarish possibilities, adding misinformation, false warnings, accidents, and inadvertent clashes to the mix.

Other paths from what occurred to nuclear weapons exploding in the USA and Soviet Union start with unauthorized actions by individuals or units of both governments making choices that they clearly had the technical capability to make. For example:

- On 22 October, General John Gerhart, commander of North American Defense Command, ordered air defense commanders to load nuclear weapons onto F-106 fighter-interceptor jets—meant to destroy incoming Soviet bombers—and disperse them to dozens of remote airfields. This order violated the Air Force's 'buddy system' doctrine, which required at least two officers to be in physical control of a nuclear weapon at all times. One nuclear safety officer observed that 'by an inadvertent act', a single pilot carrying out this order 'would have been able to achieve the full nuclear detonation of the weapon'.<sup>9</sup>
- The US Navy had been using electronic eavesdroppers to monitor four Foxtrot class submarines that had slipped out of the Soviet submarine base at Gadzhievo on Kola Peninsula on the night of 1 October. The submarine commanders had only been given a vague instruction on how to respond to a US attack: 'If they slap you on the left cheek, do not let them slap you on the right one'. On the morning of 24 October, Nikolai Shumkov, commander of one of the four Soviet submarines, realized that a US destroyer was closing in on his vessel—not to sink the submarine, as it turns out, but simply to force it to the surface. Unknown to the destroyer's commander, there was a 10-kiloton nuclear torpedo stacked in the B-130's bow. With the push of a button, Shumkov could have unleashed the weapon, which had over half the destructive force of a Hiroshima-style nuclear bomb.<sup>10</sup>

The most frequently cited lessons of the Cuban Missile Crisis have emerged from Model I analysis. These include: (1) since nuclear war between the USA and Soviet Union would have been mutual national suicide, neither nation would choose nuclear war, and therefore nuclear war was not a serious possibility; (2) given its strategic nuclear advantage at the time, the USA could choose lower-level military actions without fearing escalation to nuclear war; (3) nuclear crises are manageable, as the Cuban Missile Crisis shows, since in situations where

vital interests are at stake, leaders of both nations will think soberly about the challenge and their options and find limited actions to resolve disputes short of war.

Model II and Model III analysts caution against confidence in the impossibility of nations stumbling, irrationally in Model I terms, into the use of nuclear weapons, in the manageability of nuclear crises, or in understanding the recipe for successful crisis management. Through Model II lenses, the USA's success included crucial organizational rigidities and even mistakes. Except for the organizational and political factors that delayed an immediate military attack on Cuba, the probability of war would have been much higher. Except for the organizational and political dynamics that produced sufficiently persistent displays of American resolve to tilt Khrushchev's wildly oscillating estimates of American determination, Khrushchev might have proceeded with his plan to stage a nuclear confrontation in Berlin that could have proved even more dangerous. Only barely did the leaders of both governments manage to control organizational programmes that threatened to drag both countries over the cliff. In several instances, both Americans and Soviets were just plain lucky.

The lesson from Model II: nuclear crises between large machines, such as the US and Soviet governments of 1962, are inherently chancy. The information and estimates available to leaders about the situation reflect organizational capacities and routines as well as facts. The options presented to the leaders are much narrower than the menu that analysts might consider desirable. The execution of choices exhibits unavoidable rigidities of SOPs. Coordination among organizations is much less finely tuned than leaders demand or expect. The prescription: considerable thought must be given to the routines established in the principal organizations before a crisis, so that during the crisis the organizations will be capable of adequately performing the needed functions. In a crisis, the overwhelming problem will be that of control and coordination of large organizations. Given insurmountable limits to control and added dangers that can be created or compounded by the interacting plethora of the safety routines themselves, such crises must be *avoided*.

Lessons that emerge from Model III provide even less reason to be sanguine about our understanding of nuclear crises or about the impossibility of nuclear war. Actions advocated by leaders of the US government covered a spectrum—from doing nothing, to seeking a diplomatic bargain with Khrushchev at a summit meeting, to an invasion of Cuba. The process by which the blockade emerged included many uncertain factors. Had the Cuban Missile Crisis been Kennedy's first crisis, the participants in the decision-making group would have been different. Had McNamara been less forceful, the air strike could well have been chosen in the first day or two. Had Kennedy proved his mettle domestically in a previous confrontation, perhaps the diplomatic track would have prevailed and a major Berlin crisis could have erupted in November and December of 1962.

Thus the lessons of Model III terms are: (1) leaders of the US government can choose actions that they believe entail real possibilities of escalation to war; (2) the process of crisis management is obscure and exceedingly risky; (3) the interaction of internal games, each as ill-understood as those in the White House and the Kremlin, could indeed yield war, even nuclear war, as an outcome. If a president and his/her associates have to manage a nuclear crisis, the informal machinery, free-wheeling discussions, and devil's advocacy exemplified by ExCom have many advantages. But the mix of personality, expertise, influence, and temperament that allows such a group to clarify alternatives, even while it bargains over separate preferences, must be better understood.



## Key points

- The Cuban Missile Crisis refers to the period of heightened nuclear tension between the Soviet Union and the USA during the thirteen days of 16–28 October 1962.
- The Soviet government decided to give arms to Cuba in 1959, steadily increasing the shipments. Soviet nuclear warheads reached Cuba in early October 1962 under the covert mission 'Operation Anadyr'.
- After American U-2 planes discovered the ballistic missiles in Cuba, the US government assembled a select inner circle of advisors known as the 'ExComm', who met at the White House for the duration of the crisis.
- In his address to the public on 22 October 1962, President John F. Kennedy declared a strict quarantine on all offensive military equipment under shipment to Cuba and called for Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev to eliminate the provocative threat to world peace.
- On 28 October, Soviet leaders announced that they would withdraw their missiles from Cuba.
- The Cuban Missile Crisis remains a formidable case study in world history for students of foreign policy analysis.



## Questions

1. What lay behind Soviet Premier Khrushchev's decision to deploy offensive missiles in Cuba?
2. Why did Fidel Castro permit the Soviet missiles to be deployed in Cuba?
3. At the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis, what options were considered by President Kennedy and the members of the Executive Committee?
4. Put yourself in the position of the American President. How would you have acted to resolve the Cuban Missile Crisis differently? What would be the consequences of your actions?
5. Why did the Soviet Union ultimately decide to remove the missiles from Cuba? Was this a 'victory' for the USA?
6. How close did the world come to nuclear annihilation in October 1962? As an ordinary citizen living in the USA, what would you have done during the bleakest times of the crisis?
7. If events had occurred differently and nuclear missiles had been launched, which areas do you think would have been most critically affected?
8. What steps have we taken since 1962 to ensure that such a potentially devastating nuclear crisis does not happen again?



## Further reading

**Allison, G. (2004), *Nuclear Terrorism: The Ultimate Preventable Catastrophe* (New York: Times Books–Henry Holt).**

This book addresses modern-day nuclear threats from a variety of sources. Selected by the *New York Times* as one of the '100 most notable books of the year'.

**Glantz, D. M. (2001), *The Military Strategy of the Soviet Union: A History* (London: Routledge).**

This book sheds light on the military strategy of the Soviet Union during an epoch when it was the most threatening enemy of the USA.

**Kennedy, R.F. (1969), *Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: W.W. Norton).**

This classic book offers an engaging narration of the Cuban Missile Crisis, and includes official documents of correspondence and speeches during the crisis.

**Nathan, J.A. (ed.) (1992), *The Cuban Missile Crisis Revisited* (New York: St. Martin's Press).**

This volume brings to light either significant re-evaluations of the crisis, or in some cases, truly startling challenges to the conventional wisdom surrounding much of the crisis.

**Neustadt, R.E. (1990), *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan* (5th edn) (New York: Free Press).**

This book offers an insightful look into the executive power of American presidents, therefore accounting for the 'agency' around foreign policy decisions.



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