



ROBERT L. O'CONNELL

THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS:  
Second Holocaust

*Had it not been for the downing of the U-2, the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962 might never have come about: Eisenhower's reluctant adventurism (to use a favorite Marxist word) plunged us into the most dangerous period of the Cold War. Indeed, on the fever chart of these forty-five years, the Cuban confrontation gives off the highest reading, signaling a near-terminal breakdown.*

*Conventional interpretations and reconstructions of the crisis that followed the discovery of Soviet intermediate-range missiles in Pinar del Río Province, the region of Cuba closest to the United States, tell us that the shooting down of another U-2, Major Rudolf Anderson's, presented the moment of utmost peril. That was October 27, the day that came to be known as "Black Saturday," when Khrushchev remarked that "a smell of burning hung in the air." But perhaps the most serious threats, as Robert L. O'Connell makes clear in this chapter, may have lurked under the water, in the form of Soviet submarines armed with tactical nuclear torpedoes. Their commanders were prepared to use them on the spot, and there would be no waiting on Moscow's word—just as the Soviet general who ordered the firing of the SA-2 surface-to-air missile at Anderson's plane did so on his own initiative. And if the American invasion of Cuba had taken place, probably the following Tuesday,*

October 30, local Soviet commanders also had the authority to fire tactical nuclear weapons, without prior approval. President John F. Kennedy may have been ready to risk not going to war, and so, as the crisis deepened, was the man who had initiated it, Khrushchev. But as O'Connell points out, other factors might have led the two antagonists over the brink. History is too often determined not by its obvious movers and shakers but by its loose cannons.

On Black Saturday, the former secretary of state, Dean Acheson, who was one of Kennedy's advisers, advocated a strike against the missiles. "I know the Soviets well," he began:

*"I know what they are required to do in the light of their history and their posture around the world. I think they will knock out our missiles in Turkey," Acheson said.*

*"What do we do then?" he was asked.*

*"I believe that under the NATO treaty, with which I was associated, we would be required to respond by knocking out a missile base inside the Soviet Union," Acheson went on.*

*"Then what do they do?"*

*"That is when we hope," Acheson replied, "that cooler heads will prevail, and they will stop and talk."*

*It might not have been that simple.*

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Archivist of the United States

Room 1200

John Fitzgerald Kennedy Memorial Records Center

New Capital District

Cheyenne Mountain 80903-2000

The Honorable Ted Stevens

Chairman

Senate Select Committee on Intelligence

The Congress of the United States

Dear Mr. Chairman:

On this day, the fortieth anniversary of the commencement of the Two Days' War, I am forwarding to you for final clearance and publication the narrative summary of the findings of the Danforth Commission. As you know this document has remained classified since its completion in 1972, and is only now being released as the result of a long judicial process, culminating in a ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Following the mandate of the court, my staff has made every effort to preserve the details of the original narrative summary, without compromising the relatively small amount of information still classified after

forty years. I believe we have succeeded. However, our accomplishments pale before those of the Danforth Commission—the historians, members of the military, archaeologists, cryptanalysts, climatologists, physicists, physicians, and the host of other specialists—who worked continuously for three years to reconstruct the events of October 27–8, 1962 and their aftermath. In doing so they overcame enormous gaps . . . hiatuses literally burned in the fabric of the evidence, pursuing clues at times at the risk to their own health and longevity. We owe them a profound debt of gratitude. Together they produced a document that I believe will explain to the American people how and why history took such a tragic turn, and help remove the remaining veil of guilt and suspicion that continues to hang over our beloved nation.

I remain, respectfully,  
Newton Leroy Gingrich, Ph.D.

## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

### Introduction

Far more than any of the other momentous occurrences of the twentieth century, the events surrounding the Two Days' War remain shrouded in uncertainty. It was the charter of the Danforth Commission, directed by the president and confirmed by a Joint Resolution of Congress, to gather and analyze all available evidence with the aim of clarifying the causes of the war, its course, and the subsequent response on the part of the world community. In this we have only partially succeeded. The near-simultaneous demise of virtually all the key decision makers on both sides left gaps in the record that simply could not be overcome. This remained a particular handicap in interpreting motivation and causation. With two important exceptions on the U.S. side (Ambassadors Bohlen and Stevenson) and one on the Soviet (Captain Dubivko), we were forced to fall back on what amounted to secondary

sources—comments made by principals to subordinates and foreign diplomats, a limited amount of message traffic, and data gleaned from patterns of nuclear release authority, launch procedures, and subsequent weapons effects. Despite these impediments, we believe that the passage of time, unprecedented access to those sources that do exist, along with the talent and dedication of our professional staff, has allowed for a reasonably accurate profile of this tragic war and its aftermath. Subsequent historical research will undoubtedly alter the facade, but the underlying frame of events should continue to stand.

### Causation

The understanding of Nikita S. Khrushchev's motives for deploying nuclear forces to Cuba has undergone a fundamental shift. At the time of the missile crisis it was understood by the United States and its allies as an offensive move aimed at threatening the American people and laying the foundation for the eventual Soviet dominance of the Western Hemisphere. In large part, the USSR was viewed as an aggressive power intent on world hegemony, disdainful of U.S. political will, and recklessly determined to gain a fundamental psychological advantage over its chief adversary. However, subsequent revelations, particularly those of the Chinese and Indians, point to this as a basic misinterpretation.

The weight of evidence now indicates that Khrushchev's motives, though profoundly misguided, were defensive and centered on two separate sets of concerns. First, reporting indicates that the Soviet leadership prized the Cuban revolution as the first example of a people willingly embracing communism and were apparently determined to protect it from what was perceived as an almost inevitable invasion on the part of the United States (a conclusion made all the more plausible by two very large amphibious maneuvers held in the spring and fall of 1962 off nearby Vieques Island). Secondly, it was apparent to Khrushchev and his colleagues that not only was the United States far ahead of the Soviet Union in the race to build a ballistic-missile-based nuclear strike force, but that the Americans were perfectly aware of

their lead, a fact made painfully obvious in October 1961 during a speech by Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric, a known Kennedy confidant.

It is estimated that by the spring of 1962 the Soviets had less than 25 operational intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and fewer than 500 strategic nuclear weapons, the great majority dedicated to ballistic missiles and bombers without the range to reach the continental United States. In comparison, the U.S. strategic force was huge: 174 deployed Atlas and Titan 1 ICBMs; 105 Jupiter and Thor intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBMs); 8 Ethan Allen- and George Washington-class ballistic missile submarines mounting a combined 128 Polaris IRBMs; along with a fleet of over 1,500 B-47, B-52, and B-58 jet bombers each carrying multiple bombs in the 1-to-24-megaton range—a grand total of over 3,500 nuclear weapons, all of them deliverable to within the borders of the USSR. Since much of this information was available in the open press, it can be assumed that the Soviets fully understood the magnitude of their disadvantage.

It was in this context that Khrushchev decided, probably in the spring of 1962, to surreptitiously deploy forty-two SS-4 medium-range ballistic missiles (MRBMs) with a range of 1,200 miles and quite possibly a dozen or more SS-5 IRBMs with significantly longer ranges. (These never reached Cuba, and the ships transporting them were subsequently sunk at sea before a positive identification could be made.) From a Soviet perspective, this must have been a highly attractive though risky option. In one quick move they would have not only moved decisively to protect the Cuban revolution but also significantly redressed the strategic imbalance by more than doubling the number of their ballistic-missile-mounted nuclear warheads capable of reaching the United States.<sup>1</sup> Of course, the Soviet leader and his colleagues must have realized that the introduction of these missiles into Cuba would be inter-

<sup>1</sup> The central attraction of all ballistic missiles was their speed, which at this time rendered them invulnerable to interception once successfully launched.

preted by Americans as a direct challenge to their strategic preeminence in the Western Hemisphere, but this apprehension was likely balanced by the fact that the United States had already deployed Jupiter IRBMs along the Soviet border in Turkey, thereby posing a similar threat to the Eastern power. Also, the Soviets plainly hoped to keep the true nature of the scheme secret from U.S. Intelligence until the missiles were fully operational, thereby presenting their adversary with an irreversible reality. However misguided this reasoning may have been, it does at least give the impression of having been thought through. The true devil was to be found in the operational details of the Soviet deployment; this in the end was what led them to disaster.

The Soviet MRBMs arrived in Cuba with a massive support structure: a cadre of ground forces troops to defend the island and construct the required missile bases and infrastructure (estimated at the time at around 16,000, but now thought to have been much larger); multiple SA-2 surface-to-air missile (SAM) units; a variety of frontline Soviet combat aircraft including IL-28 light bombers, approximately one hundred tactical cruise missiles along with six unguided Frog rockets; and a naval contingent consisting of a number of small patrol boats and at least four 641-class diesel-electric submarines. While U.S. Intelligence would assume that the Soviets had delivered nuclear warheads for their strategic SS-4s, they had no idea that their adversaries, apparently as a matter of course, also brought along approximately one hundred nuclear weapons for their Frogs, cruise missiles, and IL-28s, and, fatally, one nuclear torpedo for each of the submarines. Compounding matters, Soviet nuclear release authority was profoundly faulted. Control by Moscow of the SS-4 warheads was likely provided through KGB elements in Cuba, a procedure, though it ultimately failed, that was at least credible. Unfortunately, no parallel regulation was extended to the tactical weapons, which might be activated by the commander on the ground or at sea by his own authority. More than any other single factor it was the failure of these procedures that brought about the terrible consequences of the Two Days' War.

### Road to War

Shortly after an American U-2 reconnaissance aircraft first photographed MRBM sites being readied at San Cristóbal on October 14, 1962, President John F. Kennedy assembled a body of advisers to aid him in dealing with the impending crisis. The key members of this group were Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson; the president's brother and attorney general, Robert Kennedy; the secretary of state, Dean Rusk; Undersecretary of State George Ball; Llewellyn Thompson, recently U.S. ambassador to Moscow; Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara; Roswell Gilpatric; Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Maxwell Taylor; Assistant Secretary of Defense Paul Nitze; Secretary of the Treasury Douglas Dillon; National Security Assistant McGeorge Bundy; Theodore Sorensen, the president's speechwriter and factotum; former secretary of state Dean Acheson; the director of Central Intelligence, John McCone; soon-to-be ambassador to France Charles Bohlen; and Ambassador to the United Nations Adlai Stevenson. The group was all male, included not a single member of Congress, and was notably hostile toward the Soviet Union (two members, Acheson and Nitze, were virtually the architects of America's Cold War security structure). Tragically, the entire membership, with the exception of Bohlen and Stevenson, would be dead within two weeks. It is upon the testimonies of these two men alone that our knowledge of this body's deliberations and even its existence rests. Unfortunately, the reporting of each was circumscribed by time and circumstances. Ambassador Bohlen was available to be interviewed by the Danforth Commission staff, but he had attended only one meeting before leaving to assume his duties in Paris and therefore was familiar with only the opening circumstances. Ambassador Stevenson, shuttling between Washington and the United Nations' former headquarters in New York, was knowledgeable of the group's activities. Unfortunately, he died in 1965. Before his death, however, he did produce a long manuscript on his recollection of the events leading up to the Two Days' War. Stevenson was plainly dismayed by the outlook and

conduct of the president's advisers, complaining bitterly that when he proposed giving up our base in Guantanamo and withdrawing the IRBMs in Turkey in exchange for the Soviet removal of their missiles from Cuba, he was reviled as an appeaser. "This was a group," he concluded, "more determined to make a point than to avoid a nuclear war."<sup>2</sup>

Yet, the evidence indicates that it would hardly be fair to characterize the group's behavior as reckless. So far as is known, the general outlook of the participants became increasingly less aggressive as the crisis transpired. Three basic options were considered: air strikes to destroy the missiles, an invasion of Cuba, and a naval "quarantine" (actually an embargo, but since embargoes constituted an act of war under international law, this euphemism was employed). It is known that these policy choices were thoroughly debated, and the one perceived the least dangerous of the three, the "quarantine," was chosen. Planning for all was nonetheless continued, bringing forth from the Joint Chiefs of Staff Operational Plans 312 (air campaign), 314 (embargo), 316 (incursion). But when President Kennedy delivered his famous televised speech on the evening of October 22, informing the American people of the presence of the Soviet missiles, it was naval interdiction that served as the keystone of his plan to halt and reverse the offensive buildup.

The next several days seemed to point toward a peaceful resolution of the crisis. The USSR found little support for its actions. An intensive U.S. diplomatic campaign brought our European allies and the Organization of American States solidly behind the Kennedy administration's position. Then, at a meeting of the UN Security Council on October 25, Ambassador Stevenson publicly confronted doubters around the world and, in particular, the Soviet delegation with photographic evidence of the offensive missiles in Cuba, a presence they had heretofore denied. This appears to have thrown the USSR on the diplomatic defensive,

<sup>2</sup> Adlai E. Stevenson, "My Memories of October's Path to Apocalypse," *The Papers of Adlai E. Stevenson*, University of Illinois, p. 547. Subsequently published as *A Man of Peace in a Nest of Hawks* (New York: 1971).

and it is believed that Khrushchev was ready to defuse the crisis. Yet, the most dramatic and positive indication of Soviet intentions occurred the day before, when two Soviet transports, *Gagarin* and *Komiles*, stopped dead in the water just before approaching U.S. Navy Task Force 136 led by the aircraft carrier *Randolph*. Shortly after, it was reported that the twenty Soviet ships closest to the blocking force had either stopped or reversed their course. Collectively, America and the rest of the world breathed a sigh of relief. But the vision of peace proved to be a mirage.

On October 26, the White House announced, on the basis of U-2 overflights, that rather than signs of dismantlement "the development of ballistic missile sites continues at a rapid pace, . . . apparently directed at achieving a full operational capability as soon as possible."<sup>3</sup> Yet, it is also apparent that intense diplomatic efforts were being made through official and unofficial channels to head off a confrontation. On the same day as the White House announcement, Khrushchev had written a public letter to Kennedy offering to withdraw the missiles from Cuba in exchange for an American removal of the Jupiter IRBMs from Turkey, along with a formal pledge not to invade the island. Ambassador Stevenson's manuscript, however, refers to "a much better offer."<sup>4</sup>

Apparently, the Soviet leader had written Kennedy a private communication the same day. Stevenson, who was in New York, never saw the letter, but it was authoritatively described to him as long, rambling, and highly emotional, but nonetheless clearly stating a willingness to eliminate the missiles from the island for a simple promise not to invade. Whether the proposals would have allowed the U.S. and Soviet leadership to steer away from impending catastrophe remains today a matter of speculation, since the miscalculations of subordinates and disastrous operational procedures almost immediately seized the initiative.

And in this regard, the record is clear: it was Soviet subordinates and Soviet operational procedures that led the two antagonists over the brink.

### The Two Days' War

Saturday, October 27, 1962, began inauspiciously and ended far worse. Bad news came in an avalanche. First, it was learned that a U-2 gathering data on nuclear testing near the North Pole had strayed into Soviet airspace and was unaccounted for. Far more serious was the news that around noon a Soviet SAM battery had shot down a U-2 on a reconnaissance mission over Cuba, killing its pilot, Major Rudolf Anderson. Why this was done and exactly who was responsible has never been resolved. But it was plainly part of a pattern of local Soviet commanders taking matters into their hands.

At 1343 hours, two destroyers of Task Force 136, *Blandy* and *Domado*, picked up on their sonars a Soviet submarine approximately twelve miles south of the island of Andros, moving in the general direction of the aircraft carrier *Randolph*. We know from Captain Lev Dubivko, who survived the sinking of his own submarine later that day in the waters south of Cuba, that the boat in question was a B-130, a member of the 641 class and commanded by Captain Anatoli Shumkov. When the B-130 moved to within 12,000 yards of the *Randolph*, *Blandy* and *Domado* maneuvered to intercept, the former firing two depth charges, "solely as a warning," it was later maintained by the ship's commanding officer, James O. Robinson.<sup>5</sup> Whatever the intent, the B-130 surfaced shortly thereafter. Then, at 1412, a huge explosion engulfed the *Randolph* and within minutes formed a characteristic mushroom cloud. Since *Randolph* was conventionally powered, it was clear that the explosion was a result of hostile action. Captain Shumkov had fired his 53-58 nuclear torpedo. It was learned from Captain

<sup>3</sup> White House statement on continuation of missile buildup in Cuba, October 26, 1962.

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., "My Memories of October's Path to Apocalypse," p. 372.

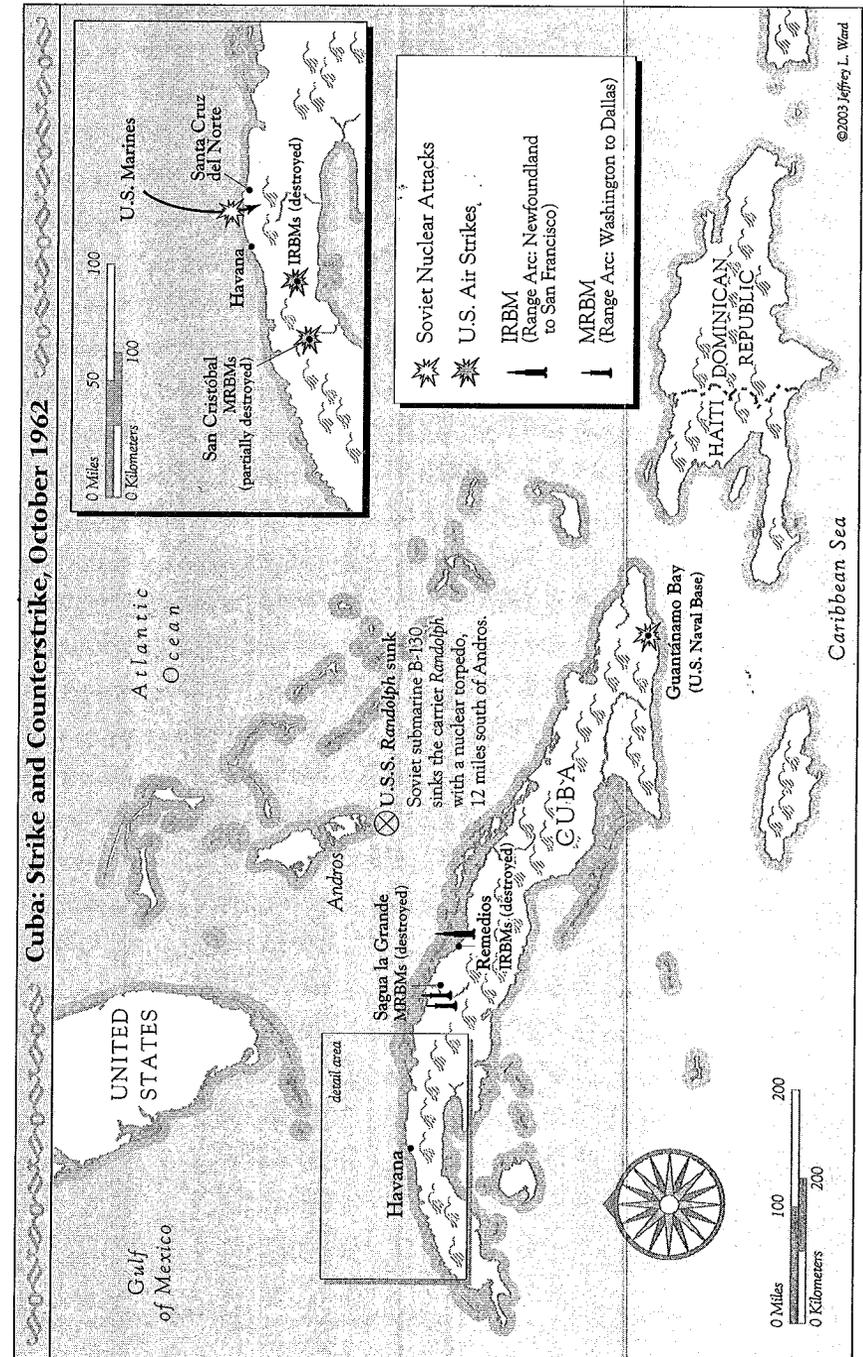
<sup>5</sup> Deposition of Lt. Cmdr. James O. Robinson, Portsmouth Naval Prison, December 14, 1962, p. 341.

Dubivko that Soviet submarine commanders off Cuba had the authority to employ nuclear torpedoes if their hulls were breached. Whether this was the case with the B-130 will never be known, since it was immediately sunk by the combined fire of the two U.S. destroyers.

The reaction in Washington was almost immediate. At 1426, the order went out from the National Command Authority (NCA) to "Execute Op Plan 312 followed by 316."<sup>6</sup> In practice, this meant immediate air strikes on Soviet offensive missile bases at San Cristóbal, Sagua la Grande, and Remedios, along with a variety of air defense sites. Meanwhile, because preparations for a full-scale invasion were not yet complete, Plan 316 would be limited to paradrops of the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions along with amphibious landings by ten battalions of Marines in ships hovering off the northwest coast of Cuba, operations that were shortly overtaken by events.

Again, one or several local Soviet commanders (extensive research of Red Army command-and-control patterns points to either General Issa Pliyev or General Igor Statsenko as the key initiator<sup>7</sup>) chose on his own authority to employ nuclear weapons. As the first U.S. F-100 and F-101B fighter bombers swept in from the north, a barrage of four Soviet nuclear-armed Frogs was fired at Guantanamo, obliterating the base and wiping out the Second Marine Division. This was shortly followed by the launch of two nuclear-tipped cruise missiles in the general direction of the Marine ships offshore, which, though they each missed by over a mile, set off explosions that nearly swamped several ships.

Much worse would follow. The initial U.S. tactical air strikes were highly destructive, but several of the bombs released over San Cristóbal failed to detonate, leaving two SS-4s and their launch sites completely



<sup>6</sup> Records of the Joint Congressional Panel to Investigate the Conduct of the Two Days' War (JFK Memorial Records Center), vol. 26, p. 2457.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 30, pp. 301-367; see also Seymour Hersh, *Who Fired First in Cuba?* (New York, 1970), Gerhardt Weinberg, *The Broken Tripwire: An Inquiry into the Release of Nuclear Weapons in Cuba* (Chapel Hill, 1973).

undamaged. Once again, Soviet procedures for nuclear release proved tragically inadequate. During the lull, Soviet personnel not only managed to prepare the two rockets for launch but also obtained their associated nuclear warheads, mated them to the missiles, and completed the arming procedures.

On or about 1610, the first missile was launched. It impacted about eight minutes later in a field in rural northern Kentucky, forty-two miles short of Cincinnati, but its warhead malfunctioned and did not produce a nuclear event. Unfortunately, this was not the case with the second SS-4, which was fired approximately eight minutes after the first and detonated at 1625 hours and 31 seconds, approximately 2,000 feet above the Lincoln Memorial. The resulting thermonuclear blast, conservatively estimated at 640 kilotons, leveled everything within a radius of 1.5 miles, including the White House, the State Department, and the Pentagon, killing in the process the entire National Command Authority. Strategically, this unsanctioned act of preemption may have decapitated the U.S. government and military, but it sealed the doom of the USSR. Had President Kennedy and his key advisers remained alive and in control, it is likely that they would have responded in a measured and judicious manner. Now, instead, the entire Single Integrated Operations Plan (SIOP) would be executed against the Soviet Union without regard for the consequences.

The SIOP had evolved gradually and in relative obscurity during the 1950s and early sixties, driven almost exclusively by targeting policy. As new U.S. nuclear weapons and delivery systems were deployed, Soviet targets were found for them, until they numbered literally in the thousands. When the Kennedy administration assumed power, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara expressed something close to horror at its implications. On June 16, 1962, during a speech, McNamara first publicly articulated the need for a "damage limitation" strategy. Yet, by autumn nothing tangible had been accomplished. Thus on October 27 the full-blown SIOP remained in place, a terrible instrument of retribution.

There ensued a lull of approximately twenty-five minutes, during which time General Thomas Powers, head of the Strategic Air Command (SAC), struggled to learn what had happened in Washington, and if in fact the National Command Authority was defunct. At 1652, after being assured that a nuclear blast had gone off directly above the District of Columbia and having failed to reestablish contact with any elements of the NCA, Powers, on his own authority, sent out orders to SAC elements around the world to initiate the SIOP. Twenty-two minutes later, the general was put in touch telephonically with John W. McCormack. The speaker of the House of Representatives, at home for the weekend in the Boston area, had been located and already sworn in as president. When Powers informed him of his order, McCormack replied: "Johnny and Lyndon are dead. You only did what you had to."<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile, the Soviets had failed to initiate further attacks. The status of communications between the leadership in Moscow and their forces in Cuba remained very much in doubt. It is unlikely they were made aware of Captain Shumkov's actions, since his submarine was sunk so quickly. It is also open to question whether they were promptly informed of tactical nuclear weapons use in Cuba. Even the nature of the attack on Washington may have remained obscure to them, since their own embassy and its communications gear was completely destroyed in the blast. At any rate they had very little time left.

Within minutes of the Powers order, thirty-five of the forty-two pre-fueled Atlases and Titans along with fourteen Jupiters and Thors had been successfully launched. Approximately eight minutes later the first of the IRBMs, each armed with a four-megaton W-49 warhead, began impacting in and around Moscow, Leningrad, and several specifically military targets, paralyzing the national command-and-control system

<sup>8</sup> Testimony of Gen. Thomas Powers, December 11, 1962, before the House Armed Services Committee, St. Louis, MO. Records of the Joint Congressional Panel to Investigate the Conduct of the Two Days' War, vol. 4, p. 12; written deposition, Pres. John W. McCormack, Jan. 4, 1963.

and its ability to coordinate a response. Strategically, the war had already been won, but the punishment had just begun.

About twenty-five minutes after the IRBMs, the first of the Atlas and Titan ICBMs, also armed with W-49 warheads, began hitting a broad range of civilian and military targets. Over the next 1.5 hours, sixty-three more ICBMs and seventy Thors and Jupiters arrived and detonated over their targets. (Of the total number of ballistic missiles launched during this period, seven malfunctioned catastrophically at or near their points of departure, creating serious nuclear contamination problems, particularly at IRBM bases in Italy and England, which were close to population centers.)

Next in order of appearance were the manned bombers of the Strategic Air Command, an eighth of which had been kept airborne in rotating cycles to avoid preemption and shorten the time and distance to their targets. Approximately half an hour after the initiation of the SIOP, a flight of B-47E Stratojets, each armed with multiple nine-megaton Mk-53 gravity bombs, crossed over into Cuban airspace and laid down a radioactive path of destruction. (Before the Two Days' War had played itself out, a total of forty-one nuclear weapons would be detonated over Cuba, ultimately killing 95 percent of the population and creating serious fallout problems in southern Florida, the Bahamas, Hispaniola, Puerto Rico, and the Leeward Islands.) In return, Soviet-manned Cuban air defenses managed to shoot down just four B-47s before collapsing in the general devastation.

Nor were the PVO Strany elements charged with protecting the skies over the Soviet Union any more successful in thwarting the SAC bombers that began arriving about 2.5 hours after the ICBMs in the form of sixty-three supersonic B-58 Hustlers. Their command-and-control already shattered and their SAMs designed for much slower targets, Soviet air defense troops were virtually helpless in the face of the Mach 2 Hustlers, flying at 70,000 feet and carrying either a single Mk-53 or up to five single-megaton B-43s. "Redundant target servicing," or simply overkill, only grew more horrific with the arrival of 242

B-52G and H-model heavy bombers. After releasing their two AGM-28 Hound Dog supersonic cruise missiles against preprogrammed locations, many spent the next several hours wandering the Russian heartland in fruitless search of viable remaining targets for their Mk-41 and B-53 gravity bombs. To their credit, numerous crews returned home with their weapons bays full, but in all too many instances thermonuclear fuel was added to the fire in the form of bombs dropped on locations devoid of strategic significance.

The situation was much the same along the periphery. Over a period of thirteen hours after the initiation of hostilities, five members of the U.S. Navy's ballistic missile submarine fleet launched their Polaris A-1s and A-2s against Soviet targets along the littoral. Many malfunctioned—the USS *Patrick Henry* was lost with all hands due to an explosion of a missile prior to ejection—but over fifty detonated at or near their targets, obliterating coastal assets along the Baltic and Barents seas, the Black Sea, and in the Pacific. Meanwhile, an armada of B-47s and tactical-attack aircraft went after Soviet ground force concentrations in East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Romania. Among the members of the Warsaw Pact, only Hungary was spared some measure of nuclear consequences.<sup>9</sup>

By the end of what in all probability should have been the only day of the war, the Soviet Union and its allies had been subjected to over 950 nuclear blasts—damage incomparably greater than what was necessary to pound them below the threshold of functioning opponents. In response, the USSR managed to deliver precisely two more glancing but still nuclear blows to the continental United States. Yet, they were sufficient to ensure another measure of gratuitous retribution.

At approximately 2200 hours a 611AV-class Soviet ballistic missile submarine (probably B-67) surfaced fifty-five miles west of Virginia

<sup>9</sup> There remains some dispute as to exactly why, but most authorities agree that this was primarily due to Hungary's revolt against communism and Soviet occupation in 1956.

Beach and over the course of the next fifteen to twenty minutes launched two R-11FM missiles (the naval equivalent of a Scud) in the direction of the Norfolk naval complex. Both overshot the mark—one detonated in open country north of Fort Pickett, the other hitting Sussex, Virginia. The submarine's captain probably received word of hostilities and was carrying out an assigned mission, but this remains uncertain since the boat was sunk within minutes after the missiles were fired. Together, both blasts killed less than 6,000 people, but they led U.S. military authorities to conclude the USSR was still dangerous.

Thus the stage was set for the secondary strikes of October 28 and the delivery of another 370 nuclear weapons, all but a few into Russia. Many targets were simply "reserviced," but there also appeared an entirely new and ominous tactic. A substantial number of nuclear weapons were detonated in the heavily timbered areas of central and western Siberia with the intention of setting huge forest firestorms across the taiga. Of all the excesses committed by U.S. forces during the two days, this was its most inexcusable, and one that would have dire consequences for the postconflict environment. If anything can be said for this wanton act of mega-arson, it is that it marked the final act of the terrible drama. All U.S. Intelligence sources pointed to the complete destruction of the USSR. There had been no signs of resistance for many hours and precious little signs of life. At last the generals sheathed their nuclear swords. The Two Days' War was over; now it was necessary to come to terms with its consequences.

### Aftermath

For those who survived, the initial response was largely one of relief that the conflict was over so quickly and that it had not spread worldwide. The United States had lost over a quarter-million people but was basically intact, and the magnitude of the damage suffered by the USSR and its allies was understood by only a very few. Otherwise, the rest of the globe appeared to have escaped basically unscathed. Unfortunately, this initial judgment was based almost entirely on ignorance and was

utterly contradicted within weeks by the harsh reality of what nuclear warfare really meant.

While the costs of the Two Days' War are common knowledge, they bear repeating in light of the blame assigned to the United States and the resulting consequences.

The first to suffer were the Japanese, who for the second time in just seventeen years were victimized by severe nuclear effects, when prevailing southwesterly winds delivered a cloud of very heavy radiation directly from the Vladivostok area. Europe, due to generally easterly winds, escaped this initial fate, but dramatically elevated radiation levels were soon reported in China, the Indian subcontinent, across the Middle East, and into eastern Africa. Of course, this was only the preface.

The near-simultaneous explosion of more than 1,300 nuclear devices had already lofted approximately 100 million tons of fine radioactive dust into the upper atmosphere. This mass, when combined with the pall of smoke from urban and forest firestorms, spread a cloud that, within a month, girdled the entire Northern Hemisphere, particularly the areas between 30 and 60 degrees latitude. By January 1, 1963, sunlight had been reduced in this band by up to 50 percent, resulting in by far the coldest winter ever recorded. The so-called nuclear twilight caused widespread public fear that the condition was permanent and even predictions by respected scientists that a new Ice Age was inevitable. Fortunately, these fears were dispelled when the dust settled during the next year, though at the cost of greatly increased radiation levels. In the end, however, the most serious consequences of nuclear twilight was the virtual absence of spring in the Northern Hemisphere and the resultant drop in food production, setting off severe famines in India and China and very serious food shortages across Europe and North America.

By the late summer the return from Russia of Chinese and European reconnaissance parties confirmed what had become increasingly apparent during the previous year: the Soviet Union had not just been crushed militarily, it had suffered something close to extermination. Even the states of Eastern Europe, whose urban centers had been spared,

suffered immediate casualties ranging from 15 to 30 percent. Death and destruction in the USSR was far worse, akin to Cuba's. Of the initial population of 233 million, it was estimated that only around 80 million were alive a month after the war. Roughly two-thirds of this number would succumb to starvation and the effects of radiation during the following year, leaving the population only a little more than a tenth of what it had been. It was during the fall of 1963 that the term Second Holocaust was first applied to the conflict, and the United States began to be viewed increasingly as malefactor, not victim, by people around the globe. The trend would only gain momentum until the United States was virtually ostracized from the world community.

During the early stages, Americans were thoroughly preoccupied with their own misfortune. The seat of national government and many of its functions had been shattered, and reestablishing order and coherence in the face of a collapsing food supply proved a Herculean task. Elsewhere, Americans may have been seen as callous and self-absorbed, but in their own eyes they were struggling for survival as a nation.

To his everlasting credit, President McCormack rose to the emergency, discharging his duties with a wisdom and dignity that earned him the nearly universal sobriquet Grandfather John. Yet, at age seventy-two, he had easily been the oldest man every to assume the presidency, and the unrelenting series of crises he faced left him in ill health and without the slightest desire to contest the office as his term wound down.

The campaign of 1964, waged in the shadow of growing world hostility against the United States, pitted two veterans of the Cold War, Senator Henry M. Jackson and ex-vice president Richard M. Nixon, against each other. While neither candidate was inclined to concede any measure of war guilt, it was Nixon who seized the initiative and ultimately the election with his famous "nothing to be ashamed of" speech.

Although the passage of time may partially rehabilitate the image of the Nixon administration, at present little has emerged that is positive. In essence, Nixon and his advisers were guided by political

expediency—choosing a path aimed at satisfying a short-term domestic agenda over one that sought to accommodate at least some of the desires and aspirations of the world community. This choice led inexorably toward isolation. Most notable was the administration's scarcely concealed contempt for the global disarmament movement and its refusal to participate in the 1966 Geneva Convention for the Abolition of Nuclear Armaments, a decision that left the United States in a minority of one. This status was confirmed by Nixon's decisions to rebuild the war-depleted nuclear stockpile, continue the deployment of solid-fueled Minuteman ICBMs, and prioritize the development of a ballistic missile defense. While these moves were plainly aimed at reassuring the American public, which undeniably had been the target of a recent nuclear attack, they galvanized worldwide opinion. Anti-American demonstrations of unprecedented size became virtually a daily occurrence; NATO collapsed in early 1967 when the entire European membership withdrew, and a movement to expel the United States swept the UN General Assembly later that year. Once again attempting to play on domestic outrage, Nixon, in a nationally televised address on January 23, 1968, renounced membership and ordered all UN functions and functionaries out of New York.

By declaring the 1968 presidential election a "referendum on national security" Nixon plainly drew a line in the sand, a challenge taken up by the Democratic party with the nomination of Eugene J. McCarthy, an advocate of what he termed "global reconciliation and healing." McCarthy's victory, by an unprecedented 76 percent of the popular vote, made it clear that the American people believed that Nixon had taken the wrong turn and that isolation amounted to national exile.

Now, on the eve of the 1972 elections, President McCarthy's record remains a mixed one. The United States has reestablished diplomatic relations with twenty-four states and also assumed an "observational" status in the UN, offering to take up full membership if and when those resolutions dealing with war guilt and reparations are dropped. The

American scientific community, with massive support from the U.S. government, has assumed a leading role in the global nuclear decontamination effort. American agriculture is once again producing bountiful harvests, which are being systematically distributed to what are now termed the Victim States. U.S. international trade is once again growing, and we are now participating in the deliberations of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.

Nonetheless, President McCarthy's record is less positive on the core issue of nuclear disarmament. Unilateral reductions of the American strategic arsenal and offers to enter negotiations aimed at an eventual "zero option" have plainly fallen on deaf ears, especially among the signatories to the Geneva Convention. Among state parties there is no option but the treaty itself and the immediate renunciation and disarmament it entails. This position is unquestionably founded on a continuing belief that the United States was primarily responsible for the outbreak and consequences of the Two Days' War.

After viewing the evidence in the greatest possible detail, it is the opinion of the Danforth Commission staff that this is far from the case. The United States only responded after suffering nuclear attacks by Soviet forces in three separate venues: the sinking of the *Randolph*, the use of tactical nuclear weapons in Cuba, and the destruction of its national government in Washington. It is true, however, for reasons having to do more with planning and accident than intent, that the U.S. response greatly exceeded that which was necessary to militarily defeat the Soviet Union. It must be admitted that we did, in this process, commit something close to genocide, and that the use of the term "The Second Holocaust" is not inappropriate. Plainly and undeniably, this tragic consequence was the direct result of the accumulation of nuclear weapons and their delivery vehicles. Nuclear war in any form is unsustainable. Yet, the only way to ensure its end is to ensure the elimination of the means by which it is waged. We, therefore, believe that the United States has no choice but to become a state party to the Geneva Convention on the Abolition of Nuclear Armaments at the earliest possible date.



ROBERT DALLEK

## JFK LIVES

*Probably no question in recent history is more poignant than what would have happened if John F. Kennedy had not chosen to visit Dallas on November 22, 1963. Barely more than a year had passed since his most memorable success, the resolution of the missile crisis. What would the forty-six-year-old president have achieved if he had lived? How would the world have been different? In the chapter that follows, Kennedy's biographer Robert Dallek reflects on some of the possible might-have-beens of a lengthened public career. Domestic reforms, especially in civil rights, are probably a given. But what about Cuba and our ever-expanding Vietnam ulcer? Or would his relentless womanizing or his fragile health have derailed his progress toward greatness?*

*Kennedy was the youthful symbol of youthful age. Rarely in history has the death of one individual so tainted the future. Would the sixties have turned quite so sour if the nation, and the world, had continued to depend on, and take nurture from, his special grace under pressure? We still would have had the Beatles and Woodstock, the miniskirt, women's liberation, Twiggy, the Twist, the Prague Spring, and Swinging London. But would our energies have been diverted to outlets more creative, more fruitful, than protesting a war in Vietnam that he might have terminated? Would we have been spared the Chicago riots at the 1968 Democratic convention, the SDS occupations of*