

**Special National Intelligence Estimate October 19, 1962**

1. 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 US can no longer prevent the advance of Soviet offensive power even into its own hemisphere. In this connection they assume, of course, that these deployments sooner or later will become publicly known.
2. It is possible that the USSR is installing these missiles primarily in order to use them in bargaining for US concessions elsewhere. We think this unlikely, however. The public withdrawal of Soviet missiles from Cuba would create serious problems in the USSR's relations with Castro; it would cast doubt on the firmness of the Soviet intention to protect the Castro regime and perhaps on their commitments elsewhere.
3. If the US accepts the strategic missile buildup in Cuba, the Soviets would continue the buildup of strategic weapons in Cuba. We have no basis for estimating the force level which they would wish to reach, but it seems clear already that they intend to go beyond a token capability. They would probably expect their missile forces in Cuba to make some contribution to their total strategic capability vis-a-vis the US....
4. US acceptance of the strategic missile buildup would provide strong encouragement to Communists, pro-Communists, and the more anti-American sectors of opinion in Latin America and elsewhere. Conversely, anti-Communists and those who relate their own interests to those of the US would be strongly discouraged. It seems clear that, especially over the long run, there would be a loss of confidence in US power and determination and a serious decline of US influence generally.

7. Special National Intelligence Estimate, October 19, 1962  
<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/diplomacy/forrel/cuba/cuba032.htm>

**National Security Advisor MacGeorge Bundy**

"The political advantages are, are very strong, it seems to me, of the small (surgical) strike. It corresponds to the [idea that] the punishment fits the crime in political terms, that we are doing only what we warned repeatedly and publicly we would have to do. We are not generalizing the attack....

"I think there's an enormous political advantage, myself, within these options, granting that all the Chiefs didn't fully agree, taking out the thing that gives the trouble [i.e., the missiles] and not the thing that doesn't give the trouble [i.e., Cuba itself]." (2)

"I've reflected a good deal upon the situation in the course of a sleepless night, and I doubt whether the strategy group is serving the President as well as it might, if it merely recommends a blockade.... A blockade would not remove the missiles. Its effects are uncertain and in any event would be slow to be felt. Something more is needed to get the missiles out of Cuba. This would be made more difficult by the prior publicity of a blockade and the consequent pressures from the United Nations for a negotiated settlement. An air strike would be quick and would take out the bases in a clean surgical operation. I favor decisive action with its advantages of surprise and confronting the world with a fait accompli." (4)

2. Off the Record Meeting on Cuba, October 16, 1962  
<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/diplomacy/forrel/cuba/cuba021.htm>  
4. Record of Meeting, October 19, 1962  
<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/diplomacy/forrel/cuba/cuba031.htm>

**Secretary of the Treasury C. Douglas Dillon**

"The existence of strategic missiles in Cuba is, in my opinion, not negotiable. I believe that any effort to negotiate the removal of the missiles would involve a price so high that the United States could not accept it. If the missiles are not removed or eliminated, the United States will lose all of its friends in Latin America, who will become convinced that our fear is such that we cannot act. However, the limited use of force involved in a blockade would make the military task much harder and would involve the great danger of the launching of these missiles by the Cubans." (5)

"In my view a blockade would either inevitably lead to an invasion of Cuba or would result in negotiations, which I believe the Soviets would want very much. To agree to negotiations now would be a disaster for us. We would break up our alliances and convey to the world that we were impotent in the face of a Soviet challenge. Unless the Russians stop their missile buildup at once, we will have to invade Cuba in the next week, no matter what they say, if we are to save our world position. We cannot convey firm intentions to the Russians otherwise and we must not look to the world as if we were backing down." (6)

5. Minutes of the 505th Meeting of the National Security Council, October 20, 1962  
<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/diplomacy/forrel/cuba/cuba034.htm>  
6. Minutes of the 506th Meeting of the National Security Council, October 21, 1962  
<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/diplomacy/forrel/cuba/cuba038.htm>

**Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy**

"I would say that [in an air strike] you're dropping bombs all over Cuba.... You're covering most of Cuba. You're going to kill an awful lot of people, and we're going to take an awful lot of heat on it.... And then...you're going to announce the reason that you're doing it is because, they're sending in these kinds of missiles. Well, I would think it's almost incumbent upon the Russians, then, to say, well, we're going to send them in again, and if you do it again, we're going to do the same thing to Turkey, or we're going to do the same thing to Iran." (1)

"I think that we should also consider what Cuba's going to be a year from now, or two years from now. Assume that we go in and knock these sites out, I don't know what's going to stop them from rebuilding the sites six months from now...." (2)

"There seem to be three main possibilities: one is to do nothing, and that would be unthinkable; another is an air strike; the third is a blockade. I think it would be very, very difficult indeed for the President if the decision were to be for an air strike, with all the memory of Pearl Harbor and with all the implications this would have for us in whatever world there would be afterward. For 175 years we have not been that kind of country. A sneak attack is not in our traditions. Thousands of Cubans would be killed without warning, and a lot of Russians too. I favor action, to make known unmistakably the seriousness of United States determination to get the missiles out of Cuba, but I think the action should allow the Soviets some room for maneuver to pull back from their over-extended position in Cuba." (4)

"I think we should first institute the blockade. In the event that the Soviets continued to build up the missile capability in Cuba, then we should inform the Russians that we will destroy the missiles, the launchers, and the missile sites. I favor a short wait during which time the Russians can react to the blockade. If the Russians do not halt the development of the missile capability, then we can proceed to make an air strike. The advantage of proceeding in this way is that we would get away from the Pearl Harbor surprise attack aspect of the air strike route." (5)

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1. Transcript of a Meeting at the White House, October 16, 1962  
<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/diplomacy/forrel/cuba/cuba018.htm>
  2. Off the Record Meeting on Cuba, October 16, 1962  
<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/diplomacy/forrel/cuba/cuba021.htm>
  4. Record of Meeting, October 19, 1962  
<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/diplomacy/forrel/cuba/cuba031.htm>
  5. Minutes of the 505th Meeting of the National Security Council, October 20, 1962  
<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/diplomacy/forrel/cuba/cuba034.htm>

### **Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara**

"The political course of action...by approaching Castro, by approaching Khrushchev, by discussing with our allies...seems to me likely to lead to no satisfactory result, and it almost stops subsequent military action. Because the danger of starting military action after they acquire a nuclear capability is so great I believe we would decide against it....

"A second course of action...would involve declaration of open surveillance; a statement that we would immediately impose a blockade against offensive weapons entering Cuba in the future; and an indication that with our open-surveillance reconnaissance, which we would plan to maintain indefinitely for the future, we would be prepared to immediately attack the Soviet Union in the event that Cuba made any offensive move against this country.

"It seems to me almost certain that any...form of direct military action will lead to a Soviet military response of some type some place in the world. It may well be worth the price. Perhaps we should pay that. But I think we should recognize that possibility, and, moreover, we must recognize it in a variety of ways. We must recognize it by trying to deter it, which means we probably should alert S[trategic] A[ir] C[ommand], probably put on an airborne alert, perhaps take other alert measures. These bring risks of their own.... We should accompany an invasion following an air strike with a large-scale mobilization, a very large-scale mobilization, certainly exceeding the limits of the authority we have from Congress requiring a declaration therefore of a national emergency. We should be prepared, in the event of even a small air strike and certainly in the event of a larger air strike, for the possibility of a Cuban uprising, which would force our hand in some way. Either forces us to accept an unsatisfactory uprising, with all of the adverse comment that result; or would force an invasion to support the uprising." (2)

"An air strike would not destroy all the missiles and launchers in Cuba, and, at best, we could knock out two-thirds of these missiles. Those missiles not destroyed could be fired from mobile launchers not destroyed....

"After a blockade, the United States should negotiate for the removal of the strategic missiles from Cuba. We would have to be prepared to accept the withdrawal of United States strategic missiles from Turkey and Italy and possibly agreement to limit our use of Guantanamo to a specified limited time. We can obtain the removal of the missiles from Cuba only if we are prepared to offer something in return during negotiations. I believe that issuing an ultimatum, to the effect that we would order an air attack on Cuba if the missiles were not removed, is too risky. I am prepared to tell Khrushchev that we consider the missiles in Cuba as Soviet missiles and that if they are used against us, we will retaliate by launching missiles against the USSR....

The disadvantages of the blockade route are as follows:

1. It would take a long time to achieve the objective of eliminating strategic missiles from Cuba.
2. It would result in serious political trouble in the United States.
3. The world position of the United States might appear to be weakening.

The advantages are:

1. It would cause us the least trouble with our allies.
2. It avoids any surprise air attack on Cuba, which is contrary to our tradition.
3. It is the only military course of action compatible with our position as a leader of the free world.
4. It avoids a sudden military move which might provoke a response from the USSR which could result in escalating actions leading to general war. (5)

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2. Off the Record Meeting on Cuba, October 16, 1962  
<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/diplomacy/forrel/cuba/cuba021.htm>
  5. Minutes of the 505th Meeting of the National Security Council, October 20, 1962  
<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/diplomacy/forrel/cuba/cuba034.htm>

Advisor	Recommendation	Reasons