first in approving the Bay of Pigs attack, and now in thinking that he could reduce differences with Khrushchev by rational explanation. Instead of being responsive to Kennedy’s expressions of regard for Soviet power and appeals to reason over Berlin, Khrushchev had become more assertive and unbending. Kennedy was angry with himself for not having shown a tougher side from the beginning of the talks. He believed that his behavior had strengthened Khrushchev’s conviction after the Bay of Pigs that he was an inexperienced and irresolute president who could be bullied into concessions on Germany and Berlin. Worst of all, he feared that his performance at the meeting had increased rather than diminished the chances of an East-West war.

On one hand, he could not imagine that Khrushchev actually meant to go to war over Berlin. He told O’Donnell shortly after he left the last meeting, “As De Gaulle says, Khrushchev is bluffing and he’ll never sign that treaty. Anybody who talks the way he did today, and really means it, would be crazy, and I’m sure he’s not crazy.” Fighting a war that would kill millions of people over access rights to Berlin or because the Germans wanted to reunify their country impressed him as “particularly stupid.... If I’m going to threaten Russia with a nuclear war, it will have to be for much bigger and more important reasons than that.”

Yet he also understood that smaller issues than those at stake over Berlin had sparked past wars, including World War I. And so he was “shaken” by and “angry” at Khrushchev’s rhetoric and behavior. It was the first time he had ever met “somebody with whom he couldn’t exchange ideas in a meaningful way.” Bobby Kennedy said later: “I think it was a shock to him that somebody would be as harsh and definitive” — as unrelenting and uncompromising — as Khrushchev was in Vienna. However difficult and frustrating the meeting had been, Kennedy understood that the greatest challenges to him as president now lay ahead.

CHAPTER 12

Crisis Manager

When I ran for the Presidency of the United States, I knew that this country faced serious challenges, but I could not realize — nor could any man realize who does not bear the burdens of this office — how heavy and constant would be those burdens.

— John F. Kennedy, Report to the American People on the Berlin Crisis, July 25, 1961

London was a welcome respite from the tension of Vienna. Although Macmillan had initially been “appalled” that someone so young was president and had feared that Kennedy would see him as “so old that he wasn’t worthwhile talking to,” they had established an excellent rapport at two meetings in Washington during Kennedy’s first months in office. Macmillan’s intelligence and dry, quick wit had delighted the president. Going to see the prime minister was like being “in the bosom of the family,” Kennedy told Henry Brandon. “I am lucky to have a man to deal with with whom I have such a close understanding.” “It was the gay things that linked us together,” Macmillan told Schlesinger, “and made it possible for us to talk about the terrible things.”

Kennedy’s meeting with Khrushchev, Macmillan thought, had left JFK stunned. “For the first time in his life Kennedy met a man who was impervious to his charm.” The chairman was “much more of a barbarian” than he had anticipated. Because Kennedy seemed so tired, Macmillan suggested that they meet without Foreign Office officials — “a peaceful drink and chat by ourselves.” Kennedy was pleased at the suggestion, but their discussion was anything but relaxing. Khrushchev’s threats were impossible to ignore, and for the
better part of an hour the two allies explored ideas on a formal response. They believed it essential to stand by what Kennedy had told Khrushchev: The Russians could do what they liked about a peace treaty with the DDR, but “the West stood on their rights and would meet any attack on these with all the force at their command.”

Kennedy returned to Washington on the morning of June 6. He met with congressional leaders that afternoon and spoke to the American people from the Oval Office at 7:00 P.M. He gave the sixteen Senate and House leaders a candid assessment of the talks, reading some excerpts from minutes of the meetings rather than simply giving them his gloss on what had occurred. He had no intention, he told the leaders, of saying anything “that would seem to put Khrushchev in a corner where he must fight back.” But he also wanted them to understand that the United States was competing with an adversary intent on world dominance. Kennedy believed the test ban talks were now pointless and hoped to end them while making Soviet responsibility for the failure clear. On Berlin, Kennedy said that the U.S. would not cede its rights of access. “The Soviets feel that our edge is gone on the nuclear side,” he added, meaning not that Moscow had greater nuclear might than the United States but that it doubted U.S. resolve to fight a nuclear war.

Kennedy’s evening TV address struck a balance between signaling emerging dangers and avoiding rhetoric that could provoke a crisis. To mute the difficulties with Russia, he partly spoke about his successful meetings with de Gaulle and Macmillan. But, as with the congressional leaders, he left no doubt that the United States faced a tough challenge from the Soviet Union. “It was a very sober two days” in Vienna, he said. To be sure, although the gap between the two countries had not been materially reduced, “the channels of communication were opened more fully.” Yet no one should ignore the fact “that the Soviets and ourselves give wholly different meanings to the same words — war, peace, democracy, and popular will. We have wholly different views of right and wrong.” Yet both sides realized that they had the capacity to inflict enormous damage on each other and the world. Consequently, they owed “it to all mankind to make every possible effort” to avoid an armed clash.

Kennedy was not optimistic that Moscow would act sensibly. The Soviets had no desire to provoke a direct conflict with the United States and its allies, but it was clear that the contest between East and West would now spread to developing countries where Moscow gained a foothold. America, Kennedy said, needed to resist such communist advances with economic and military assistance programs to emerging nations struggling to remain free. And though he hid his private anxieties about a possible war over Berlin, his closing words left no doubt about the difficulties ahead: “We must be patient. We must be determined. We must be courageous. We must accept both risks and burdens.”

Renewed public and private expressions of doubt about Kennedy’s performance in Vienna made his sensible statesmanship all the more difficult. After the meeting, Time reported “a widespread feeling that the Administration has not yet provided ample leadership in guiding the U.S. along the dangerous paths of the cold war.” Privately, Macmillan shared this concern: “I feel in my bones’ that President Kennedy is going to fail to produce any real leadership. The American press and public are beginning to feel the same.” Mac Bundy told Kennedy that he and columnists Joe Alsop and Walter Lippmann believed that “this problem of Berlin is one which you will have to master and manage, under your own personal leadership and authority.” He would need to be “in immediate, personal, and continuous command of this enormous question.” And he would have to do better than he had been doing so far.

Kennedy now worried that a defeat over Berlin or in Vietnam, where the Saigon government remained in jeopardy, could be a decisive blow to his presidency. He told Galbraith, “There are limits to the number of defeats I can defend in one twelve-month period. I’ve had the Bay of Pigs, and pulling out of Laos [or refusing to fight there], and I can’t accept a third.”

Kennedy had enough detachment about himself and the magnitude of the problems he confronted not to let criticism or negative perceptions control his public actions toward the USSR. The personal concerns underlying his father’s unwise isolationism remained an object lesson in how not to make foreign policy. He was determined to shape an image of himself as clear and firm about international affairs, but not at the risk of being reckless or allowing considerations other than avoiding a nuclear war to shape what he said and did. Where Bobby would explode in anger toward someone like Chester Bowles for seeming to criticize his brother, JFK was much more restrained. Being president, of course, was vastly different from being attorney general. The reflective temperament that set Kennedy apart from his father, Bobby, Acheson, and most American
military chiefs served him well in a job one shudders to imagine in any of their hands in 1961.

The Berlin Crisis as it evolved during the summer of 1961 was arguably the most dangerous moment for a nuclear conflict since the onset of the Cold War. It tested Kennedy's ability to strike an effective balance between intimidating the Soviets and giving them a way out of their dilemma. How could Moscow halt the migration from East to West, which threatened the collapse of East Germany, without altering existing U.S. treaty rights of unfettered access to Berlin and pushing Washington toward war? Khrushchev had some hope that a Soviet-East German peace treaty might not cause the United States to fight. The Western press, which repeatedly described him as not believing that JFK would pull the nuclear trigger, encouraged the chairman to accept these reports as evidence that Kennedy would not act. But he could not be sure.

On June 10, six days after he left Vienna, Khrushchev publicly released the aide-mémorie he had given Kennedy insisting on a German peace treaty that he hoped could be used to alter Western rights of unfettered access to Berlin through East Germany. Two days later, the Soviet delegate at the Geneva test ban talks "dropped all pretense of serious interest in concluding an agreement." Khrushchev had "no further interest in keeping the test talks alive as a means of promoting an accommodation with Washington," the CIA concluded. On June 15, Khrushchev spoke to his people on television about the urgency of concluding a peace treaty and changing the status of Berlin. East Germany's head of government, Walter Ulbricht, added to the sense of crisis by threatening to shut off Western access to Berlin, including the city's Tempelhof Airport.

Kennedy's initial public response was muted. In the three weeks after Moscow released the aide-mémorie, he said nothing directly about Berlin. Instead of making him look responsible, Kennedy's silence made him seem like an indecisive leader or perhaps a politician seeking a middle ground. International relations expert Hans J. Morgenthau complained that Kennedy's response to Khrushchev's threat to Berlin was reminiscent of the failed "half-measures" he had used during the Cuban invasion.

But behind the scenes, Berlin was Kennedy's greatest daily concern. "He's imprisoned by Berlin, that's all he thinks about," cabinet members complained. It was the highest priority for almost every-

body around the president. National security advisers, academic experts, journalists close to the administration, and even Acheson were asked for their input on how to discourage Soviet implementation of the aide-mémorie and what to do if Khrushchev went ahead.

Much of the argument now revolved around "the need for re-establishing the credibility of the nuclear deterrent." Acheson pressed for acceptance of a formal proposition that the U.S. might have to resort to nuclear war. A failure to defend Western rights in Berlin, he argued, would destroy international confidence in the United States. "The whole position of the United States is in the balance," Acheson said. The Soviets might make nuclear war unavoidable, but in the meantime Kennedy needed "to increase the nuclear deterrent to the greatest extent we can devise. This... offers the best hope of avoiding war short of submitting to Moscow's demands."

By the end of June, Kennedy was under irresistible pressure to speak publicly again on Berlin. Stories in Time and Newsweek that made him seem well behind the public and the Pentagon in determination to face down the Soviets in Germany incensed him. "Look at this shit. This shit has got to stop," he told Salinger. A Nixon dig that "never in American history has a man talked so big and acted so little" was an additional incentive to speak out.

When Kennedy finally did say something at a press conference on June 28, his remarks were measured, calculated to restrain Moscow without deepening the crisis. The Soviet insistence on signing a peace treaty was "to make permanent the partition of Germany" and close off allied access to West Berlin. "No one can fail to appreciate the gravity of this threat," Kennedy said. "It involves the peace and security of the Western world." Kennedy also complained of Moscow's refusal to negotiate a test ban and warned that the United States would respond to renewed Soviet nuclear testing with tests of its own. He then turned Khrushchev's claim that the USSR would outproduce the United States by 1970 into a call for peaceful competition. He predicted that the Soviet Union, whose GNP was 39 percent of America's, would not outproduce the United States in the twentieth century. But he encouraged Moscow to try; it "could only result in a better living standard for both of our people."

When reporters tried to draw Kennedy into more concrete statements about the gravity of the "crisis" or U.S. intentions, he refused. He denied that any proposal for a partial mobilization to meet the Berlin threat had come before him, "though of course we will be
considering a whole variety of measures"; defended the value of the Vienna meeting, which had added to his store of information about the Soviets, though no plans for another meeting were in the works; denied any evidence of renewed Soviet nuclear testing; and declared that decisions on measures to counter the Soviet threat to Berlin were under consideration and that public discussion of a matter of such "extreme seriousness" should wait until the administration's deliberations were complete. Kennedy's remarks struck an effective balance between firmness and restraint, and contrasted Soviet belligerence with American interest in peaceful economic competition.

Behind the scenes, however, a vigorous argument had begun to rage over what all agreed was now a full-blown crisis. On one side stood advocates led by Acheson, the Joint Chiefs, Allen Dulles, and some State and Defense Department officials urging an overt military buildup to intimidate Moscow, and on the other, Rusk, Stevenson, Bowles, Harriman, Schlesinger, and Sorensen arguing for a more flexible response that included possible negotiations coupled with military preparations.

Kennedy refused to choose openly between the two alternatives, nor would he move precipitously. Above all, he was determined to control the decision making. On June 28, he told the Joint Chiefs that they were his principal advisers on all military matters, but that he also regarded them as "more than military men and expected their help in fitting military requirements into the over-all context of any situation, recognizing that the most difficult problem in Government is to combine all assets in a unified, effective pattern." The message was clear enough: The military needed to understand that it was part of a larger process in which the president would set military considerations alongside other factors before deciding what best served the national interest.

In a meeting with Acheson and national security officials the next day, Kennedy, who said little, nevertheless made clear that he would not foreclose additional discussions with Khrushchev about Berlin. Although Acheson believed that "no negotiation can accomplish more than to cover with face-saving devices submission to Soviet demands," Kennedy asked him what would be "the right answer" if the chairman proposed a summit that summer. Acheson suggested that talks could begin at "a lower level. . . . There were plenty of 'elderly unemployed' people like himself who could be sent to interminable meetings" and "could converse indefinitely without negotiating at all." Kennedy's preference for talks had registered three days before when he met with three Soviet journalists. Most of the discussion was about Berlin: He explained that the American people would impeach him if he gave up U.S. rights in Berlin, urged against a showdown over the city, and predicted that a Soviet-American war would "leave everything to the rest of the world — including the Chinese," a prediction Kennedy understood would not be lost on the Russians, who were growing increasingly apprehensive about their competition with Peking.

During the first week of July, Newsweek boosted Soviet-American tensions over Berlin by reporting a leak about Pentagon planning that included a declaration of limited national emergency, the removal of U.S. military dependents from West Germany and France, the reinforcement and increase of American divisions in Germany, and "some demonstration of U.S. intent to employ nuclear weapons," either by a resumption of testing or by moving atomic weapons in the NATO stockpile "to advanced 'ready' positions." Kennedy may have authorized the leak to send Khrushchev an unmistakable message. In response, Khrushchev gave private and public indications that Moscow was both ready for and horrified at the prospect of a nuclear fight. "Why should two hundred million people die for two million Berliners?" he asked the British ambassador. Upping the ante on his side, on July 8, Khrushchev publicly canceled plans to reduce Soviet forces by more than a million men, announcing instead a one-third increase in the defense budget.

Kennedy now pressed advisers for political alternatives to the potential military confrontation. He complained to Schlesinger that Acheson was "far too narrowly" focused on military solutions and asked him to bring Berlin planning "back into balance." Kennedy, who was leaving that afternoon for a weekend in Hyannis Port, where he was to meet with Rusk, McNamara, and General Maxwell Taylor, instructed Schlesinger to write a paper on the unexplored Berlin political issues. Working furiously for two hours with State Department counselor Abram Chayes and Harvard professor Henry Kissinger, Schlesinger delivered a memo as Kennedy was about to leave in a helicopter from the White House south lawn. The memo concluded that Kennedy should ask Rusk "to explore negotiating alternatives, and ask Acheson to supply the missing political dimension in his argument."

Kennedy's determination to give himself more than the nuclear option in the growing crisis registered forcefully on his three weekend companions. While they cruised off Cape Cod, Kennedy peppered
Rusk, inappropriately dressed in a business suit (which perfectly symbolized his and the State Department’s unhelpful formality and inability to think imaginatively), McNamara, and Taylor with questions about diplomatic initiatives and military alternatives that might deter Moscow from a nuclear attack.

Determined not to find himself confronting inadequate military options, as he had during the Bay of Pigs, and to rein in public pressure for overt military preparations, which might prove wasteful and dangerous, Kennedy asked McNamara and Bundy to extract concrete explanations from the Pentagon on anticipated Berlin outcomes. At the same time, he directed Pentagon press officer Arthur Sylvester to write William Randolph Hearst Jr., providing a catalogue of actions refuting complaints in his newspapers about insufficient military preparedness. Sylvester hoped that Hearst would “give these additional facts . . . the same prominence that you gave your earlier report.”

During July, as planning proceeded on how to respond to the Soviet threat, Kennedy sought the greatest possible flexibility. He wanted no part of a Pentagon plan that saw a ground war with Soviet forces as hopeless and favored a quick resort to nuclear weapons. Nor did he want pseudonegotiations that would make the United States look weak and ready to yield before Soviet pressure. He believed that “the only alternatives were authentic negotiation or mutual annihilation.” As he told New York Post editor James Wechsler, “If Khrushchev wants to rub my nose in the dirt, it’s all over.”

To make his intentions clear to Moscow and reassure Americans and European allies, Kennedy scheduled a highly publicized television address on July 25. As a run-up to the speech, he used a July 19 press conference to urge Moscow “to return to the path of constructive cooperation,” looking toward “a just and enduring settlement of issues remaining from” World War II. He also outlined the themes of his forthcoming speech, promising a discussion of responsibilities and hazards as well as a statement of “what we must do and what our allies must do to move through not merely the present difficulties” but also the many challenges ahead.

As Sorensen and several other aides helped Kennedy draft his television address, the president continued to worry about perceptions that he lacked the guts to fight an all-out war. Bobby heard from a Soviet embassy source that Moscow’s ambassador Mikhail Menshikov was privately telling Khrushchev that JFK “didn’t amount to very much, didn’t have much courage.” Bobby dismissed this as Menshikov “telling Khrushchev what he’d like to hear,” but American press reports (probably leaked by Pentagon sources eager to pressure the White House) of Menshikov’s opinion added to Kennedy’s problem over Berlin.

Acheson privately shared Menshikov’s assessment. After Kennedy made clear in the July meetings that he would not strictly follow Acheson’s advice, the former secretary of state said to a small working group, “Gentlemen, you might as well face it. This nation is without leadership.” Mac Bundy believed it essential for the president to counter these impressions.

Given all this, Kennedy’s speech on the twenty-fifth was the most difficult moment for him since the Bay of Pigs. Speaking from the Oval Office, crowded with TV cameras and klieg lights that added to the heat of the summer night, Kennedy struggled not to appear uncomfortable. Additional steroids helped ease the tensions of the moment, but he suffered physical discomfort nevertheless, which added to the pressure of speaking to hundreds of millions of people around the world seeking reassurance that the young American president would fend off a disastrous conflict. Too little emphasis on military planning and too much on negotiations seemed certain to bring cries of appeasement; too much talk of readiness to fight and too little on possible discussions or interest in another summit would provoke shouts of warmonger.

But the speech struck a masterful balance between the competing options, effectively blaming the crisis on Moscow. More important, Kennedy made it clear that he would not permit the Soviets to overturn America’s legal rights in West Berlin or its promise “to make good on our commitment to the two million free people of that city.” Using a map, he illustrated the Soviet-East German ability to close off Western access to the city. But it would be a mistake, he said, for Moscow to look upon Berlin as “a tempting target” because of its location. It had “now become — as never before — the great testing place of Western courage and will. . . . We cannot and will not permit the Communists to drive us out of Berlin, either gradually or by force. . . . We will at all times be ready to talk, if talk will help. But we must also be ready to resist with force, if force is used upon us.” And to make sure that the United States had “a wider choice than humiliation or all-out nuclear action,” Kennedy declared his intention to ask Congress for an additional $3.25 billion
appropriation for defense, an increase in army strength from 875,000 to one million men, with smaller increases in navy and air force personnel, a doubling and then tripling of draft quotas, a call-up of reserves to meet manpower needs, and expanded funding for greater civil defense planning.

The choice, however, was "not merely between resistance and retreat, between atomic holocaust and surrender. . . . Our response to the Berlin crisis will not be merely military or negative," Kennedy declared. "We do not intend to abandon our duty to mankind to seek a peaceful solution." He was ready to talk with other nations if they had constructive proposals and if they sought "genuine understanding — not concession of our rights." He expressed sympathy for Moscow's security concerns "after a series of ravaging invasions," but not at the expense of Berlin's freedom or Western treaty rights. "To sum it all up: we seek peace — but we shall not surrender."

The response to Kennedy's speech pleased and partly surprised the White House. Predictably, it created a "rally" effect, with Americans and West Europeans approving of the president's "determination and firmness." Majorities in the United States and the Western European countries backed Kennedy's intention to defend American rights in Berlin and supported the right of Berliners to self-determination. What startled Kennedy and others in the administration was the public's lack of support for negotiations. And reactions in the press and Congress and from Nixon reflected the current national view that an unbridgeable divide between the U.S. and the USSR would end in a nuclear war. Sixty percent of Americans believed that Soviet insistence on control of Berlin would mean a war, and 55 percent thought that chances were either nil or poor that Moscow would give in. The press, which always found conflict more interesting than diplomacy, saw the U.S. military buildup as the headline in Kennedy's speech, even though the White House leaked suggestions that the president might be ready to accept alterations in East Germany's boundary or a nonaggression pact with Moscow guaranteeing Russian safety from a German attack. As a result, Congress rushed to approve funding not only for Kennedy's defense requests but also for arms that the administration believed unnecessary.

Despite public and press militancy, Kennedy was not about to be stampeded into military action. And though Khrushchev was unhappy with Kennedy's speech, he also deciphered Kennedy's restraint. Khrushchev publicly emphasized his determination not to be intimidated and predicted that Soviet nuclear superiority could make Kennedy America's last president, but he also declared his continuing faith in Kennedy's reason and said that "after thunderstorms people cool off, think problems over and resume human shape, casting away threats."

During the next two weeks, Khrushchev publicly mixed harsh warnings with invitations to negotiate. It was what a State Department analyst called the "twin tactics" of "maintaining, even stepping up his threats . . . and at the same time, gradually broadening the possible terms of negotiation." It was more stick than carrot, but it allowed Khrushchev to save face while Moscow laid plans to extricate itself from a confrontation in which it was increasingly clear Kennedy would not give ground.

EARLY SUNDAY MORNING, August 13, while Kennedy was in Hyannis Port, East German security forces threw up barriers that blocked access from East to West Berlin. There had been some talk in Washington about such a development. In a television interview on July 30, Senator William Fulbright had wondered "why the East Germans didn't close their border, because I think they have a right to close it." Five days later, during a stroll in the White House Rose Garden with Walt Rostow, Kennedy, reflecting on how unbearable Khrushchev's refugee problem was, said, "East Germany is hemorrhaging to death. The entire East bloc is in danger. He has to do something to stop this. Perhaps a wall. And there's not a damn thing we can do about it." Kennedy also said: "I can get the alliance to move if he tries to do anything about West Berlin but not if he just does something about East Berlin."

But this was all conjecture; Kennedy had no advance knowledge of Khrushchev's plan, and the administration's failure to anticipate the development left him frustrated and angry. Moreover, there is no indication that he saw the border closing as ending the Berlin crisis; quite the opposite: "With this weekend's occurrences in Berlin there will be more and more pressure for us to adopt a harder military posture," he told McNamara. "I do not think we can leave unused any of the men or money that were offered by the Congress with the exception perhaps of the bomber money." At the same time, Kennedy asked Rusk, "What steps will we take this week to exploit politically propagandawise the Soviet-East German cut-off of the border? This seems to me to show how hollow is the phrase 'free
city' and how despised is the East German government, which the Soviet Union tries to make respectable. The question we must decide is how far we should push this. It offers us a very good propaganda stick."

Kennedy responded to the border closing with studied caution. He stayed at the Cape until his scheduled return Monday morning and confined the administration's initial response to a State Department statement declaring the action without impact on the "Allied position in West Berlin or access thereto." Nevertheless, the department noted "violations of existing agreements" that would be "the subject of vigorous protests through appropriate channels."

The restrained response reflected Kennedy's realization that the Berlin Wall, as the thirteen-foot-high barrier came to be known, was something of a godsend. "Why would Khrushchev put up a wall if he really intended to seize West Berlin?" Kennedy asked O'Donnell. "There wouldn't be any need of a wall if he occupied the whole city. This is his way out of his predicament. It's not a very nice solution, but a wall is a hell of a lot better than a war."

With the wall, Kennedy's problem was in fact more with his allies — the West Germans in particular — than with the Soviets. On August 16, Edward R. Murrow, USIA director, who had been visiting Berlin when the wall went up, cabled Washington that conversations with West Berlin's mayor, Willy Brandt, and newspaper, radio, and TV journalists had indicated a degree of demoralization that "can and should be corrected." The absence of any "sharp and definite follow up" to Washington's response had produced a "letdown" that amounted to "a crisis of confidence." At a public rally, Brandt asked Kennedy to demonstrate his commitment to Berlin by reinforcing the U.S. garrison stationed in the city. Embarrassed by the appeal, which Kennedy believed a campaign tactic to help Brandt win election to the chancellorship, JFK bristled: "Look at this! Who does he think he is?" But the pressure to do something was irresistible. At a meeting on August 17 with national security officials, Kennedy cautioned them against considering the issue of the wall itself — "our writ does not run in East Berlin" — and asked them to address instead the question of West Berlin morale. The discussion persuaded him to send additional troops to Berlin along with a letter delivered publicly to Brandt by Johnson, who had played almost no part to that point in the Berlin crisis, and General Lucius D. Clay, the architect of the 1948 Berlin airlift that had saved the Western sector from a Soviet blockade. As Kennedy told Brandt in the letter, he appreciated that these actions were more symbolic than substantive, but not entirely. (The troop reinforcement underlined the U.S. rejection for "the removal of Allied protection from West Berlin.") More important, Kennedy promised to continue the buildup of military forces in Europe to counter the Soviet threat to Berlin.

Johnson thought the trip a poor idea, less because he feared for his safety — as Kenny O'Donnell later suggested — than because he believed it would intensify the crisis. When Johnson heard that he would be expected to greet the American troops traveling through the Eastern Zone to West Berlin, he predicted, "There'll be a lot of shooting, and I'll be in the middle of it. Why me?" General Norstad also believed it a mistake to send the vice president: It "would run the risk of exciting great expectations in West Berlin and possibly also among the unhappy East Germans," he cabled the Joint Chiefs from Paris.

Kennedy, however, believing that Johnson's mission would send just the right message to Khrushchev, the West Germans, and the allies, ordered LBJ and Clay to fly to Bonn on August 18. Johnson threw himself into the assignment with characteristic energy, staying awake on the overnight transatlantic flight to work on his speeches. At the Bonn airport, he told a waiting crowd that America was "determined to fulfill all our obligations and to honor all our commitments." Chancellor Konrad Adenauer assured LBJ that his presence was a refutation to an old woman in the crowd waving a sign that said "Action, Not Words." Flying on to West Berlin, Johnson rode to the city center in an open car cheered by 100,000 spectators lining the roads. Stopping the car repeatedly, he plunged into the appreciative crowds, shaking hands, distributing ballpoint pens, and responding with visible emotion to the displays of enthusiasm. At city hall, he told 300,000 cheering Berliners to maintain faith in themselves and "in your allies, everywhere throughout the world. This island does not stand alone."

The next day, Sunday, at 9:00 A.M., Johnson and Clay awaited the arrival at the Helmstedt entrance to West Berlin of sixteen hundred U.S. Army troops crossing the 110-mile stretch of autobahn separating the city from West Germany. Kennedy, who normally spent summer weekends in Hyannis Port, stayed in Washington to monitor the progress of the convoy; he intended to control the response to any possible confrontation with Soviet troops at East
German military checkpoints along the road. For more than twelve hours from Saturday night to Sunday afternoon in Washington, Kennedy's military aide reported to the president every fifteen minutes on the progress of the column. Berliners greeted the arrival at 10:00 A.M. of the first elements of the convoy with shouts, tears, and flowers. The U.S. commander described the event as "the most exciting and impressive thing I've ever seen in my life, with the possible exception of the liberation of Paris."

No one in the Western camp saw Johnson's trip as more than a temporary morale booster; it offered no formula for ending the confrontation. Kennedy wanted to issue an invitation before September 1 to Moscow to begin talks and to make "plain to our three Allies that this is what we mean to do and that they must come along or stay behind." But he also wanted fresh proposals to work with. He suggested that the allies "examine all of Khrushchev's statements for pegs on which to hang our position. He has thrown out quite a few assurances and hints ... and I believe they should be exploited." When no one came up with anything that seemed likely to advance negotiations, hopes for meaningful talks remained no more than that. In these circumstances, de Gaulle warned the president, negotiations "would be considered immediately as a preamble to the abandonment, at least gradually, of Berlin and as a sort of notice of our surrender." Discussions now "would be a very grave blow to our Atlantic Alliance." Reported "trends towards neutralism" in Europe, new Soviet threats to civil air and road access to West Berlin, and Moscow's resumption of nuclear testing on August 30 led Max Taylor to tell Kennedy that "Khrushchev intends using military force, or the threat thereof, to gain his ends in Berlin." It all further diminished Kennedy's hopes of early productive talks.

Nevertheless, since the alternative to diplomacy might be a nuclear war, Kennedy saw the continuing search for a negotiating formula as imperative. So did Khrushchev, who invited columnist Drew Pearson during a visit to Russia to come to his summer retreat on the Black Sea for an interview. During their talk, he emphasized that "there isn't going to be a war." Consequently, when George Kennan reported from Belgrade, where he was serving as ambassador, that his Soviet counterpart, under instructions from Khrushchev, wanted to discuss Germany and Berlin, Washington agreed.

Throughout, Kennedy tried to placate Adenauer, who, like Acheson, believed that only military steps would restrain the Soviets. Kennedy endorsed the chancellor's "estimate of the severity of the threat to the entire world by increasing the dangers of a thermonuclear holocaust." (Privately, he had been furious with the report that the Soviets had resumed testing: "Fucked again," he told the national security official who brought him the news. "The bastards. That fucking liar," he said of Khrushchev.) Declaring the Soviet announcement "a form of atomic blackmail, designed to substitute terror for reason in the present international scene," Kennedy invited the USSR to join the U.S. and Britain in banning atmospheric nuclear tests producing radioactive fallout. In addition, he ordered the resumption of underground explosions as a response to ten Soviet tests but said the United States remained eager for "a controlled test ban agreement of the widest possible scope."

Although Khrushchev privately described the resumption of tests as essential to build Russia's nuclear strength, Soviet scientist Andrei Sakharov believed otherwise. Soviet testing, Sakharov predicted, would simply provoke U.S. testing and a further lead for the United States in the arms race. When Sakharov confronted Khrushchev with this reality, the chairman, playing to hard-line critics in the Kremlin, invited the USSR to join the U.S. and Britain in banning atmospheric nuclear tests producing radioactive fallout. In addition, he ordered the resumption of underground explosions as a response to ten Soviet tests but said the United States remained eager for "a controlled test ban agreement of the widest possible scope."

Crisis . . . and of the likelihood that worse is yet to come." Yet Kennedy disputed Adenauer's contention that negotiations "might be misinterpreted as a sign of weakness on our part." Khrushchev had no reason for illusions about Western firmness. And Kennedy believed that the sheer "logic of a thermonuclear war demands that we exhaust every effort to find a peaceful solution consistent with the preservation of our vital interests." Little Soviet interest in negotiations did not discourage Kennedy. "It isn't time yet," he told Rusk. "It's too early. They are bent on scaring the world to death before they begin negotiating, and they haven't quite brought the pot to boil. Not enough people are frightened."

Publicly, Kennedy demonstrated only determination to face down Khrushchev. On August 30, he announced the appointment of General Clay as his personal representative in Berlin and described renewed Soviet nuclear testing as a demonstration of "utter disregard of the desire of mankind for a decrease in the arms race . . . [and] a threat to the entire world by increasing the dangers of a thermonuclear holocaust." (Privately, he had been furious with the report that the Soviets had resumed testing: "Fucked again," he told the national security official who brought him the news. "The bastards. That fucking liar," he said of Khrushchev.) Declaring the Soviet announcement "a form of atomic blackmail, designed to substitute terror for reason in the present international scene," Kennedy invited the USSR to join the U.S. and Britain in banning atmospheric nuclear tests producing radioactive fallout. In addition, he ordered the resumption of underground explosions as a response to ten Soviet tests but said the United States remained eager for "a controlled test ban agreement of the widest possible scope."

Although Khrushchev privately described the resumption of tests as essential to build Russia's nuclear strength, Soviet scientist Andrei Sakharov believed otherwise. Soviet testing, Sakharov predicted, would simply provoke U.S. testing and a further lead for the United States in the arms race. When Sakharov confronted Khrushchev with this reality, the chairman, playing to hard-line critics in the Kremlin, publicly reprimanded Sakharov for not understanding politics. The Americans, Khrushchev lectured, did not understand any other language than displays of military strength. And Kennedy, Khrushchev felt, was of no help in reaching useful agreements. "We helped elect Kennedy last year," Khrushchev told a Soviet lunch group. "Then we met with him in Vienna, a meeting that could have been a turning point. But what does he say? 'Don't ask for too much. . . . If I make
too many concessions, I'll be turned out of office.' Quite a guy! He comes to a meeting but can't perform. What the hell do we need a guy like that for?"

However poor prospects for productive talks seemed, Kennedy pressed aides, allies, and Moscow to find a negotiated solution to Berlin. In a conversation on September 5 with Rusk, Stevenson, and other White House officials, he described several plausible elements of a negotiating strategy. He also instructed Ambassador Thompson to discuss a possible basis for negotiations with Foreign Minister Gromyko. Meanwhile, Kennedy sent Khrushchev conciliatory messages through the American press: On September 6, James Reston quoted the president as ready for an "honorable accommodation." Two weeks later, James Wechsler of the New York Post described Kennedy as believing that nothing was nonnegotiable "except the dignity of free men."

Never forgetting how devastating a nuclear exchange with the United States would be for the Soviet Union, and relieved of his émigré problem through Berlin, Khrushchev began a slow but unmistakable shift away from threats and toward talks. Worried that a peace treaty with East Germany would "spark a Western economic embargo against the socialist bloc," which would destabilize Moscow's Eastern European satellites, he had ample reason to maintain the status quo with Germany. But after repeatedly threatening to sign a treaty, Khrushchev needed a graceful means of retreat.

Khrushchev sent a message to the president, carried by Cyrus Sulzberger of the New York Times, that he was not "loath to establish some sort of informal contact with him to find a means of settling the crisis without damaging the prestige of the United States — but on the basis of a German peace treaty and a Free City of West Berlin." A preliminary discussion between Rusk and Gromyko in September signaled further Soviet interest in an accommodation. Khrushchev then sent Kennedy a message through Soviet press spokesman Mikhail Kharmalov. At a dinner with Salinger at the Carlyle Hotel in New York on September 24, the night before Kennedy was to mark the opening of the U.N.'s annual session with a speech before the General Assembly, Kharmalov said, "The storm in Berlin is over." Kharmalov also described the chairman as ready for a summit discussion that could head off a Soviet-American conflict, and relayed Khrushchev's hope that Kennedy's upcoming U.N. address would "not be another warlike ultimatum like the one on July 25. He didn't like that at all." Salinger delivered the message to the pres-

ident, who was dressed in pajamas and chewing on an unlit cigar, in his hotel suite at one o'clock in the morning. Kennedy commented, "He's not going to recognize the Ulbricht regime — not this year, at least — and that's good news."

To encourage Khrushchev's interest in talks, Kennedy's speech the next day mixed condemnation with conciliation. He denounced renewed Soviet nuclear testing and seeming indifference to the horrors of a conflict — "Mankind must put an end to war — or war will put an end to mankind," Kennedy declared in a memorable line. "This is not the time or the place for immoderate tones," he added. Although he left no doubt that Moscow was responsible for the current confrontation, he declared the crisis unnecessary and himself willing to talk. "We are committed to no rigid formula," he explained. "We see no perfect solution. . . . But we believe a peaceful settlement is possible. . . . There is no need for a crisis over Berlin, threatening the peace — and if those who created this crisis desire peace, there will be peace and freedom in Berlin." At the same time, he instructed Bobby to give interviews that emphasized the dangers to peace from Soviet threats. "The United States and the Soviet Union," Bobby told Knight journalists, "are on a collision course. Unless the situation changes, we will run into one another in a short period of time. I don't think that there is any problem that even comes close to this. . . . On this question really rests the future not just of the country but of the world."

Three days after Kennedy spoke, Khrushchev sent him a back-channel twenty-six-page letter delivered by Kharmalov to Salinger. The letter flattered the president as someone who "prepossessed" people with his "informality, modesty and frankness, which are not to be found very often in men who occupy such a high position." It also struck warm, folksy notes, describing the chairman's retreat into tranquility on the Black Sea, where he enjoyed the sun, bathing, and the "grandeur of the Caucasian Mountains." In this setting, Khrushchev found it "hard to believe that there still exist problems in the world which . . . cast a sinister shadow on peaceful life, on the future of millions of people." His letter was meant to be an informal and personal approach to their mutual problems — "Only in confidential correspondence can you say what you think without a backward glance at the press."

Most important, Khrushchev mirrored Kennedy's concern not to bring the world to disaster through rash actions provoking a nuclear war. He sounded positive notes about shared interest in "striving
towards that noble goal" of disarmament and in finding a solution to their German problem. With the Berlin Wall easing Soviet embarrassment, Khrushchev focused on his other concern, keeping Germany divided. Khrushchev now proposed private talks about Germany between personal representatives as a prelude to a summit meeting between Kennedy and himself. “We can agree, we can disagree with one another,” Khrushchev concluded, “but weapons must not be brought into play.”

A week after Kennedy received Khrushchev’s letter, Gromyko asked to see him at the White House. “This is really the first time since Vienna that they’ve wanted to talk,” the president told O’Donnell and Powers. “It looks like a thaw.” Kennedy greeted Gromyko with expressions of satisfaction at the recent exchanges between him and Rusk and suggested that Ambassador Thompson continue the discussions in Moscow. Tediously reading from a prepared text for an hour, Gromyko, whose wooden, formal demeanor irritated the president, said nothing that Kennedy had not heard before, except that Khrushchev no longer saw a “fatal date,” meaning that a year-end treaty signing no longer applied. Kennedy answered Gromyko that current Soviet proposals on Germany and Berlin “meant [their] trading an apple for an orchard. It would result in a decline of our position in West Berlin and would require our acceptance of other changes which are in the interest of the U.S.S.R.” It amounted to “not a compromise but a [U.S.] retreat.” Nevertheless, Kennedy stressed American willingness to continue discussions in Moscow and expressed the determination not to protract them month after month.

On October 17, before Khrushchev received a firm but cordial written reply to his letter, in which Kennedy agreed to the likely benefit of “wholly private” exchanges, Khrushchev publicly announced his satisfaction with indications of Western interest in a solution to the German and West Berlin problems and the diminished need to sign a peace treaty by the close of the year.

The “thaw,” however, did not end American planning for a possible confrontation. After Khrushchev’s false private assurances on renewing nuclear tests, Kennedy remained distrustful of Soviet professions of peace and good intentions on Germany. In addition, Franco-German opposition to negotiations made a Berlin settlement unlikely, and at home Kennedy faced considerable pressure from mindless right-wingers all too ready to fight a nuclear war. During a White House luncheon, E. M. Dealey, the publisher of the Dallas Morning News, verbally assaulted the president for heading an administration of “weak sisters.” Dealey believed that the United States needed “a man on horseback” to deal with the Soviet threat. “Many people in Texas and the Southwest think that you are riding Caroline’s tricycle,” Dealey commented. Kennedy, with evident but controlled anger, replied, “Wars are easier to talk about than they are to fight. I’m just as tough as you are — and I didn’t get elected President by arriving at soft judgments.”

Kennedy signaled his determination to keep his military guard up in an October 20 letter to General Norstad. The president authorized a continuation of the contingency planning and buildup in NATO military strength. But he also wanted to be sure that in a new Berlin crisis his wishes for a controlled escalation would be clear to U.S. commanders and would be closely followed. He told the general that military moves would only come after diplomacy had failed; current planning was only meant to assure against any “half-cocked” action. Nor would he take the country into a nuclear war until he had exhausted every diplomatic and more traditional military step in defense of the United States and Western Europe.

Yet Kennedy’s cautious approach was tempered by both international and domestic constraints that dictated he exert continuing pressure on Moscow to stand down more definitively. Consequently, on October 21, Kennedy had Deputy Defense Secretary Roswell Gilpatric publicly describe U.S. nuclear superiority to the Soviet Union. Despite concerns that the speech might propel the Soviets into greater efforts to achieve missile parity, Kennedy believed it would reduce the risk of war over Berlin and fears in the West that he still lacked the toughness to deter communist aggression. According to Gilpatric, the speech, given before a business council meeting in Hot Springs, Virginia, aimed to convince Moscow of America’s readiness to meet any threat to Berlin and to persuade America’s allies that increasing conventional forces did not preclude fighting a nuclear war. Rather, conventional forces were a form of insurance against a hasty, and possibly unnecessary, escalation to the ultimate weapons.

The Soviets responded to Gilpatric’s speech with mixed signals. Two days later, on October 23, the Soviets detonated a thirty-megaton nuclear bomb; Soviet Defense minister Rodion Malinovsky, speaking to the Twenty-second Communist Party Congress, declared his country unintimidated by Gilpatric’s threatening words; and Russian officers provoked a temporary confrontation between Soviet
and American tanks at a checkpoint between East and West Berlin. On November 9, Khrushchev followed these actions with another long letter to Kennedy about Soviet-American differences over Germany. He returned to his complaints about the emergence of West German militarism and insisted on the continuation of two German states. "Any other approach would inevitably lead us to collision, to war." He also complained about the dearth of fresh proposals on Berlin and warned of the "extremely sad" consequences for both the United States and the Soviet Union that could flow from "unreasonable decisions."

At the same time, however, the Soviets struck several conciliatory notes. Little was said at the annual party congress about Berlin, Khrushchev told reporters on November 7 that "for the time being, it was not good for Russia and the United States to push each other"; urged the West German ambassador to believe that rapprochement between their two countries was his highest priority; and, in his latest letter to Kennedy, emphasized Soviet devotion to "the principles of peaceful co-existence" and his belief that reconciliation between them was not only possible but essential.

All this back and forth left official Washington uncertain and on edge. Bundy called it "a time of sustained and draining anxiety." In a circular cable to all diplomatic posts in November, Rusk interpreted the Soviet party Congress as signaling an avoidance of a "serious risk of nuclear war" balanced by vigorous Soviet action to establish communist regimes in developing nations. Rusk thought it evident that the Soviets were as determined as ever to win the Cold War. "Unity, preparedness, and firmness of purpose" remained essential in blunting threats to Germany and Berlin.

In a conversation at the end of the month with Aleksei Adzhubei, Khrushchev's son-in-law and Izvestia editor, Kennedy, speaking on the record, echoed Rusk's concerns. He bluntly told Adzhubei that international difficulties were the result of Soviet efforts "to communize, in a sense, the entire world. . . . It is this effort to push outward the communist system, on to country after country, that represents, I think, the great threat to peace." In a private conversation with Adlai Stevenson, who had objected to the American resumption of nuclear tests, Kennedy said, "What choice did we have? They had spit in our eye three times. We couldn't possibly sit back and do nothing at all. . . . All this makes Khrushchev look pretty tough. He has had a succession of apparent victories — space, Cuba, the Wall. He wants to give out the feeling that he has us on the run."

But by November 1961, Kennedy could take satisfaction from the fact that his successful handling of the Berlin problem had forced Khrushchev to retreat. Kennedy's measured, firm response to Khrushchev's threats had preserved West Berlin from communist control. True, Moscow had brought an end to the talent drain from East to West by erecting the wall, but the barrier dividing Berlin became an instant potent symbol of East European discontent with communism. Of course, Kennedy took no pleasure in the continuing plight of the millions of Europeans trapped behind the Iron Curtain, no matter the propaganda advantage. But Khrushchev's backtrack restored Kennedy's faith in his foreign policy leadership, and Berlin could now be considered his first presidential victory in the Cold War.

Despite his success, Kennedy had no illusion that reduced tensions over Germany promised a grand rapprochement in East-West relations or an easing of the Soviet-American contest for global influence. Russia might not force America out of Berlin or into the permanent partition of Germany, but if it established communist governments across Latin America, Africa, and Asia, it would leave the United States and its allies surrounded by hostile regimes. Any sign of weakness or hesitation to answer the communist threat in these regions would encourage Soviet hopes that America lacked the resolve to stand up for itself and its allies in new direct challenges to the United States.

Kennedy had hoped that the Alliance for Progress could help meet the communist threat in Latin America. But domestic and foreign constraints quickly demonstrated that the Alliance was no immediate or possibly even long-term answer to hemisphere problems. Kennedy began by setting a ten-year time frame for the plan and asking Adolf A. Berle, an assistant secretary of state under FDR, to head a Latin American task force. In June, however, Schlesinger told the president that the State Department's Latin American experts "keenly resent the intervention of 'outsiders'" and were "predominantly out of sympathy with the Alianza." These men formed "a sullen knot of resistance to fresh approaches." The administration would need to break their grip on policy if there were to be anything resembling "a new look in Latin America."
Resistance to reform in Latin America itself was an even greater obstacle. Kennedy's idealistic rhetoric about transforming the region had not persuaded entrenched interests across the hemisphere. "The governments of most Latin American countries have not yet grasped what this program calls for in the way of economic and social change, nor do the economically privileged groups understand the sacrifices which will be required of them," Ambassador Thomas Mann in Mexico told Rusk in October. "The obstacles to change vary from country to country but they are all deep-seated and each will be extremely difficult to remove," Bowles agreed. He doubted that the administration had considered how much a successful Alliance required revolutionary change. "What we are asking is that the philosophy of Jefferson and the social reforms of F.D.R. be telescoped into a few years in Latin America. And these steps will have to be taken against the wills of the rich and influential Latin Americans and the people in power. . . . The reforms we want them to make appear very radical to them. We take progressive income tax for granted, but this is shockingly radical to those countries."

If cautious firmness was the formula for dealing with Khrushchev in Europe, where a major miscalculation could provoke the ultimate conflict, Kennedy embraced largely covert but determined anticommunist efforts in Latin America. However undemocratic such actions might have been, Kennedy believed that he had no choice but to make sure that American surrogates got what they needed to combat Moscow-supported threats.

To facilitate counterinsurgency struggles in developing regions generally and Latin America in particular, Kennedy felt compelled to remove Bowles from the number two job in the State Department. Kennedy saw several reasons to replace him; one was his inability to reform the department's bureaucracy, which JFK saw as miserably ineffective in acting imaginatively or promptly in responding to crises like Cuba and Berlin. Bowles's tensions with Bobby and other advocates of practical — as opposed to what they called "fanciful" — answers to hard foreign policy questions also played a part. Bowles's antagonism to administration hard-liners was an open secret. "The question that concerns me most about this new Administration," Bowles wrote privately after the Bay of Pigs, "is whether it lacks a genuine sense of conviction about what is right and what is wrong. . . . The Cuban fiasco demonstrates how far astray a man as brilliant and well intentioned as Kennedy can go who lacks a basic moral reference point." As for Bobby, Bowles thought he demonstrated the perils of a newcomer to foreign policy who, "confronted by the nuances of international questions . . . becomes an easy target for the military-CIA-paramilitary-type answers which can be added, subtracted, multiplied or divided." Bowles certainly had it right about Bobby. Moreover, he was one of the few high officials — Schlesinger was another — who wisely raised moral questions about administration foreign policies and the negative consequences to the country in letting apparent national security imperatives eclipse ethical concerns. For the long run, however, he misjudged how much the Cuban failure would cause JFK to share Bowles's doubts about facile military answers to foreign challenges.

Bowles's conflicts with the administration's hard-liners had registered most clearly over Cuba and the Dominican Republic. By July, this infighting had joined with his failings as an administrator to convince Kennedy to shift him from the State Department to an embassy. But Bowles refused to accept a posting to Brazil, and when press accounts appeared about the president's decision to oust him, Kennedy, concerned about alienating liberals, felt compelled to back away — but not for long. In the fall, Bowles and the Kennedys clashed over the value of counterinsurgency forces fighting Third World communism. Bobby, "a true believer in counterinsurgency," which he called "social reform under pressure," envisioned special forces training guerrilla fighters to combat communist subversion and helping the downtrodden build hospitals, roads, and schools. Bobby and the president also wanted to train Third World police forces to counter clandestine infiltration and communist-inspired mob violence. In September, Kennedy issued a National Security Action Memo (NSAM) instructing McNamara to establish police academies to train the Latin American military in these techniques. When Bowles wisely opposed this as a poor substitute for aid programs that directly met the needs of peasants in rural poverty, it convinced the president and Bobby that Bowles had to go. In November, during Thanksgiving weekend, Kennedy announced a reorganization of the State Department that made Bowles a roving ambassador and replaced him with George Ball, another Stevensonian in whom Kennedy had more confidence.

Pushing Bowles aside was part of Kennedy's renewed determination to do something about Cuba. For six months after the Bay of Pigs failure, the administration had reached no decision on how to
deal with Castro. Kennedy had approved the creation of a Special Group to discuss counterinsurgency in Cuba, but it provided no effective plan. "The Cuba matter is being allowed to slide," Bobby noted in a memo on June 1. "Mostly because nobody really has the answer to Castro. Not many are really prepared to send American troops in there at the present time but maybe that is the answer. Only time will tell." In July, discussions of CIA support for an underground movement foundered on the realization that no group in Cuba had sufficient political appeal to overturn Castro. Would the United States have to invade Cuba to get rid of him? JFK asked Admiral Burke at the end of the month. Burke believed that although "all hell would break loose . . . some day we would have to do it." In September, Kennedy told Dick Goodwin that he wanted "to play it very quiet" with Castro because he did not want to give Castro the opportunity to blame the United States for his troubles. Publicly ignoring Castro and avoiding even indirect action that could encourage comparisons to David and Goliath seemed like the best temporary policy.

During the summer, at a conference in Montevideo, Che Guevara, Castro's close associate, who was representing Cuba, spoke with Goodwin. "Che was wearing green fatigues, and his usual overgrown and scraggly beard," Goodwin told the president. "Behind the beard his features are quite soft, almost feminine, and his manner is intense. He has a good sense of humor, and there was considerable joking back and forth during the meeting." Che "wanted to thank us very much for the invasion — that it had been a great political victory for them — enabled them to consolidate — and transformed them from an aggrieved little country to an equal." Goodwin said, "You're welcome. Now maybe you'll invade Guantanamo." "Never," Che responded with a laugh. He also suggested the possibility of talks looking toward a rapprochement. But fearful that it would be seen as a victory for Castro and would stir sharp political protest in the United States, Kennedy expressed no interest in the idea.

By October, with the Berlin crisis winding down and the growing conviction that the Soviet-American struggle would shift to the Third World, Kennedy exhibited renewed concern about removing Castro "in some way or other . . . from the Cuban scene." Although this was not "a crash program . . . it should proceed with reasonable speed," Bundy told State Department officials charged with the assignment. On November 3, after Goodwin urged Kennedy to make Bobby the commander of an anti-Castro operation, the president authorized Operation Mongoose, "the development of a new program designed to undermine the Castro government." As Bobby, whom Kennedy directed to run the operation, noted, "My idea is to stir things up on the island with espionage, sabotage, general disorder, run & operated by Cubans themselves with every group but Batistaites & Communists. Do not know if we will be successful in overthrowing Castro but we have nothing to lose in my estimate." At a November 21 meeting attended by Kennedy, Bobby, General Edward Lansdale (whom Bobby had made chief of operations), and Goodwin, Bobby, speaking for the president, "expressed grave concern over Cuba, [and] the necessity for immediate dynamic action," including "a variety of covert operations, propaganda" discrediting Castro, and "political action" supported by the OAS.

The CIA had been plotting Castro's assassination during the closing months of Eisenhower's administration, so it was not unprepared for this not-so-new assignment. Senator Frank Church's Select Committee investigating alleged assassination plots in 1975 turned up eight schemes to kill Castro hatched between 1960 and 1965, including a contract with mobsters eager to reestablish lost business interests in Cuba. Kennedy himself discussed assassinating Castro. In March 1961, he had asked George Smathers whether "people would be gratified" if Castro were killed. In 1988, Smathers recalled Kennedy telling him that the CIA had encouraged him to believe that Castro would be "knocked off" at the start of the Bay of Pigs attack. There are additional indications that the president and Bobby talked in the fall of 1961 about killing the Cuban leader. Bobby Kennedy's biographer Evan Thomas pointed out that "on the very same day that the Attorney General — for the first time in four months — asked about a case that risked exposing CIA plotting against Castro, the administration requested a study on the likely effect of removing Castro — and further ordered that the President's interest in this subject be kept quiet . . . There can be little doubt," Thomas concluded, "that they discussed assassination as at least an option, however sordid." "We were hysterical about Castro at the time of the Bay of Pigs and thereafter," McNamara said later. In a conversation on November 9 with New York Times reporter Tad Szulc, Kennedy asked, "What would you think if I ordered Castro to be assassinated?" When Szulc denounced it as immoral and impractical, Kennedy entirely agreed with him. Szulc also recalled the
president saying that he had raised the question because "he was under terrific pressure from his advisers." (Szulc thought Kennedy was talking about Bobby, whom CIA officials remember pressing them at this time to use any means to "get rid" of Castro.)

Bobby was not advancing an assassination plot against his brother's wishes. No secrets on foreign policy existed between them. Assassination was undoubtedly a topic of discussion and something the emotional, messianic Bobby may have seen as a necessary evil. But his more dispassionate brother seems to have resisted the suggestion, not necessarily as immoral, but as impractical and counter-productive. Kennedy realized that Castro's death seemed likely to strengthen rather than eliminate communist control in Cuba, where the leader's brother Raul and Che Guevara could convert his death into an emotional plea vindicating his life and beliefs. Poor planning at the Bay of Pigs had ended in disaster. By contrast, careful, modulated responses to Khrushchev's pressure over Germany and Berlin had produced at least a temporary stand-down. The two episodes had strengthened Kennedy's instinctual caution about any response to international dangers that could lead to war. Although the CIA continued to see assassination as a possible response to pressure to remove Castro, there is no evidence that the White House, perhaps after briefly entertaining it, saw it as anything more than a bad idea. Nevertheless, as with the Bay of Pigs fiasco, Kennedy was the accountable party for his administration's actions. Hidden acts of aggression against Third World countries by overzealous agencies were the president's responsibility.

Kennedy's caution in the fall regarding the advancement of American interests in the hemisphere also revealed itself in his dealings with British Guiana. There can be no question that he saw a communist takeover in the British colony as impermissible. Like Castro, Cheddi Jagan claimed to be an anticommunist social democrat, but the experience with Castro had made Washington wary. British reassurances that Jagan could be kept in the Angola-American camp gave Kennedy only minor reason to hope that Guiana would not turn into another Cuba. In addition to his own worries about a second communist enclave in the hemisphere, which would jeopardize U.S. security and deal his administration another serious blow, he was under pressure from Senator Thomas Dodd of Connecticut, who was denouncing Jagan as a communist agent.

Jagan's selection as prime minister in September, after his party won majority control of a legislative council, gave Kennedy little choice but to try to work with him. In late October, he agreed to receive Jagan at the White House during a trip to America to ask economic assistance. Though Jagan struck a number of responsive chords with Kennedy, he came across as an unreliable romantic who Kennedy believed would eventually suspend constitutional democracy and "cut his opposition off at the knees." Kennedy refused to give him a relatively large aid package but did agree to some help in the belief that support would reduce the chances of his going communist from 90 percent to 50 percent. To guard against that eventuality, Kennedy approved a covert program aimed at destroying communist influence in the country. But the watchword was caution: The covert program was to "be handled with the utmost discretion and probably confined at the start to intelligence collection." A wait-and-see attitude would parallel efforts to work "against pro-Communist developments by building up anti-Communist clandestine capabilities." It was, considering the pressure Kennedy was under, a restrained effort, and would remain so. That would not be the case — tragically — in the next place to which Kennedy turned his attention. That place had only a limited hold on the public's imagination in 1961, but before long millions of Americans would know about South Vietnam.