I THINK WE WILL WIN THIS OPERATION

The Soviet offer of nuclear missiles surprised Fidel Castro. In the past year Moscow had been giving him less of the conventional weaponry that he and his commanders believed Cuba needed. It had taken Moscow almost a year to agree to give him the much less dramatic defensive assistance he had requested in September 1961. As of May 1962, not only had the surface-to-air missiles not yet arrived, but the Soviets were now making noises that they could not supply as many as the Cubans wanted. The story was the same regarding the Sopka shore missile system. The Soviets had balked at Castro’s initial request for three batteries in September 1961, and when they finally relented in April 1962, they said they could promise only one battery. Castro had also asked for ten thousand Soviet troops to be deployed to the island. He had been careful not to describe them to the Soviets as a trip wire, but no doubt he hoped they would serve as a guarantee that any U.S. Invasion would be interpreted by Moscow as an attack on the Soviet Union. The Soviets then counteroffered only three thousand men. So, with all this evidence that the Soviets were having a hard time agreeing to give Castro the defensive strength he wanted, out of the blue came an offer of offensive ballistic missiles.

Sharaf Rashidov, a candidate member of the Presidium from Uzbekistan, ostensibly led the Soviet delegation that arrived on the island in late May 1962. The Cubans, however, quickly understood that the military representative, Marshal Sergei S. Biryuzov, held the real power in the group. Castro explained to Rashidov and Biryuzov that the Soviet offer was flattering. He knew of no other instance in which the Soviets had considered deploying nuclear missiles outside their country. But he was not prepared to believe that it was concern about the defense of Cuba that had motivated the Kremlin’s unexpected generosity. In his estimation, the Sopka, the SAMs, and the Soviet troops would be enough to defend the island. Repeating Khrushchev’s official justification for the offer, the delegates denied that the Soviet leader had any objective in mind besides defending Castro’s regime.

Castro would have been excused if he found Moscow’s initiative ironic. For years the Soviets had been telling the Americans that they were wrong to fear that Cuba would become an extension of Soviet power. Just before the Bay of Pigs, Khrushchev had sent Castro a confidential snippet from a conversation with the U.S. ambassador. “We disagree with the U.S. conception of Cuba,” Khrushchev had lectured Thompson. What the Soviet leader had in mind was Washington’s tendency to view Cuba in the same way it viewed the countries that bordered the USSR. “The USA, for some reason, believes that it has the right to put military bases along the borders of the USSR. [Yet] we do not at the same time have a military base in Cuba, but friendly relations.” As a way of ridiculing U.S. concerns in 1961, Khrushchev had even indulged in sarcasm: “And in the U.S. there has already been the criticism that the USSR is building a rocket base on Cuba.” A year later it now looked to Castro as if reality would replace sarcasm.

The Soviet delegation failed to persuade the Cuban leader that the missiles would be coming just to defend his revolution, but he saw no reason to reject an offer that would likely tie the Soviet Union to the defense of his country. Castro told his visitors that Cuba would accept the strategic missiles.

Once he heard the good news, Khrushchev lifted some of the veil of secrecy between the two countries. He was never completely open with the Cubans about the reasons that had prompted him to take the risk of his career, but in a letter thanking Castro, he allowed that more than the defense of Cuba was at stake. Castro’s agreement, he wrote, represented “a further fortification of the victory of the Cuban revolution and of the greater success of our general affairs.”

The Rashidov delegation returned to Moscow on June 8, 1962, and Khrushchev convened an unusual Sunday morning meeting of the Presidium two days later to hear its reports and formally approve the Cuban missile operation.

What Khrushchev had in store for his colleagues was much more than a plan to send a couple of nuclear missiles to Cuba. At the June 10 meeting Soviet Defense Minister Malinovsky outlined an audacious plan to build a powerful Soviet military base ninety miles from the U.S. coast. Under Operation Anadyr—a cover name drawn from the name of a Siberian river to
confuse the uninitiated—the Soviet Union would dispatch forty nuclear missiles divided into five nuclear missile regiments, three with medium-range R-12s and two with intermediate-range R-14s. Atlanta, Georgia, was in range of a medium-range missile launched from Cuba, whereas an intermediate-range missile could hit the U.S. strategic missile bases in the Midwest and Washington, D.C. These missiles represented a major augmentation of Soviet strategic power. As of mid-1962, the Soviets had only about twenty strategic rocket launchers with missiles that could reach the United States, and they all were intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) located in the USSR.3

According to Khrushchev’s and Malinovsky’s plan, the strategic missiles were the centerpiece of what was to become an extensive Soviet military presence in Cuba. Protecting the missiles in Cuba would be four motorized regiments, two tank battalions, and a MiG-21 fighter wing, some antiaircraft gun batteries, and twelve SA-2 surface-to-air missile detachments (with 144 launchers). Each tank battalion would be outfitted with the T55, the newest Soviet tank. The total deployment of Soviet forces would be 50,874, of which 10,000 would be deployed in the four motorized regiments. Additional nuclear striking power would come from forty-two Il-28 light bombers, which could reach Florida and were given six nuclear bombs, and two cruise missile (FKR) regiments, comprising eighty nuclear-tipped missiles positioned opposite likely U.S. landing beaches. Besides this impressive land and air component, the Soviet armed forces intended to establish a submarine base on Cuba, which would simplify the logistics of maintaining patrols of the North American coastline. A massive flotilla that would establish a naval presence for the Soviet Union around the island would accompany these submarines.4

“I think we will win this operation,” Khrushchev exclaimed after listening to Malinovsky’s description of what power the Soviet Union would soon be able to project from Cuba. The Soviet leader could hardly contain his excitement, but the records left of this extraordinary 11:00 A.M. Sunday meeting of the Presidium suggest that he did not explain what “winning” meant. Was it that he assumed that with Soviet power staring Washington squarely in the face, the United States would finally have to take Moscow seriously as an adversary? It is difficult to know with any certainty how clearly Khrushchev had thought through the implications of his new Cuban base in early June.

What new, formerly top-secret Soviet information reveals, however, is that by early July he had developed an increasingly ambitious sense of what the Cuban deployment could mean for Soviet strategic policy. In the three weeks since Castro’s acceptance of the missiles Khrushchev thoroughly revised his foreign policy objectives for 1962. This was supposed to be the year of no new diplomatic initiatives. Now he hoped to keep the Americans off-balance, allowing international affairs to be as unstable as the meniscus on a glass, until Soviet power reached a point where deals could be struck on issues like Berlin, the test ban, and Southeast Asia.

On July 1 Khrushchev unveiled his ambitious new agenda to his Presidium colleagues. The meeting was ostensibly to discuss a Soviet-Cuban defense agreement. The Cuban defense minister, Raúl Castro, was expected in Moscow the next day, and Havana wanted to sign a pact of sorts. Khrushchev used the occasion to introduce some ideas that he had on matters in an area that had never before been linked to Cuba.6

The Soviet leader announced that he wanted to renew the push for a settlement on West Berlin. He proposed delaying the removal of the eleven thousand Western troops from the city in a way that would not harm Soviet prestige. Immediately upon the signature of a peace treaty between the Western powers and the two Germanys, Western garrisons would be cut in half and then remain under the UN flag. On the second anniversary of the peace treaty the remaining fifty-five hundred Western soldiers would be replaced by non-Western UN troops. Four years after that—or six years in total following the signature of the peace treaty—all UN troops would leave. Under this plan there would be nothing like the international access authority that Kennedy had suggested as a way to guarantee that Western planes and trains could continue to cut across East Germany to reach West Berlin. “An international organ is unacceptable,” Khrushchev announced at the July 1 session. The UN’s role would be limited to providing troops to satisfy American anxieties that West Berlin might be attacked by the Soviet bloc. He wanted a letter to go out to Kennedy with these proposals.8

Khrushchev conveyed to his colleagues that this proposal was to be Moscow’s bottom line, and the Americans were to be forced to accept it, even if it meant taking the “path of aggravating things.”9 In January the Soviet leader had disavowed making 1962 the year of Berlin. “Really, is such an issue on the agenda now?” he had asked his colleagues before answering his own question. “No, on the contrary, we don’t have this issue at all, because, if not now, then it will be tomorrow. And if it’s not now, but tomorrow, is this worse? What, will it undermine our foundation? No, not in the least. On the contrary, our strengths are increasing, our influence in the world is increasing, our impact is increasing. So why should we take such a drastic step?”10
Now Khrushchev declared to his Kremlin colleagues in secret session that it was time to take that drastic step. Why? The notes of the July 1 Presidium meeting are fragmentary, but there are clues that the prospect of a substantial Soviet missile force ninety miles from the United States, in effect tripling the number of Soviet strategic nuclear missile launchers within range of North America, was just part of the story. Equally important was Khrushchev’s anger at what he considered yet another act of hubris by the Kennedy administration. Two weeks earlier Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara had given a speech on U.S. nuclear policy at the University of Michigan commencement. It was a public restatement of a revolution in Western nuclear strategy he had secretly unveiled at a NATO conference in Athens in May. Soviet intelligence had apparently missed the NATO speech, but Khrushchev could easily read about the Ann Arbor speech, which was covered around the world.

What McNamara said irritated the Soviet leader because the secretary of defense explained that in the future NATO should consider targeting Soviet military installations instead of cities. The U.S. government was making this argument because it wanted to discourage the French, the British, and the West Germans from building their own nuclear forces, which were inefficient and hard to control and bred Soviet concerns. Only the U.S. force was technologically sophisticated enough to hit Soviet missile silos. But what Khrushchev heard was that McNamara was somehow trying to make nuclear war seem less bloody and therefore more acceptable. Minutes after outlining a new Berlin offensive, Khrushchev railed against McNamara at the July 1 meeting: “Not targeting cities—how aggressive! What is their aim?” he asked. Answering his own question, as he often liked to do, Khrushchev replied, “To get the population used to the idea that nuclear war will take place.” McNamara was even suspect for having announced in Michigan that the U.S. and Soviet nuclear arsenals were essentially equal. “They are not equal,” Khrushchev reminded his Kremlin listeners, who, like him, knew the Soviet nuclear force to be inferior. He suspected a trick by McNamara, who might be trying to lay the ground for a rapid increase in American nuclear forces. “How many bombs do they need?” Khrushchev asked.

Khrushchev’s impulse to lash out at U.S. power recalled his overreaching in November 1958. At that time the imminent deployment of Soviet nuclear missiles in East Germany had steeled his determination to do something to curb NATO’s nuclear alliance with West Germany and the alliance’s presence in Berlin. In 1959 he had found he lacked the power to compel Dwight Eisenhower to give in, so he dropped his ultimatum. This time, however, he expected to be powerful enough to get his way, and he hinted to his colleagues that he intended to try out traditional forms of diplomacy before launching a new world crisis. He would make one more direct appeal to Kennedy to accept his reasonable proposals on Berlin before going to the UN in the fall. And although it seems Khrushchev did not mention Southeast Asia in this discussion, there is ample evidence that on July 1 he also had in mind seeking a diplomatic agreement to neutralize Laos in Geneva, if possible, that summer. On June 11 the princes Souvanna Phouma and Souphanouvong had reached agreement on a coalition government and called for a reconvening of the Geneva Conference to formalize Laotian neutrality. The U.S. envoy to those discussions, Averell Harriman, was due to meet with Soviet Foreign Ministry officials on July 2 in Moscow to reaffirm Kennedy’s desire to seek the peaceful demilitarization and political neutralization of Laos, and Khrushchev planned to assure Washington that this remained his goal as well.

The tension between Khrushchev’s willingness to use diplomacy in Laos and his taste for brinkmanship over Berlin was apparently left unexplored at the July 1 meeting. The Presidium did spend some time discussing Cuba before the meeting ended, though its connection to the coming confrontation over Berlin was also left unstated. Foreign Minister Gromyko read a draft Soviet-Cuban defense agreement to the members, which they approved. The Presidium also formally designated Khrushchev, Malinovsky, and Gromyko to take part in the negotiations with Raúl Castro. Meanwhile Khrushchev assured his colleagues that this would have to occur in the midst of a crisis atmosphere. He also seemed to assume that after scoring points in the ensuing debate at the UN, Moscow could then force its way to get what it wanted.

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Khrushchev got everything that he asked for from his colleagues on July 1. This time, unlike in 1958 and 1961, he was able to bring about a radical shift in Soviet Berlin strategy without any debate. Mikoyan, the Presidium’s resident skeptic on the wisdom of launching Berlin crises, was not at the meeting, and his absence may explain the lack of opposition on July 1. If Mikoyan later expressed any doubts when he returned to the Kremlin, those reserva-
The details of Castro's two conversations with Khrushchev on July 3 and July 8, 1962, remain elusive. If Russian notes were taken, they cannot be found. Meanwhile, in a vestige of the Cold War more than four decades later the Cuban account remains sealed. However, Khrushchev's public statements in the days that followed and his statements in highly classified settings reveal that Castro's trip altered his planning of the Cuban facet of the 1962 strategic offensive. The Cubans and General Dementyev convinced him that the security of the operation required the shipment of surface-to-air missiles to precede the delivery of the medium-range and intermediate-range rockets. According to the original Soviet military plan, the SAMs were to be delivered in two installments, the first was that July and the second in August. The Cubans apparently requested that the missiles arrive the same month.

In making their request, the Cubans had differentiated between weapons necessary for their defense and strategic weapons that Khrushchev wanted on the island for his purposes. Khrushchev accepted this distinction. In explaining the change of plan to his colleagues at the Presidium on July 6, following his first meeting with Raúl Castro, he said that the "defensive" weapons would go first and that the weapons that were part of his offensive plan, the strategic missiles, would follow. The Cuban request had a second consequence, the significance of which became apparent only in the fall. Originally Malinovsky and the planners at the Soviet Defense Ministry had projected that all the nuclear missiles would be sent to Cuba in the first part of July. They were to leave in two shipments, one carrying the medium-range missiles, the other, the intermediate-range missiles. Now that the Cubans wanted their SAMs first, the missile shipments had to be delayed because of the shortage of Soviet ships to carry them. According to the Anadyr plan, the Ministry of Marine, responsible for transporting everything but the nuclear warheads, which were to be handled by the Soviet Navy, had only so many ships. The Defense Ministry still believed that the entire plan could be implemented by November 1, as Khrushchev had hoped, but instead of the missiles arriving while the launch facilities were being built, they were now expected to arrive later.

Between meetings with Raúl Castro, Khrushchev approved a threatening letter to President Kennedy on Berlin. "International developments, especially those in and around West Berlin," Khrushchev wrote on July 5, "prompt the conclusion that further delay in solving the questions connected with a German peace settlement would involve such a threat to peace which must be averted already [sic] now when it is not too late." The letter contained an even stronger demand than that which Khrushchev had outlined to his colleagues on July 1. Kennedy was told that Moscow wanted an immediate 50 percent cut in the Western contingent in West Berlin, with replacement troops coming from the Warsaw Pact and from neutral and some small NATO countries like Denmark. His original proposal said nothing about putting socialist soldiers in West Berlin. In the letter Khrushchev promised that the combined NATO–Warsaw Pact–Neutral contingent of eleven thousand troops would then serve under the UN flag. Over the course of four years the entire UN contingent would gradually be phased out, with proportional reductions of the Western and non-Western portions. In his July 1 proposal to Kremlin leadership Khrushchev had shown a willingness to accept a six-year transition to a demilitarized West Berlin. Evidently his confidence in what he could soon get in the new international environment was rising.

Khrushchev did not coordinate this new proposal with East Germany. Relations with Ulbricht were little improved from the difficulties of 1961, when Khrushchev rescinded the ultimatum he had handed Kennedy at the Vienna summit. Of this new effort, Ulbricht was told only that the Soviet Union and the United States were about to head into some very serious negotiations on Berlin, and Khrushchev sent along the suggestion that if the East Germans wanted to tighten border controls, now was the time to do it.
WHEN KENNEDY read Khrushchev's letter on July 5, he immediately foresaw serious trouble ahead. The new demands signaled an unwelcome resumption of Soviet pressure for an immediate settlement of the future of Berlin and yet another test of Kennedy's resolve in Central Europe, an issue that should have been resolved by his actions in 1961. The president knew of no international developments that might have prompted this dramatic change in tone. Complicating matters was not merely the renewed hostility of Khrushchev's letter—the Soviet leader was famous for blowing hot and cold, and now he was blowing hot—but that the terms it offered were the worst to have come out of the Kremlin since 1958. Khrushchev must have known, thought Kennedy, that these terms would be unacceptable. But if there was any doubt in the Soviet leader's mind, Kennedy wasted no time in explaining to the Soviet leadership through Ambassador Dobrynin in Washington that no U.S. president could accept this deal. 23

In handing Dobrynin the letter containing his government's formal reply to Khrushchev on July 17, Kennedy emphasized the dangerous turn that U.S.-Soviet relations were taking. 24 Using carefully chosen language, he explained why compromise along the lines Khrushchev had suggested was impossible. Maintaining the troops in West Berlin was a "vital interest of the United States." Therefore, "none of the Soviet proposals for alternative arrangements," he said, "could be accepted." To remove the troops would be "a major retreat." Historically, great powers did not accept retreats except at the point of a knife. If he were to accept Khrushchev's terms, Kennedy added, "Europe would lose confidence in U.S. leadership. It would be a major victory for the Soviet Union and a major defeat for the West." Kennedy's rejection could not have been clearer.

Two days after transmitting his response to Moscow, the president met with his Berlin team to discuss contingency planning for the now expected crisis. He was very dissatisfied with NATO's current military plans, which would take days to initiate once a crisis started. If the Soviets or East Germans were to deny Western access to West Berlin by closing any of the routes to the city, Washington might be faced with the decision to use nuclear weapons immediately because of the glacial pace by which U.S. allies would be able to get sufficient troops to the area. The U.S. plan was no better. Known as National Security Action Memorandum 109, or Poodle Blanket, it envisioned a sixty-day diplomatic and mobilization period before U.S. forces could attack. When Kennedy had routinely asked in June for the status of any of these plans, he was told that none of them could be implemented for at least another few months. 25

A few days after this sobering meeting Kennedy received more bad news from Moscow. On July 25 Khrushchev met for five hours with Ambassador Thompson, about to leave his post in Moscow and return to the United States to become Kennedy's chief Sovietologist. The meeting began in the morning at Khrushchev's office in Moscow and ended at his dacha outside the city. Khrushchev offered a dark assessment of the state of U.S.-Soviet relations. He admitted to having little hope of achieving any agreement to ban nuclear tests. "[H]e did not think the Pentagon wanted it," Thompson reported to Washington. 26 But this was not the section of the conversation that caused concern in the White House. As the ambassador was about to leave, the Soviet leader said that he had an unpleasant subject to discuss. He told Thompson that it was evident from Kennedy's reaction to his Berlin proposals that Washington was prepared to wait indefinitely to resolve this problem, a scenario that was not acceptable to Moscow. Khrushchev recalled that the United States often referred to issues, especially Berlin, as matters of prestige but never seemed to take Soviet prestige into account. It was a matter of Soviet prestige, he explained, that the Berlin situation be resolved very quickly and the appropriate peace treaties be signed.

Khrushchev spoke calmly and, despite the ominous topic, was remarkably cordial. Thompson sensed that he was determined to move ahead but "was deeply troubled." 27 At one point Khrushchev asked the U.S. ambassador to ask President Kennedy personally if he wanted matters to come to a head over Berlin before or after the November 6 congressional elections in the United States. Khrushchev said he wanted to "help him," presumably to win seats for Democrats; but he left his meaning unclear, and Thompson did not press him on it. 28

Despite Khrushchev's professed interest in helping him, Kennedy was convinced that a major crisis was brewing. He had been in office eighteen months, and already he had dealt with the consequences of a failed covert action in Cuba, the seemingly unsolvable puzzle in Laos, and tension over Berlin a year before. But compared with all of these foreign policy challenges, this new one had the earmarks of something worse.

As the president confronted the likelihood of another Berlin crisis, someone, possibly his brother Robert, handed him a copy of Barbara Tuchman's latest book, The Guns of August detailed the tortuous path taken by the great powers before the outbreak of the First World War. 29 The story left its mark on Kennedy, who was struck by how almost casually the elite of the Edwardian age had drifted into war. An exchange involving Imperial Germany's prewar chancellor, Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, was what impressed him most.
To the question “Oh, how did it happen?” Bethmann-Hollweg could only answer, “Oh, if we ever knew.” According to his brother Robert, John F. Kennedy was “not going to have that legacy left while he was President.”

John Kennedy decided he owed it to himself and to history to collect a better record of the decisions that he was about to make and the information upon which they were based. Telling Secret Service officer Robert Bouck that he was concerned about recent changes in U.S.-Soviet relations, he ordered the installation of a secret taping system in the Oval Office and the Cabinet Room and upstairs in his private quarters. Although Kennedy’s very first professional ambition had been journalism, he had not kept a diary since he entered elective office. The crafty Joseph Kennedy had told his boys, “Never write it down,” and Kennedy had heeded that advice. The tapes were to fill that void in the record. Kennedy had correctly perceived that Khrushchev was determined to have a confrontation over Berlin in 1962, and he wanted to document the steps that he took to avoid nuclear war.

As the taping system was installed, U.S. intelligence began to notice an unsettling development much closer to home. Dozens of Soviet merchant ships with undisclosed cargoes were headed toward Cuba. NATO reconnaissance planes spotted the ships as they left the Barents Sea in the north and the Black Sea in the south. They were then picked up by U.S. planes over the Atlantic. It was the largest Soviet sealift to Cuba, and the timing seemed unusual.

Amid the growing uncertainty in Washington about Soviet intentions, Robert Kennedy heard from the GRU officer Georgi Bolshakov that he had a message to deliver from Moscow. It was only the second time that the Kremlin had used Bolshakov to send a message. When the attorney general informed him of Bolshakov’s request to meet him, the president decided to participate in the meeting, which was scheduled for July 31 in the Oval Office.

Khrushchev had mentioned to the Presidium on July 1 his concern about NATO’s spying on the Anadyr convoys, and he opted to use Bolshakov to ask Kennedy directly to stop the intrusive overhead reconnaissance of Soviet shipping. The NATO flights were very low-level, between 150 and 300 feet over the ships. In one case the plane came so close to the ship that the pilot lost control and crashed 150 yards from the ship. It was a risky request by Khrushchev, who was thereby drawing attention to the armada headed to Cuba with nuclear weapons, but Moscow wanted to see if Kennedy would unintentionally help them keep the secret.

The president agreed to Khrushchev’s request and used the meeting as an opportunity to send a message to the Kremlin through the Bolshakov back channel. Concerned about the sudden urgency in the Berlin negotiations, he asked Khrushchev to put the issue “on ice” for the moment.

A few days later Bolshakov sent back Khrushchev’s reply. He thanked the president for his “order to curtail US planes’ inspections of Soviet ships in open waters” but refused to reward Kennedy by stopping his push for a Berlin settlement. Khrushchev “would like to understand what John F. Kennedy means by ‘placing the Berlin question on ice’,” Bolshakov was instructed to say.

The mixed signals confused Kennedy. In late July the United States and the Soviet Union signed the multilayer Geneva Agreement to neutralize Laos, which stipulated the withdrawal of foreign forces from the country. After achieving this breakthrough in superpower relations, why was Khrushchev now making trouble in Berlin and perhaps in the Caribbean? On August 1 analysts at the CIA warned that Khrushchev had chosen to resume putting pressure on the West because “the Soviets are probably convinced that no important increase in the Western position [on Berlin] can be obtained without greatly increased pressures.” But the agency also suggested that there was a limit to the risks Khrushchev was willing to take. It anticipated nothing more than renewed harassment of Western airplanes in the air corridors or perhaps an attempt to prevent Western military traffic from entering East Berlin under the four-power agreement. The reason, the CIA assured Kennedy, was that the Soviets “almost certainly recognize that the balance of military power has undergone no change which would justify this [abandoning the traditional Soviet caution in situations involving a direct East-West confrontation].”

Unsure of why under these circumstances Khrushchev would want a second crisis over Berlin, Kennedy turned to the American who had met with and studied Khrushchev the most, Llewellyn Thompson, who had just ended his four-year tour at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow.

At their meeting on August 8 Thompson revealed more frustration and uncertainty than insight. “It’s like dealing with a bunch of bootleggers and gangsters,” he said without any apparent irony to the man whose father had sold liquor during Prohibition. Thompson had picked up a useful tidbit, however, before leaving Moscow. He had heard that Khrushchev was likely to plead his case on Berlin before the United Nations and suggested that the United States start working to ensure that the neutral countries did not support him.

The conversation ranged over Khrushchev’s recent actions. Kennedy asked Thompson to explain the Russian’s behavior at the Paris summit in 1960. Thompson told the president he thought it was an effort by Khrushchev to save face
In Moscow the Soviet Union's German experts were preparing for a fall crisis. On July 25 the Foreign Ministry's European Department began sending out letters to Soviet ambassadors in the Middle East and the Congo for detailed information on UN forces. Bodrov in Israel and Erofeev in Egypt were each asked to report within two weeks on the deployment pattern, procedures, and mission of UN forces along the truce line in the Sinai.42 In addition, the department, which had never shown an interest in this subject before, requested copies of all legal documents establishing the UN presence in the Middle East. The same day a similar instruction went out to the Soviet ambassador in the Congo.

Meanwhile the Foreign Ministry wrote to Soviet embassies for information about previous instances in which foreign military bases in sovereign states had been closed. On July 28 the Soviet ambassadors in Tunisia, Syria, Lebanon, Morocco, and Iraq received similar letters requesting information on the liquidation of foreign military bases in their region.43 The Soviets lacked an embassy in Saudi Arabia, so Ambassador Barkovsky in Damascus, Kornev in Beirut, and Vavilov in Baghdad were instructed to find out whatever they could about how the United States had dismantled its air base in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. From the embassies in Tunisia and Morocco, Moscow wanted to know how the French had gone about removing their North African bases. In each case the Soviet ambassador was told that Moscow needed this information by mid-August but not told why.

What the Foreign Ministry did not tell its ambassadors was that this information was required to prepare background documents for Khrushchev's November initiative at the United Nations. Moscow evidently wanted to prepare a detailed proposal for the withdrawal of NATO forces and their replacement by a UN force in West Berlin.

Khrushchev's November strategy had the character of the classic children's game of Mousetrap: So much had to go right for it to work. Most important, not only did the missiles destined for Cuba have to reach their destination safely, but their installation had to be cloaked in secrecy. Consistent with the code name of the operation—Anadyr, a river in Siberia—the military rank and file were told they were being deployed to the Soviet north.

Maintaining the secrecy of these deployments was largely the KGB's responsibility, but the Soviet foreign intelligence service monitored the progress only of the merchant marine vessels, leaving security on the navy ships to the GRU and the military security services. Soviet intelligence devised a complicated procedure to keep the destination of the ships a secret from the captains, crews, and passengers as long as possible. The captain of the wide-hatched transport Poltava, for example, was to learn his destination officially only after the ship had rounded Gibraltar. At that point he opened a sealed package in the presence of the ship's KGB supervisor. Besides his destination, the captain was informed that under no circumstances was he to allow any intruders onto his vessel. If an unfriendly boarding seemed likely, the ship was to be scuttled.

Despite these precautions, the destination of the cargo became the subject of accurate speculation within the Soviet armed services. The KGB reported instances of frankly bewildered ship's captains who found when they came on board their respective billets in late July that all the male passengers were sporting facial hair and suntans, as if they expected to join Fidel Castro in the Sierra Maestre. On the troopship Mednogorsk the KGB officer discovered that most of the soldiers and even their officers were wearing sideburns, beards, and mustaches. The facial hair was a tipoff because the crew members were trying to fit in among Castro's revolutionary forces, who were world famous as the barbudos, the bearded ones. When the Soviet crews were asked why they had stopped shaving, they explained that about two months earlier, in early June, they had received an order to grow facial hair if they hadn't any already. It meant, reported the KGB officer, "that even earlier the personal staff of this command knew that they were being sent to Cuba." The same was true on the Poltava, where the KGB reported on an entire boat of suntanned and bearded Russian technicians, all of whom seemed to know where they were going.44

after he had concluded that he would not be getting a deal on Berlin at the meeting. Kennedy also wanted to rehash his own experience at Vienna. "It was educational for me," he said, "but . . . he was so sort of tough about Berlin . . . "40 In response Thompson suggested that Khrushchev had taken that stand because he had to prove his toughness to the Chinese. Kennedy did not buy it. His hunch was that Khrushchev characteristically pressed forward when he perceived American weakness. "Do you think that the Cuba thing and the fact that we hadn't gone into Laos," asked Kennedy, "might have given him the impression that we were going to give way in Berlin?"40 Thompson did not think so. "He's always felt he had us over a barrel in Berlin," said Thompson. "Yeah. I think he does," said the president with a nervous chuckle.41
Although none of these bearded sunbathers turned out to be a covert source for the CIA, U.S. intelligence nevertheless could deliver an alarming picture of this sealift to the White House. Despite his assurances to Khrushchev in late July, Kennedy had not suspended U.S. overflights of Soviet shipping in the Atlantic. By late August the evidence was accumulating that the Soviets had initiated a major supply effort for the Castro regime. In spite of lapses in Anadyr’s security, U.S. intelligence could not determine with any confidence what was on board these ships while they were on the high seas. U-2s flying high above Cuba, however, were able to photograph some of what came off the ships at Cuban ports. On August 29 the White House was informed that a large number of SAMs had reached the island.

The unknowns of the Soviet sealift to Cuba caused deep divisions in Washington over the assessment of Khrushchev’s objectives. Dean Rusk and McGeorge Bundy assumed this was a conventional arms buildup, much as the Soviets had done for its other third world allies. They also believed that Berlin was currently the focus of Khrushchev’s aggressive actions and should therefore be the United States’ main concern in the summer of 1962. Robert Kennedy and the new CIA director, John McCone, who had replaced Allen Dulles in November 1961, however, saw something ominous in the deployment of SA-2 missiles. McCone, who had spent most of his government career studying the nuclear arms race, was convinced that the SAMs were there to protect ballistic missiles. He believed that a Soviet missile base on Cuba would make up for Soviet failures to build a competitive intercontinental force. Robert Kennedy had worried about a Soviet missile deployment to Cuba as far back as April 1961. By early September 1962 he and McCone were advising the president to issue a warning to deter Khrushchev from deploying nuclear weapons to the island. Sharing Bundy’s and Rusk’s concerns about Berlin, Kennedy, however, was inclined to avoid any action in the Caribbean that the Kremlin might consider provocative.

At a meeting of the national security team on September 4, the attorney general made a speculative leap in an attempt to open his brother’s eyes to the possibility that there might be something big behind the developments in Cuba: “I don’t think that this is just a question about what we are going to do about this [now]. I think it’s a question of Cuba in the future. . . . There’s going to be . . . three months from now, there’s going to be something else going on, six months from now . . . . That eventually it’s very likely that they’ll establish a naval base there for submarines perhaps, or that they’ll put surface-to-surface missiles in.” In view of this threat, the attorney general wanted the president to announce that the United States would never tolerate the placement of Soviet strategic weapons on the island of Cuba.

Robert Kennedy’s recommendation sparked a debate in the room. Bundy rejected the attorney general’s prediction of Soviet behavior. The president’s assistant for national security was a brilliant analyst who nevertheless lacked a feel for the Soviet mentality. He was looking for institutional patterns instead of thinking about how Khrushchev had acted under pressure in the past. Noting that everything that the Soviets had sent to Cuba thus far “really is, insofar as you can make these distinctions, a defensive weapon,” Bundy predicted more of the same. The deployment of strategic missiles, he suggested, would represent an unlikely break with past practice. “[This would be] a much larger step,” he said, “than the development of the kind of thing we’ve seen over the last year and a half, which is fully consistent with their behavior in a lot of other countries.” Secretary of State Rusk shared Bundy’s optimism and was concerned that overreacting to the Soviet buildup in Cuba might complicate matters in the Berlin stalemate. “If we designated ground-to-ground missiles or we specified the nuclear weapon, I think we could create a kind of panic that the facts themselves don’t now justify.”

The issue wasn’t settled that morning. Before the group broke up, the president asked that a statement on Cuba be drafted and that the group meet again in the afternoon. The attorney general was due to meet Anatoly Dobrynin at 2:15 P.M., an appointment that the Soviet had asked for a few days earlier. Despite the almost uniform skepticism of his national security experts, President Kennedy was now leaning toward adopting his brother’s strategy, but he decided to wait to hear what Dobrynin had to say.

It was a very determined Bobby Kennedy who met with the Soviet ambassador. “The U.S. government,” the attorney general said to Dobrynin, “was viewing with growing anxiety the increase in Soviet military supplies to Cuba and the appearance there of Soviet military specialists.” The United States worried that the most technically advanced of the new Soviet weapons, the SAMs, would be turned over to the Cubans. “Who will stop the emotional Cubans,” he asked, “from firing on American planes?” He then brought up his pet theory. “How do we put such supplies to Cuba in perspective, following the line of logic? Won’t more powerful weapons that could reach the territory of the United States appear? Could these not ultimately carry nuclear warheads? The United States in this case definitely cannot allow its security to depend on this or that decision of the current government of Cuba.”

Robert Kennedy would not let go of this fear. In what seemed to Dobrynin
a half-joking manner, he asked, "And what if rockets with small nuclear charges appear with the Cubans, what then?"

Dobrynin dismissed this possibility. "As [you] must . . . know well from the meetings between A. A. Gromyko with Rusk, the Soviet Union supports the nontransfer and the nonproliferation of nuclear weapons." Dobrynin knew nothing about Anadyr. So sure was he of the correctness of his denial that he added, "In future I will have this position emphasized, if the U.S. side would put it forward this way."

At that point Kennedy rose, saying that he had to get back to the White House to finish work on a presidential statement on Cuba. "I only wish that in the Soviet Union it was understood what feeling was stirred up in American society as a result of the reports of Soviet military supplies to Cuba, a distance of only 90 miles from the United States." 49

Nothing Dobrynin said had altered Robert Kennedy's determination to get a warning out to Moscow in his brother's name. The presidential statement was ready by 6:00 P.M., and although the language was more muted than he would have liked, the attorney general had essentially carried the day. The president's warning to the Soviets about not putting missiles on the island had survived the skeptics. An hour later Press Secretary Pierre Salinger read the presidential statement: "There is no evidence of any organized combat force in Cuba from any Soviet bloc country, of military bases provided to Russia, of a violation of the 1934 treaty relating to Guantánamo, of the presence of offensive ground-to-ground missiles, or of other significant offensive capability either in Cuban hands or under Soviet direction and guidance. Were it to be otherwise, the gravest issues would arise." Dobrynin, who read the statement that night, must have thought the young Kennedys were overreacting.

Khrushchev learned about Kennedy's statement at his summer retreat in the Caucasus. In 1961 he had used his holiday at Pitsunda to find a way to reduce tensions in the Berlin crisis. A year later Kennedy's sudden announcement elicited a different response. As of September 1, none of the strategic nuclear weapons had been installed in Cuba. The missile technicians were on the island and beginning their work, but the first shipment of missile parts was still days from landing in Havana. As for the nuclear warheads, these were under lock and key in the Soviet Union. According to the revised plan for Anadyr, the warheads were not scheduled to go to sea until early October.

Among the many decisions he had faced as Soviet leader, this would be among the most fateful. Khrushchev could still turn back the missiles and keep the defensive munitions on the island. Soon he would have more than fifty thousand Soviet troops and technicians in Cuba, and their presence could prove a powerful deterrent. After all, would the United States really take a chance on killing thousands of Soviet citizens to overthrow Castro? Furthermore, in August 1962 Castro had suggested to the Kremlin that the two countries announce the signature of a joint defense treaty. Moscow had demurred then, afraid that a treaty would awaken the Americans to Khrushchev's plans for the island. In response to Kennedy's statement of September 4, however, it might be the time to announce that a U.S. attack on Cuba would represent an attack on any member of the Warsaw Pact, with consequences that the United States understood.

But having Soviet troops on the island and a Soviet-Cuban defense treaty in place would not allow Khrushchev to achieve the larger objectives that he now associated with this Cuban missile operation. He wanted to change the international balance of power. He wanted the United States to respect him when he defined something as a Soviet interest. Canceling Anadyr now would mean giving up on the grand settlement with the United States that had been his dream since his first visit to Eisenhower in 1959. More than any member of even the Kennedy administration, Khrushchev had become a disciple of the U.S. statesman he had always feared most. He had come around to the unshakable conviction that there was no alternative to John Foster Dulles's policy of peace through strength. Once the Americans were truly afraid of Soviet military power he could get them to accept what he considered a reasonable basis for better relations.

Kennedy's September 4 statement on Cuba complicated this strategy, especially when three days later the White House seemed to give it teeth by requesting stand-by authority to call up 150,000 reservists. The Soviet leader had not expected a U.S. invasion of Cuba until just before the presidential election in 1964, if at all. The statement and the call-up, however, raised the possibility that instead of the Berlin crisis that he wanted, he might end up facing a military confrontation over Cuba in the fall. Too committed to his grand strategy to back down, Khrushchev made two decisions on September 7. First, he asked the Ministry of Defense to assign twelve tactical nuclear weapons to the Soviet motorized brigades already deployed in Cuba. Unlike the strategic missiles, which could strike targets in the United States, these missiles had a range of less than forty miles and were intended solely for use on the battlefield. Also unlike the strategic missiles, these were missiles that
Khrushchev was prepared to use against the United States should U.S.
Marines attack Soviet positions on the island.

Fearing that Kennedy might be planning an attack in the near future,
Khrushchev asked the Ministry of Defense to send the tactical missiles by
plane. But here his military advisers successfully advocated caution. Were any
of the planes carrying these munitions to crash, there might be a nuclear inci-
dent. Instead these tactical nuclear weapons, known as Lamas, to the Russians
and Frogs to the Americans, could go by the ship Indigirka, already slated to
carry the warheads for the medium-range ballistic missiles.

Khrushchev's second decision on September 7 was to instruct the Soviet
Navy to bolster the security of the ships carrying the nuclear missiles and to
increase the firepower of the flotilla sent to protect the island. He wanted sub-
marines with nuclear-tipped torpedoes to trail the ships carrying the war-
heads as they made their way to Cuba and then to be permanently stationed
in the Caribbean.

As these military changes took place, Khrushchev sought to deter any rash
U.S. action with words. On September 11 the TASS news agency issued an
official warning to Washington that Moscow had the right to help the Cubans
defend themselves and that any attack on Cuba or on the Soviet ships on their
way to that island would be interpreted as an attack on the Soviet Union.

The unintended consequence of Khrushchev's reaction to the Kennedy
announcement and the call-up was to delay further the deployment of the
long-range missiles in Cuba. The shortage in Soviet shipping meant that
sending the Luna short-range missiles would delay the dispatch of the ballis-
tic missiles. The two ships carrying the intermediate-range ballistic missiles,
the R-14s, were now rescheduled to arrive in Cuba between November 3 and
November 5. Khrushchev was apparently not worried. He had decided not to
do anything about Berlin until after the U.S. congressional elections on
November 6, and he was determined to first make his case at the UN. In
mid-September 1962 a couple of days one way or the other did not seem to
make a difference.

As he made these momentous decisions, Khrushchev met with two dis-
tinguished Americans at Pitsunda, the poet Robert Frost and the U.S.
Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall. Khrushchev was careful not to reveal
his plans to either of these men. The aged Frost was touring the Soviet Union
to give poetry recitals and talk up peace. He expected to meet Khrushchev and
tell him, in a crusty but grandfatherly way, that the Soviet leader would have
to stop "blackguarding" to create the right climate for superpower concilia-
tion. Khrushchev acted gently with the eighty-eight-year-old poet, who fell
mildly ill at Pitsunda, but raised with him the question of whether Kennedy
was a strong enough man to fight for peace. Frost did not understand that
Khrushchev was calculating the president's reaction to a choice of war or
compromise peace over Berlin. With Udall, Khrushchev was tough, hinting
broadly that soon Soviet power would reach a point where it could compel the
United States to do things that it didn't want to do. "Now, we can swat your
ass," he said.

He did, however, leak to another Westerner that something very big was in
the offing. Khrushchev decided to tell the West German ambassador to the
Soviet Union, Hans Kroll, of his strategy for the coming Berlin crisis.
Khrushchev knew that Kroll had been punished for his efforts to improve
Soviet-West German relations. The pro-Washington faction in the West
German Foreign Ministry had considered Kroll too friendly with Khrushchev.
The only explanation for his survival was that Kroll seemed to have
Adenauer's personal backing. Khrushchev had found the ambassador intelli-
gent and understanding, and the fact that Adenauer kept him around had
always deepened the mystery of the clever German leader. But by September
1962 Kroll's luck had run out, and he was about to replaced in Moscow.

Khrushchev had a soft spot for Kroll, who since his days as a junior foreign
service officer in the 1920s had been an advocate of making better relations
with the Russians a cardinal point in West German foreign policy. Kroll was
not a Communist, but the Russian-speaking diplomat believed that geogra-
phy and culture made Russians, whatever the ideology of their regime, essen-
tial trade and political partners. Since 1958 he had figured in Khrushchev's
efforts to interest elements of the West German government in a special rela-
tionship with Moscow. Now that Kroll was being reassigned, Khrushchev let
down his guard somewhat and talked more openly than he had with any
other foreigner. Kroll went alone to the meeting, and Khrushchev was accom-
panied only by a senior member of the Soviet Foreign Ministry.

After some time spent discussing Kroll's difficulties with the pro-
American faction in the West German Foreign Ministry, the ambassador
asked an indulgence of Khrushchev. The Berlin crisis had ruined Kroll's per-
personal efforts to improve relations between Moscow and Bonn. In 1960 Kroll
told Khrushchev that West Germany could accept a number of conces-
sions, including recognition of East Germany and of the new German-Polish
border on the Oder-Neisse line, but it could never accept the loss of West
Berlin. "And this will always be so," Kroll had insisted. "Berlin is our histori-
eral capital and Bonn is only temporary," 97 In the two years since, Khrushchev and Kroll had agreed to disagree on what to do about West Berlin. Now that he was leaving, Kroll wanted to know if Khrushchev would reveal to him Soviet intentions toward Berlin in the remaining months of 1962. Six months earlier Khrushchev had apparently told him that there was no crisis on the horizon, but now the situation seemed different. In its September 11 statement on Cuba the Soviet government had mentioned Berlin in passing. While acknowledging that no resolution of the issue could be expected during a U.S. election season, the statement called for the "earliest conclusion" of a German peace treaty. 58 "Of course, you are not obligated to answer this question now and I would understand," said Kroll. "But when I return to Bonn, the chancellor will in the first instance ask me. 59

No doubt to Kroll's surprise, Khrushchev did not duck the question. "I have very much enjoyed our meetings," the Soviet leader explained, "and I consider you to have a realistic approach to the necessity of improving relations, to the problems confronting us. I like the energy with which you pushed for the resolution of these problems."

Khrushchev had concluded reluctantly that John Kennedy was a prisoner of domestic U.S. politics. The United States had a president who lacked the courage to lead his people to a Cold War settlement with the Soviet Union. "I have regularly said in my meetings with Americans: if only Kennedy rose to the occasion and understood his obligation before history to resolve international problems!" Khrushchev told Kroll that the U.S. president was making a grave political error: "If only Kennedy understood that in solving the Berlin problem and thus consolidating peace, 90% of Americans (and not just Americans) would carry him in their arms."

So Kennedy had to be forced into making that historic decision. "We now have the freedom to choose when to implement this act," explained Khrushchev. The Soviet Union would wait until after the congressional elections of November 6; then it would push for the establishment of a free city of West Berlin. "We have already prepared everything for this," he added.

"But aren't the Americans still against this?" Kroll asked skeptically.

Khrushchev explained the thinking behind his strategy of détente through fear: "I believe that Kennedy needs us to take the first step. Kennedy cannot be the first to say, 'I agree to take my troops from West Berlin.' Why? Because Adenauer and de Gaulle would use this against him. Kennedy is waiting to be pushed to the brink—agreement or war? Of course, he will not want war; he will concede. No rational being could not but agree with us."

There were things Khrushchev did not tell Kroll. He did not reveal that the source of his confidence was the fact that forty Soviet nuclear missiles would soon be deployed in Cuba. Yet he did not completely avoid discussing Cuba with Kroll. At the end of the conversation, only minutes after laying out the psychological game of brinkmanship he intended to play with the American president, Khrushchev of his own accord raised the issue of Cuba. He didn't give away the entire strategy, but his comment revealed that his greatest concern was not the possibility of a U.S. invasion of the island. "Kennedy claims that Cuba is threatening America. This is idiocy. For this reason we issued today's appeal to America that were they to renounce the call-up of the reserves and reestablish normal relations with Cuba, then Cuba would not need to get weapons from us."

Thanks to Khrushchev, Kroll almost had enough to connect the dots. Between the lines the Russian had revealed his plan for what he would do sometime after November 6. "I don't know on which day we will sign the peace treaty with the GDR," he said. His Foreign Ministry had prepared all the documentation required to set up the new free state of West Berlin and to structure UN participation in the removal of NATO forces from the city. Khrushchev intended this to be the final crisis over Berlin.

Kroll understood the importance of what he had been told. Perhaps because Khrushchev knew he had revealed too much, he went out of his way to tell the West German that there was "nothing confidential" about his thinking on Kennedy's likely reaction to the next crisis. "It seems I have already started talking about this," he said. But Khrushchev hadn't, and Kroll had reason to believe that his information was important. That same day, September 11, he communicated with the U.S. Embassy in Moscow and with the Canadian ambassador about his meeting with Khrushchev and warned that a major Berlin crisis was brewing. But Kroll had little credibility with his Western colleagues. He had always seemed too close to Khrushchev for their liking. The State Department received a report on Kroll's statements on September 14, and within four days this information reached the White House. It appears that only the office of the vice president took special notice. "Khrushchev stated quite emphatically to Kroll just before he left Moscow," wrote Johnson's military aide, Colonel Howard Burris, "that Soviet actions leading to a separate peace treaty will begin soon and in time to permit recourse to the UN if such an action appears appropriate or necessary." 60 He added ominously: "Khrushchev has come to the conclusion that Western leaders have proven themselves so anxious to avoid conflict that they will accept the treaty and accommodate themselves to it."

Frustrated that Kroll's warning was not being taken seriously, Johnson's military aide concluded his report: "Our diplomats and certain political appointees
In mid-September the Soviet Navy responded to Khrushchev's request for more security for the Cuban missile operation. Khrushchev had asked for special protection for the ships carrying nuclear warheads. On September 18 the Soviet Defense Council supplied him with an ambitious plan to send a convoy to Cuba, involving seven Golf missile submarines and four Foxtrot torpedo submarines, two cruisers, two cruise missile ships, two destroyers, and a host of auxiliary ships. The goal was for most of the flotilla to reach Cuba on November 9. Given that it would take the submarines twice as long to reach Cuba as the surface ships, the submarines would leave the Kola Peninsula on October 7. Besides providing defense for Cuba, they would be responsible for protecting the ships carrying the R-14 missiles and warheads. The bulk of the surface ships would leave around October 20 and were to catch up with the submarines south of Bermuda, where the Soviet Navy wanted to hold a three-day naval exercise at the beginning of November. The ships carrying the R-14 missiles and their nuclear warheads, as well as their submarine escorts, were due to arrive earlier than November 9.

The Soviet Navy knew that if the Americans detected that some of the ships had submarine escorts, Washington might discover the importance of the cargoes. Foxtrot submarines had diesel engines that required them to surface periodically to run those engines and recharge the batteries that the submarines used when submerged. Consequently, the navy recommended that they stay submerged during the day and surface only at night.

Another important change was that in the original plan the Golf and Foxtrot submarines were not intended to carry nuclear weapons. In the Defense Ministry's new plan, the submarines were to be armed with nuclear weapons, and the commanders of the Golf submarines were to receive a special target list so that "upon the signal from Moscow [they could] launch an attack on the most important coastal targets of the U.S."66

Khrushchev's level of anxiety in mid-September was far too high for him to approve Malinovsky's revised naval plan in its entirety. A few days earlier the military had reported to the Presidium that in the first twelve days of September alone, the United States had flown fifty reconnaissance flights over fifteen different Soviet ships. With the United States and NATO keeping such a tight watch on his Cuban convoys, Khrushchev feared the international reaction to the movement of two cruisers and two destroyers to Cuba. He also considered the recommended submarine force too large and instructed Malinovsky to drop the idea of sending the seven Golf submarines with their nuclear-tipped ballis-
tic missiles to Cuba. In their place Khrushchev approved sending only the four Foxtrot-class diesel subs with nuclear-tipped torpedoes.

The Indigirka, with the warheads for both the Luna missiles, and the short-range FKIR cruise missiles, a nuclear system that had been included in the original Anadyr plan, had left the USSR on September 16, before the revision of the Soviet Navy plan. According to the previous plan, it had not been provided with a submarine escort. So that it would be protected once it neared U.S. waters, the navy suggested dispatching one of the its lone ballistic missile submarines, the Zulu-class B-75, to meet up with the Indigirka near Bermuda. At that moment the B-75 was on patrol along the U.S. coastline, waiting for an order to launch its two R-16 nuclear missiles against coastal targets.

These military decisions allayed much of Khrushchev’s concern, and by the end of September his attention had returned to ending the Cold War in November. On the twenty-eighth he sent the White House a letter proposing a new basis for a test ban treaty. With agreement unlikely on how to verify compliance with a ban, Khrushchev said he would accept a treaty that banned all tests in the atmosphere, in space, and under water that did not require inspection on Soviet soil. He stipulated, however, that the three nuclear powers—Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union—would also have to observe a five-year moratorium on all underground tests while negotiations on this issue continued. If agreement on a permanent ban on underground testing could not be reached in five years, the parties would then be free to reconsider the atmospheric test ban treaty. He ended the letter with an ominous reference to the superpower disagreement over West Berlin, describing it as a “dangerous hot-bed.” He added: “We on our part again say to you that we will do nothing with regard to West Berlin until the elections in the U.S. After the elections, apparently in the second half of November, it would be necessary in our opinion to continue the dialogue.” He then hinted that he was eager for another summit with Kennedy to discuss all these issues, perhaps as early as November. “Of great importance for finding ways to solve both this problem [Berlin] and other pressing international problems,” he wrote, “are personal contacts of statesmen on the highest level.”

**G e o r g i B o l s h a k o v,** the Kennedy family’s favorite Russian, had been out of touch while visiting the Soviet Union for a few weeks. He returned to the United States with a special message for the president from Khrushchev. On October 8 he met with Bobby Kennedy to ask that a meeting be set up for him with the president.

Bolshakov found his friend quite downcast that day. He “was in an unusually gloomy mood,” he later reported to Dobrynin at the embassy. Robert Kennedy stressed how concerned he was by the turn taken in Soviet-American relations while Bolshakov had been away. “Speaking candidly,” said Kennedy, “the Soviet Union’s most recent steps regarding Cuba have angered the president, and we take them to be measures directed against us.” He added that the president had to be especially sensitive to these changes because of the midterm election.

Kennedy did not ask what Khrushchev’s motives were, and Bolshakov offered nothing but the remark that the Soviet leader had stressed that “in order to resolve the issues in a reasonable fashion we must proceed from the real correlation of forces, to respect the sovereign right of other countries, not interfering in their domestic affairs.” Khrushchev had not revealed to Bolshakov the Anadyr secret and why by November he would be very comfortable with the “real correlation of forces.”

Robert Kennedy had some bad news for the Soviets regarding the prospects for negotiations. He told Bolshakov that the president was writing a response to Khrushchev’s September 28 letter that would probably disappoint the Kremlin. It was impossible for Kennedy ever to agree to remove all Western troops from West Berlin, as Khrushchev had stipulated taking place over four years after the signature of an agreement. It was also impossible for the president to agree to a five-year moratorium on underground testing in return for an atmospheric test ban.

Kennedy asked Bolshakov if Khrushchev intended to come to the United Nations that fall. It is doubtful that the go-between knew any details of Khrushchev’s coming political offensive. However, his response to the attorney general left open the possibility of some kind of special visit. “Khrushchev does not intend to come to the General Assembly of the United Nations before the congressional elections,” said Bolshakov. “However, if the need arises for Khrushchev to speak before the General Assembly, then he could come to New York after the elections.” Kennedy refused to comment.

The next day, October 9, President Kennedy shared his concerns with the French foreign minister, Maurice Couve de Murville, about what Khrushchev might have in store for November. The question, he said, was “how much risk they [the Western powers] were prepared to take.” Kennedy thought it “not unlikely” that Khrushchev would come to the United States in November “under cover of the General Assembly in order to talk over Berlin with the President.” Ominously, the president concluded that “as a result of the Soviet actions on Cuba,” by which he meant a defensive weapons buildup, “there
KHRUSHCHEV'S EXACT scenario for November, if it was ever spelled out on paper, has not been found. But the elements were coming together. By November 6 the missiles would be in Cuba and operational, and his Foreign Ministry would have prepared boilerplate for formal agreements on the establishment of a UN presence in West Berlin and the withdrawal of Western troops. In addition, he would have a draft test ban treaty that he could offer Kennedy as a sweetener once the president had swallowed the retreat from Berlin. So long as the secret deployment to Cuba could hold for another five weeks, Khrushchev believed that John Kennedy would have no choice but to accept Soviet terms for ending the Cold War in 1962.

KHRUSHCHEV'S COLD WAR

KHRUSHCHEV'S CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

He unraveling of Khrushchev's grandest ploy began with a flight of an American U-2. Once again U.S. technology proved the Soviet leader's undoing. One week after Attorney General Kennedy's meeting with Bolshakov in early October 1962, McGeorge Bundy brought bad news to John Kennedy along with his morning newspapers. Bundy had been one of those who had advised Kennedy in September that it was highly unlikely that Khrushchev would install strategic weapons in Cuba. Now, on October 16, he carried photographs of what photo interpreters at the CIA believed were medium-range ballistic missile sites in Cuba. Oleg Penkovsky, the CIA's agent in the GRU, who had proved so useful in the Berlin crisis a year earlier, had turned over manuals on the R-12S that helped the analysts make sense of the photographs. There was really no doubt in their minds. Bundy made clear to the president that there should be no doubt in his either.

Kennedy immediately decided that the United States could not accept the deployment of Soviet missiles to Cuba. Although Secretary of Defense McNamara assured him that these missiles would not erode America's advantage in the strategic balance of power, the president sensed that the missiles might tip the psychological balance in Khrushchev's favor. Just one month earlier the United States had warned of the unacceptability of any deployment of Soviet offensive weapons to Cuba and had singled out missiles as an offensive weapon. The Kremlin had subsequently promised in public and through back channels that its military supply program in Cuba did not include missiles. American allies, let alone the American people, would doubt the credibility of the U.S. president's word if he suddenly turned around and accepted the missiles as a fait accompli.

Over the next six days Kennedy met secretly with his Cuban team, a group centered on the attorney general, the vice president, McNamara, Bundy, John McCone of the CIA, Secretary of State Dean Rusk and his