

# *Thirteen Days Thirty Years After: “Robert Kennedy and the Cuban Missile Crisis” Revisited*

(30年目の『13日間』 — 「ロバート・ケネディとキューバ・ミサイル危機」再訪)

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**SUMMARY IN JAPANESE:** 1962年のキューバ・ミサイル危機は現代国際政治史における転換点であり、またその危機性により外交史、対外政策論など様々なアプローチからの研究がなされている。80年代後半以来の再検討会議、史料公開などにより危機研究は更なる発展を遂げている。本稿は当時の司法長官でありジョン・F・ケネディ大統領の実弟であったロバート・ケネディに焦点を当てている。キューバ危機でのロバート・ケネディの活躍に関しては彼自身による『13日間』を含め二次的記録も少なからずあったが、新史料入手が可能になった現在、彼の役割に関する以前の記述は周到に改竄されていたことが明白となった。

ミサイル危機以前の61年から62年にかけて、アメリカは暗号名で「マングース作戦」とよばれたカストロ政権転覆を目的とする秘密裏の諜報・破壊工作活動を行っていたが、ロバート・ケネディはその計画段階において中心的な役割を担っていた。また彼はミサイル発見直後にアメリカとしていかなる対策をとるべきかの議論で、強硬に対キューバ地上侵攻を主張していたことが明らかとなった。これらの事実は、彼の後の上院への進出、更には68年の大統領選挙への出馬に際し、「タカ派」としてのイメージはマイナスに働くとの国内政治の考慮から隠蔽されることとなった。

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また危機の最終段階で、現在までの通説に反しケネディ大統領はトルコに配備されていたアメリカ側のジュピター・ミサイルの撤去と引き替えにキューバに配備されたソ連のミサイル撤退を申し出るという融和策をとっていたことが明らかとなったが、ロバート・ケネディはその連絡役を務めていた。この事実は、アメリカ大統領が西側同盟国を放棄する意思があったとの印象を招きかねず、西側諸国の士気を損なう可能性があったので、やはり現在まで隠され続けてきたのである。

## Introduction

The Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 was a critical turning point in world history after the Second World War. Although the United States and the Soviet Union confronted each other almost to the point of nuclear Armageddon, immediately after the crisis they began to search for a way to accommodate each other after nearly two decades of nuclear rivalry, and an organic framework for American-Soviet cooperation eventually bore fruit for the first time since the war.

The crisis is important in that it was an apex in “real” world politics and also in that it has become the most studied case in “academic” international politics. Graham T. Allison, the author of *Essence of Decision*,<sup>1</sup> described the crisis as “seminal,”<sup>2</sup> and it has been studied in such disciplines as international relations, foreign policy decision making, strategic studies, and diplomatic history, etc.

The crisis has recently become more attractive to students of international politics and foreign policy because of newly available information that supplements the conventional understanding of the crisis. A series of five conferences to review the Missile Crisis that have been held since the late 1980s has played the most important role in revising knowledge about the crisis. Former officials in the Kennedy Administration as well as Soviets and Cubans who were actively engaged in the crisis participated in these conferences and provided information about what really happened in the Kremlin, and Fidel Castro’s inner circle, as well as the Excomm (the executive committee of the National Security Council), an ad hoc decision-making body in the Kennedy Administration during the crisis.<sup>3</sup> In addition, newly

declassified documents<sup>4</sup> and newly published memoirs by those involved in the crisis, not only from the United States but also from the Soviet Union and Cuba,<sup>5</sup> include some startling revelations.

This flood of new information has driven many students to begin studying the crisis again, and a number of secondary works have been published during the last a couple of years.<sup>6</sup> To date, though, a work which exclusively focuses on the role Robert Francis Kennedy (RFK) played in the crisis has not been published. RFK was the Attorney General at the time, but because he was a brother of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy (JFK), his position in the cabinet was very special and he became one of the key American players in the crisis.

However, his role in the episode has heretofore been misrepresented. Supposedly firsthand accounts of the crisis such as Theodore C. Sorensen's *Kennedy*,<sup>7</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr.'s *Thousand Days*<sup>8</sup> and *Robert Kennedy and His Times*<sup>9</sup> among others, deliberately misled readers about his role in the crisis, and even *Thirteen Days*,<sup>10</sup> RFK's memoir on the crisis, was also rewritten by "supervisor" Sorensen. The newly available information, however, sheds light on the role of RFK, which in fact is the most startling of the revelations about American decision making during the crisis.

This article therefore explores RFK's thirteen days given the new information that has become available almost 30 years after the crisis, demonstrates how knowledge of those days now differs from the previous accounts of RFK's role, and clarifies the reason that biographers hid the truth and rewrote history.

### **Before the Thirteen Days: RFK and the Secret American Plot Against Cuba**

A major revision in the conventional understanding of Soviet behavior concerning the crisis is that the real reason Nikita S. Khrushchev devised the idea of putting nuclear missiles in Cuba was not that he wanted to redress Soviet nuclear inferiority vis-à-vis the United States but that he simply feared another American invasion of Cuba.<sup>11</sup> Although almost all the surviving Excomm members, former Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara being the most vocal of them, strongly deny that the Kennedy Administration intended to launch another invasion of Cuba then,<sup>12</sup> the new evidence shows

that the Administration was engaged in activities that would have caused Khrushchev to think it did.

In July 1961, shortly after the Bay of Pigs fiasco of April, Secretary of Defense McNamara and the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed in a meeting that the United States required new contingency plans for direct military intervention against Cuba. The new plans included army and air force support for CINCLANT (Commander-in-Chief of U. S. Atlantic), and were named Operation Plan 312, or OPLAN 312 for a fast reaction air strike, OPLAN 314 for a conventional invasion, and OPLAN 316 for an invasion with a tactical nuclear force. Similar to other contingency plans that are drafted to address unexpected incidents, these OPLANs were to be executed only in the event of an unstable situation such as insurgency in Cuba.<sup>13</sup> An interesting point is that the American government was conducting a covert operation to cause instability in Cuba, which might have led to one, or all, of these OPLANs being put into effect. The series of secret activities was codenamed *Mongoose* and involved sabotage, agitation, indoctrination of young Cubans through advertising by radio and scattering papers from airplanes, and even assassination of Fidel Castro.<sup>14</sup> These covert activities, as well as the conspicuous military build-up and exercises in the Caribbean Sea for the OPLANs, no doubt forced Castro and Khrushchev to think that another American invasion was inevitable.<sup>15</sup>

Although mainly run by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Operation *Mongoose* was overseen by a high-level panel called the Special Group Augmented (SGA), which comprised aides from the CIA, the Departments of State and Defense, and the White House. RFK was a formal member of the SGA in his capacity as the president's trusted adviser, and he was influential in formulating policies related to *Mongoose*.

RFK strongly advocated overthrowing the Castro regime, as did most of the others, although his involvement in this affair and his hawkish advocacy were not previously known and all the surviving members of the SGA simply deny that they were involved or hawkish. The first meeting of the SGA was held on January 19th, 1962, and RFK unequivocally stated that overthrowing Castro was an "unreserved requirement" and that, "it is untenable to say that the United States is unable to achieve its vital national security and foreign goal re Cuba."<sup>16</sup>

RFK acted as the president's deputy in SGA meetings. In the meeting of

October 4th, he reported his brother's concern about the pace the covert operation:

[The] President is deeply concerned over the developing situation and the progress of Operation Mongoose. He hopes that the whole program should be stepped up, and that more priority should be given to mount sabotage operations and massive activities.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to this, RFK stated that he himself took sharp exception to CIA Director John McCone's hesitancy to authorize direct actions attributable to Washington. A sharp exchange followed which was clarifying in that it led to reaffirming a determination to proceed with the plans. RFK also urged the group to approve "massive activity" against Castro according to the wishes of the President.<sup>18</sup> This evidence demonstrates that both RFK and JFK were very much interested in overthrowing the Castro regime and eager to pursue Operation Mongoose.

According to Operation Mongoose, the American-backed insurgency against Castro was to occur in mid-October 1962. Furthermore, OPLANs 312, 314 and 316 were to attain "the highest state of readiness" by October 20,<sup>19</sup> with CINCLANT being ready to launch an air strike and/or invasion of Cuba from that date on. Although almost all the surviving members of the Kennedy clan insist that Operation Mongoose was never taken in OPLAN terms,<sup>20</sup> the coincidence of timing in which Operation Mongoose might have caused instability in Cuba when the OPLANs might have attained their maximum readiness suggests that military action of some kind was being seriously considered by the Americans.

Because Medium-Range Ballistic Missiles (MRBMs) were discovered in Cuban missile sites by a U-2 reconnaissance flight on October 14th, actual American military intervention did not occur. The discovery did, however, lead to another problem that became known as the Cuban Missile Crisis.

### **The Beginning of the Thirteen Days : A Belligerent Response**

The placing of Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba posed serious problems for the United States because it threatened American national security, and was

unacceptable since Khrushchev had previously promised JFK that offensive weapons would not be introduced into Cuba.

All the members of the Kennedy Administration were surprised to find out what had happened,<sup>21</sup> and expressed anger at the clandestine deployment of the missiles in Cuba. When National Security Assistant McGeorge Bundy brought the news to JFK's bedroom at 8:45 on the morning of October 16th, all the president could do was to give an order to convene a meeting related to the Cuban problem. Throughout the first two Excomm meetings, JFK unequivocally insisted on an air strike, regardless of whether it would be limited to the missile sites or a broader one that would also attack airfields and the like.<sup>22</sup>

RFK, contrary to the conventional understanding of his position, also proved to be hawkish on the first day of the Missile Crisis by arguing for an invasion, which was a different approach from his brother's. Schlesinger, one of JFK's closest friends and a personal aide at that time, later described RFK as "a dove from the start." Schlesinger wrote:

"...[If] you bomb the missile sites and airports," he said on the first day, "you are covering most of Cuba. You are going to kill an awful lot of people and take an awful lot of heat on it." If the Americans said they were bombing because of the missiles, "it would be almost incumbent upon the Russians to say that we are going to send them again and, if you do it again, we are going to do the same thing in Turkey" [or we're going to do the same thing in Iran].<sup>23</sup>

The citation above seems to suggest that RFK opposed *any* kind of military aggression against Cuba. However, recently declassified transcripts make clear that the passage Schlesinger refers to was part of what RFK said when he was raising the issue of an invasion. In fact, everytime that RFK spoke—which was relatively little—during meetings on October 16th, almost all his comments were pointed in that direction. He actually argued in the passage Schlesinger cited that an air strike would be insufficient because around six months later the Soviets might rebuild the missile bases: "if you're going to get into it [Cuba] at all, whether we should just get into it and get it over with and say that, take our losses."<sup>24</sup> He suggested that perhaps "there is some other way we can get involved in this [invasion] through Guantanamo Bay or

something, or whether there's some ship that, you know, sink the *Maine* again or something."<sup>25</sup> He proposed that to justify an invasion, they should sink an American ship and claim it had been attacked by Cubans, just as the American battleship *Maine* had been blown up off Havana in 1898 and led to the Spanish-American War. Such arguments therefore reveal that RFK initially supported an invasion rather than an air strike.

In the same vein, RFK also preferred an invasion even to a naval blockade, for which he would later become one of the most ardent proponents, and which would eventually become JFK's choice. According to *Thirteen Days*, RFK claimed to have supported McNamara's position in favor of a blockade,<sup>26</sup> but when McNamara said in a meeting on October 16th that the Soviets could be prevented from redeploying missiles by a blockade, RFK contended, "Then we're gonna have sink Russian ships [and submarines]."<sup>27</sup>

There is a well-known story that RFK passed a handwritten note to JFK and Sorensen during the meeting in the afternoon of October 16th that said, "I now know how Tojo felt when he was planning Pearl Harbor."<sup>28</sup> Schlesinger claimed that RFK gave them this note when he was "listening to the war cries of the hawks,"<sup>29</sup> and Schlesinger wrote as if RFK had taken a dovish position, opposing any kind of aggression. Given that the paragraph above demonstrates that RFK was a hawk himself, although different from those who advocated an air strike, his words on the note should be taken quite literally in that he really did understand how it felt to be thinking about a military attack because that was exactly what he wanted at that time.

All of this suggests that there was a rewriting of history from the beginning regarding RFK: although he advocated invading Cuba at the start of the crisis, he was later portrayed as "a dove from the start."

### **In the Midst of the Thirteen Days: The Acting President**

Although RFK insisted on an invasion and McNamara insisted on an air strike on the first day, from the second day on both strongly advocated a naval blockade, which the president also came to take an interest in. When Excomm met on the morning of October 17th, both the attorney general and the secretary of defense turned to the blockade option, but Secretary of the

Treasury Douglas Dillon, former Secretary of State Dean Acheson, and Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Nitze continued to argue for an air strike.<sup>30</sup>

On October 18th, JFK did not attend the Excomm meetings, partly because he was supposed to leave Washington the next day for a campaign for the upcoming mid-term election, and partly because he wanted the Excomm members to exchange their views freely without being affected by the presidential aura. During his absence, RFK was the *de facto* chairman of Excomm.

In the morning meeting, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that President Kennedy order an air strike against the missiles and other key Cuban military installations. At this point, however, RFK raised the issue of morality in regard to a surprise air attack by claiming it might be a morally unacceptable course of action, and from that moment on Excomm spent “more time on this moral question during the first five days than on any other single matter.”<sup>31</sup> In fact, JFK later conferred privately with Acheson, and when the president raised his brother’s concern over morality, Acheson remarked that RFK was “silly” and it was “unworthy of him to talk that way.” Nitze also thought that it was nonsense, but Undersecretary of State George Ball, after having heard that RFK had raised the question of morality, and Dillon both thought that it was a valid issue. RFK’s concern over morality therefore became the deciding factor behind their change of attitude in supporting a blockade.<sup>32</sup>

That evening JFK met Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko but did not indicate that the U.S. had discovered the Soviet missiles in Cuba, and the meeting ended as usual with denunciation of each other’s policies.<sup>33</sup> Shortly afterward JFK and RFK spoke with Robert Lovett, a former secretary of defense in the Truman Administration, whom JFK trusted as one of “the wise men” during the Cold War.<sup>34</sup> Lovett warned them that an air strike would appear to be an excessive first step and that a blockade would be a better alternative because it would be a relatively mild approach and they could increase the tempo of combat when necessary. According to McGeorge Bundy this advice had a large influence on the president’s decision. In fact, Lovett himself felt that the brothers essentially agreed on a blockade at the time.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, immediately after that meeting with Lovett, RFK telephoned his deputy Nicholas Katzenbach to request a brief establishing the legal basis for a blockade of Cuba to be prepared.

In the morning of October 19th, just before he left for a campaign, JFK asked



the attorney general and Sorensen to “pull Excomm together” for a blockade option. He added, “If you have any trouble, call me and I’ll call off the trip and come back and talk to them.”<sup>36</sup> The president was obviously determined at that time to pursue a blockade. In the following hours, Excomm divided into two groups, one for a blockade and the other for an air strike, in order to develop clear options for JFK in his absence and to draft speeches for each plan and to outline possible contingencies.<sup>37</sup> When Excomm reconvened that afternoon the papers that had been prepared by the separate working groups were exchanged and examined. In the discussion, National Security Assistant Bundy argued for “decisive action with its advantages of surprise and confronting the world with a *fait accompli*.” Others persisted in supporting the air strike option, but RFK allowed the members to speak freely because “the matter was so vital.”<sup>38</sup>

The attorney general, however, “pulled Excomm together” near the end of the meeting and with a faint smile said:

...he had had a talk with the President, indeed very recently this morning. There seemed to be three main possibilities: one was to do nothing, and that would be unthinkable; another was an air strike, and the third was a blockade. he [*sic*] thought it would be very, very difficult indeed for the President if the decision were to be for an air strike, with all the memory of Pearl Harbor and with all the implications this would have for us in whatever world there would be afterward. For 175 years we had not been that kind of country. A sneak attack was not in our traditions. He favored *action* [emphasis in the original], to make known unmistakably the seriousness of United States determination to get the missiles out of Cuba, but he thought the action should allow the Soviets some room for maneuver to pull back from their overextended position in Cuba.<sup>39</sup>

This time RFK made an analogy to Pearl Harbor that completely differed from the one he had made two days earlier. Dillon, who had previously advocated an air strike, recalled that, “As he spoke, I felt that I was at a real turning point in history. I knew then that we should not undertake a strike without warning. With only one or two possible exceptions, all the members of the Excomm were convinced by Bob’s argument.”<sup>40</sup>

That was the moment when Excomm decided on a blockade option. Not only did RFK take his own brother's place in Excomm while he was away, but he also spoke for the president and steered Excomm to a decision that JFK wanted.

### **The Eleventh Hour of the Thirteen Days: Secret Correspondence**

President Kennedy went on television at 7 p.m. on October 22nd and announced to the world that the Soviets had introduced MRBMs into Cuba and that the United States had decided to undertake a blockade, under which the U.S. Navy would force Soviet ships which were found carrying offensive weapons and other related materials to turn back.<sup>41</sup> From that moment on, the American-Soviet confrontation began.

RFK played a relatively insignificant role from October 20th through 22nd, when other Excomm members were preparing the president's speech or were dispatched to allied countries to persuade their leaders to accept the American position, and when military experts were preparing for the blockade.

On the evening of October 23rd, RFK met the Soviet Ambassador to the United States, Anatoli Dobrynin, with whom he had a curious relationship. They had already had several meetings, including that of September 4th when Dobrynin assured RFK that there would be no surface-to-surface missiles or other offensive weapons placed in Cuba.<sup>42</sup> Their meetings during the crisis functioned as a backchannel for communicating with Khrushchev. McGeorge Bundy recalls that the meetings between RFK and Dobrynin helped to remind the Excomm members of what was important at a particular moment in the crisis.<sup>43</sup>

Many Russian governmental documents from those years have recently been declassified, and they include almost all the records of cables and telegrams sent by Soviet diplomats to the Kremlin from the United States and Cuba. They have enabled us to reconstruct what was discussed in the meetings between RFK and Dobrynin:

From the very beginning, "The Soviet side have underscored the defensive character of weapons being supplied to Cuba. You, for

example,” said Robert Kennedy pointing [at] me, “were speaking about strictly defensive objectives of Soviet armaments supplies, in particular the missiles, during our meeting at the beginning of September... [the] President and the U.S. administration took it as a real position of the U.S.S.R.. ...Then suddenly the President received reliable information that there had appeared the Soviet missiles covering almost all the U.S. territory. President Kennedy feels deceived and tricked premeditatedly. It was a great disappointment for him and a serious blow to everything he believed in...”

Having resolutely rejected his reasoning about any deception as completely untrue, I asked R. Kennedy, “If the President really had any doubts, why had not he talked frankly with A. A. Gromyko when they had a meeting some days ago?” R. Kennedy said that the President had decided not to raise the issue in that conversation because he thought that everything expounded by the Soviet minister was apparently kept up by instructions of the Soviet government, so a discussion with him would hardly bring any good...

Staying in the doorway and saying good-bye, R. Kennedy asked, “What are the instructions given to captains of the Soviet vessels going to Cuba in the light of yesterday’s statement by President Kennedy?” I answered R. Kennedy that it was not to obey anybody’s unlawful demands to stop in the open sea because that would be a violation of freedom of navigation. Waving his hand, R. Kennedy said, “I don’t know what would be the end of the whole affair, because we have the intention to stop the vessels...”<sup>44</sup>

Other than RFK’s parting line about American vessels intending to stop the Soviet ships, which was not included in *Thirteen Days*,<sup>45</sup> Dobrynin’s report to the Kremlin does not differ significantly from RFK’s description of the meeting. RFK’s description in his memoir about a meeting with Dobrynin at a crucial point in the crisis, however, has been proved to have been intentionally distorted and to have misled readers about how the crisis was resolved.

The crisis intensified as the American naval blockade came into effect on October 24th, and from then until the 26th RFK was the closest adviser to the president as he had been previously.<sup>46</sup>

On the 26th suddenly came a turning point when the White House received a

lengthy, rambling letter certainly written by an exhausted Khrushchev himself. It proposed that the Soviet Union would declare that its ships bound for Cuba were not carrying any armaments if the United States would declare that it would not invade Cuba with troops.<sup>47</sup> Because the Soviets had proposed acceptable terms, a peaceful resolution to the crisis appeared to be close, but October 27th proved to be a day of shocks and reversals. Another letter that appeared to be the work of a committee arrived in the morning, even before a reply to the first was prepared. Its language was more demanding and hardening, and it called for an American pledge that besides not invading Cuba, the United States would remove its analogous offensive IRBMs called Jupiters<sup>48</sup> from Turkey in exchange for a Soviet promise to remove the missiles in Cuba.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, on the same day, a U-2 reconnaissance plane piloted by Major Rudolf Anderson was shot down by a surface-to-air missile over Cuba, making him the first and, as it turned out, the only person to be killed in the crisis. These events led to exhaustion, desperation, irritation, and a sense of urgency among the Excomm members.

The Excomm meeting of October 27th was dominated by advocates of a hard-line approach who stressed that they should ignore the proposals in the second letter. RFK also opposed trading the missiles in Turkey for those in Cuba and seemed to fear that the situation might be in the hands of Khrushchev and that the United States was losing its control over events:

... I think that we're going to have to, in the next three or four hours, not just put the ball completely in his [Khrushchev's] hands and allow him to do whatever he wants. We have an exchange with him and say he's double-crossed us, and we don't know which deal to accept, and then he writes back, and in the meantime he's got all the play throughout the world...<sup>50</sup>

JFK, on the other hand, was the most ardent proponent of giving up the Jupiter missiles for those in Cuba:

...It seems to me what [*sic*] we ought to—to be reasonable. We're not going to get these weapons out of Cuba, probably, anyway. But I mean—by negotiation—we're going to have to take our weapons out of Turkey. I don't think there's any doubt he's not going to .... [word unclear] now

that he made that public, he's not going to take them out of Cuba if we...<sup>51</sup>

Although the Excomm meeting concluded that they would ignore the proposals in the second letter, JFK nonetheless decided to bypass Excomm and act on his own. Unknown to some of the key members of Excomm, he ordered his brother to meet the Soviet ambassador again to seek a peaceful resolution to the crisis.<sup>52</sup>

RFK invited Dobrynin to a secret meeting at his office at the Department of Justice. According to *Thirteen Days*, RFK argued:

We had to have a commitment by tomorrow that the missile bases would be removed. I was not giving them an ultimatum but a statement of fact. He should understand that if they did not remove those bases, we would remove them ....

He asked me what offer the United States was making, and I told him of the letter that President Kennedy had just transmitted to Khrushchev. He raised the question of our removing the missiles in Turkey. I said that there could be no quid pro quo of any arrangement made under this kind of threat of pressure, and that in the last analysis that was a decision that would have to be made by NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization]. However, I said, President Kennedy had been anxious to remove those missiles from Turkey for a long period of time. He had ordered their removal some time ago, and it was our judgment that, after a short time after this crisis was over, those missiles would be gone.... Time was running out. We need an answer immediately from the Soviet Union. I said we must have it in the next day.<sup>53</sup>

Russian documents, however, reveal a different picture of what was discussed in this meeting. The following is from the recently declassified cable sent to the Kremlin by Dobrynin:

"The Cuban crisis," began Robert Kennedy, "keeps on rapidly aggravating... The military people demand for the President to arm planes and to return fire with fire. The U.S. administration will have to do so... there is no time to be lost."

"....In this connection," said R. Kennedy, "the President considers that

a suitable basis for settlement of the whole Cuban crisis could be the letter by N.S. Khrushchev of October 26. The main thing for us is to receive, as soon as possible, the consent of the Soviet government to stop further construction works of the missiles' bases in Cuba and to undertake internationally acceptable measures of verification that would make the use of the offensive weapons impossible. In exchange, the U.S. government is ready, in addition to liquidation of all the 'quarantine' measures, to give assurance that there would be no invasion of Cuba..."

"And what about Turkey?" I asked R. Kennedy.

"If that is the only obstacle to achieve the settlement, then the President does not see insuperable difficulties in the solution of this issue, too," answered R. Kennedy. "The main difficulty for the President is the public discussion of the question of Turkey. Nominally the stationing of the missiles' bases in Turkey was formalized in a special decision of the NATO council. Announcement of withdrawal of the missiles in Turkey due to a unilateral decision of the U.S. President would seriously undermine NATO."

"Nevertheless, the President is ready to come to an agreement with Khrushchev on this issue, too," added R. Kennedy, "I believe that some 4 or 5 months should be needed to take such bases in Turkey, to take the whole procedure adopted by NATO into account. If Premier Khrushchev agrees with this Turkish aspect, it's possible to continue the exchange of opinions between the Premier and the U. S. President through our backchannel. But the President can't say anything publicly about Turkey now. And I tell you that this communication about Turkey is very confidential and only 2 or 3 persons in Washington, besides he and his brother the president, are aware of it."<sup>54</sup>

Evidently, and contrary to what is written in *Thirteen Days*, RFK was not as demanding and threatening as to urge the Soviets to reply the next day. Moreover, he explicitly told Dobrynin that President Kennedy was willing to accept the proposed swap of missiles, and admitted that the president's secret idea was known only to a few people.<sup>55</sup>

Although Dobrynin's report reached the Kremlin, no one in Khrushchev's inner circle examined it seriously, with the exception of the threatening line "there is no time to be lost."<sup>56</sup> Khrushchev therefore feared that another

American invasion of Cuba was inevitable and that it would lead to a nuclear disaster. So he decided to announce that the Soviets would withdraw their missile bases in Cuba, thereby bringing the crisis to a sudden close.

## Conclusion

Robert Kennedy's role in the Cuban Missile Crisis requires a reappraisal given the information that has recently become available. In the accounts provided by RFK himself and his biographers some aspects of his role were concealed and others changed intentionally: for example, his involvement in the conspiracy against Castro had not been known previously, his hawkishly advocating an invasion of Cuba at the beginning of the crisis had been replaced by dovish, moderate assertions, and his communication with Dobrynin at the final stage of the crisis had been misrepresented.

Sorensen—one of JFK's speechwriters, author of *Kennedy*, and supervisor of RFK's *Thirteen Days*—confessed in a conference to review the crisis held in Moscow in January 1989 that he had “excised” RFK's diary, on which *Thirteen Days* was based:

Ambassador Dobrynin felt that Robert Kennedy's book did not adequately express that the “deal” on the Turkish missiles was part of the resolution of the crisis. And here I have a confession to make to my colleagues on the American side, as well as to others who are present. I was the editor of Robert Kennedy's book. It was, in fact, a diary of those thirteen days. And his diary was very explicit that this was part of the deal; but at that time it was still a secret even on the American side, except for the six of us who had been present at the meeting. So I took it upon myself to edit that out of his diaries, and that is why the Ambassador is somewhat justified in saying that the diaries are not as explicit as his conversation.<sup>57</sup>

This raises the question of why Sorensen and Schlesinger, among others, hid the truth by rewriting RFK's story.

There are two parts to the answer to this question. The first pertains to the proposal to remove the Jupiter missiles from Turkey, which required the

Americans to pay cautious attention to their NATO allies. During his meeting with Dobrynin on October 27th, RFK raised his and JFK's concern over the issue of withdrawing the Jupiter missiles by noting that such a decision should be made by NATO, not just the United States. If this proposal had been leaked and the members of NATO had been informed that an American president would remove those weapons without any consultation, they might have thought that they had been undercut by the president and that the United States had forsaken Western Europe and was not willing to protect it against the Soviet threat any longer. This might have seriously harmed West European morale, so the biographers felt they should avoid such a situation.

The second part of the answer pertains to RFK's having been involved in the secret attempt to overthrow Castro and his hawkish posture in Excomm. These were concealed from public because of some domestic political considerations. Those books were published in the middle of the 1960s. RFK later made an attempt to become a senator in 1966 and campaigned for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1968. For such pursuits the Kennedy clan did not want RFK to be seen as a hawk.<sup>58</sup>

Overall, the newly available information allows us to reexamine RFK's image as well as the American decision-making process during the crisis as a whole. It has taken almost 30 years to discover a more accurate portrait of the thirteen days. Only now might that episode be considered to be a part of history.

## NOTES

- 1 Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston, Mass.: Little Brown, 1971).
- 2 Idem, "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 63 (September 1969), p. 689.
- 3 On the Hawk's Cay Conference (held in February 1987 at Hawk's Cay, Fla., by the surviving Excomm members and American scholars), see James C. Blight, David A. Welch, & Joseph S. Nye, Jr., "The Cuban Missile Crisis Revisited," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 66 (Fall 1987), pp.170-78. On the Cambridge Conference (held in October 1987 at Cambridge, Mass., by the surviving Excomm members, American scholars, and three Soviet testifiers), see Fyodor Burlatsky, Sergo Mikoyan, & Georgi Shakhnazarov, "New Thinking about an Old Crisis: Soviet Reflections on the Cuban Missile Crisis," in Graham Allison, William Ury, & Bruce J. Allyn (eds.), *Windows of Opportunity: From Cold War to Peaceful Competition in US-Soviet*



- Relations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger, 1989), pp.105-30. On both the Hawk's Cay and the Cambridge Conferences, see James C. Blight & David A. Welch (eds.), *On the Brink: Americans and Soviets Reexamine the Cuban Missile Crisis* (N.Y.: Hill & Wang, 1989). On the Moscow Conference (held in January 1989 at Moscow mainly by Soviet testifiers but also with Americans and Cubans), see B. Allyn, J. Blight, & D. Welch, "Essence of Revision: Moscow, Havana, and the Cuban Missile Crisis," *International Security*, Vol. 14 (Winter 1989/90), pp.136-72; idem, *Back to the Brink: The Moscow Conference and the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1990); Ray Cline, "Commentary: The Cuban Missile Crisis," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 68 (Fall 1989), pp.190-96. On the Antigua Conference (held in January 1991 on Antigua in the West Indies mainly by Cuban testifiers), see J. Blight, D. Welch, & David Lewis (eds.), *Cuba between the Superpowers: Antigua, Transcript of the Meetings* (unpublished, 1991). On the Havana Conference (held in January 1992 in Havana mainly by Cuban testifiers, including Fidel Castro), see J. Blight, D. Welch, & D. Lewis (eds.), *Cuba on the Brink: Havana, Castro, and Missile Crisis* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, forthcoming).
- 4 The newly declassified documents are compiled and microfiched as *The Cuban Missile Crisis 1962: The National Security Archive Documents* (hereafter cited as NSA) (St. Alexandria, Va.: Chadwyck-Healey, 1990).
  - 5 Among the relevant memoirs which have recently been published are: McGeorge Bundy, *Danger and Survival: The Choices about the Bomb in the First 50 Years* (N.Y.: Random House, 1988); Paul H. Nitze, *From Hiroshima to Glasnost: At the Center of Decision- A Memoir* (N.Y.: Weidenfeld Nicholson, 1989); Dean Rusk, as told to Richard Rusk, *As I Saw It* (N.Y.: W.W. Norton, 1990); Dino Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball: The Inside Story of the Cuban Missile Crisis* (N.Y.: Random House, 1992); and Nikita S. Khrushchev (ed. by Jerrold G. Shecter et al), *Khrushchev Remembers: The Glasnost Tapes* (Boston, Mass.: Little Brown 1990).
  - 6 Among the most recent secondary works are: James A. Nathan (ed.), *The Cuban Missile Crisis Revisited* (N.Y.: St. Martin's Press, 1992); Robert Smith Thompson, *The Missiles of October: The Declassified Story of John F. Kennedy and the Cuban Missile Crisis* (N.Y.: Simon & Schuster, 1992); Michael R. Beschloss, *The Crisis Years: Kennedy and Khrushchev, 1960-1963* (N.Y.: Harper Collins, 1991); Philip Nash, "Nuisance of Decision: Jupiter Missiles and the Cuban Missile Crisis," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 14 (March 1991), pp.1-25; and Mark J. White, "Belligerent Beginnings: John F. Kennedy on the Opening Day of the Cuban Missile Crisis," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 15 (March 1992), pp.30-49.
  - 7 Theodore C. Sorensen, *Kennedy* (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1965).
  - 8 Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1965).
  - 9 Idem, *Robert Kennedy and His Times* (Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1978).
  - 10 Robert F. Kennedy, *Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis* (N.Y.: W.W. Norton, 1971).
  - 11 Khrushchev, *op. cit.*; Blight & Welch, *op. cit.* (1989), pp.232-42, 293-96; Burlatsky, Mikoyan, & Shakhnazarov, *op. cit.*, pp.105-11; Bernd Greiner, "The Cuban Missile Crisis Reconsidered: The Soviet View: an Interview with Sergo Mikoyan," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 14 (Spring 1990), pp.209-12.
  - 12 Robert S. McNamara, *Out of the Cold: New Thinking for American Foreign and Defense Policy in the 21st Century* (N.Y.: Simon & Schuster, 1989), p.100; Blight & Welch, *op. cit.* (1989), p.249.

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- 13 For details, see James G. Hershberg, "Before 'The Missiles of October': Did Kennedy Plan a Military Strike against Cuba?" *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 14 (Spring 1990), pp.163-98.
- 14 See *Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders: Interim Report of the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities* (also known as the Church Committee Report, hereafter cited as *Alleged Assassination Plots*), 94th Congress, 1st session, 11/20/1975, NSA 03272.
- 15 Philip Brenner, "Cuba and the Missile Crisis," *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 22 (February 1990), pp.115-42.
- 16 *Alleged Assassination Plots*, p.141; Hershberg, *op. cit.*, pp.174-75.
- 17 *Alleged Assassination Plots*, p.147; Memorandum of the SGA Meeting held on Thursday, October 4, 1962, 10/4/1962, NSA 00520.
- 18 *Ibid.*; Hershberg, *op. cit.*, pp.189-90.
- 19 *CINCLANT Historical Account of the Cuban Crisis*, 4/29/1963, NSA 03087, p.39.
- 20 McGeorge Bundy, in an interview with Nihon-Hoso-Kyokai (The Japan Broadcasting Corporation, hereafter cited as NHK), in August 1992.
- 21 Perhaps one exception might be CIA Director John McCone, who had warned that the Soviets might deploy some offensive weapons in Cuba since September. Dino Brugioni, a photo-analyst at the CIA, also recalls that the discovery was not a surprise to him. See Brugioni, *op. cit.*, *passim*.
- 22 White, *op. cit.*, pp.30-40.
- 23 Schlesinger, *op. cit.* (1978), p.547. In the following works RFK was described as a dove from the beginning: Kennedy, *op. cit.*, pp.1-24; Sorensen, *op. cit.*, pp.760-62; Roger Hilsman, *To Move a Nation: The Politics of Foreign Policy in the Administration of John F. Kennedy* (N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967), p.203.
- 24 Transcript of the 2nd Executive Committee Meeting, 10/16/1962, JFK Library, Boston, p.25.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p.27.
- 26 Kennedy, *op. cit.*, p.37.
- 27 Transcript of the 2nd Executive Committee Meeting, pp.24-25.
- 28 Handwritten note from RFK to JFK, 10/16/1962, NSA 00620.
- 29 Schlesinger, *op. cit.* (1978), p.507.
- 30 Department of Defense, *Chronology of the Cuban Crisis October 15-28, 1962*, 11/2/1962, NSA 01867, p.2.
- 31 Kennedy, *op. cit.*, pp.38-39.
- 32 Schlesinger, *op. cit.* (1978), p.508; Walter Issacson & Evan Thomas, *The Wise Men: The Six Friends and the World They Made*, Acheson, Bohlen, Harriman, Kennan, Lovett, McCloy (N.Y.: Simon & Schuster, 1986), p.622.
- 33 See Memoranda of Conversations on Kennedy-Gromyko Meeting, 10/18/1962, NSA 00666.
- 34 Lovett was asked to join Excomm from the next day on. Acheson had already joined Excomm. Kennedy also asked another "wise man", former Ambassador to the Soviet Union Charles Bohlen, to join, but he turned the offer down. See Issacson & Thomas, *op. cit.*, p.624.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p.624; Bundy, *op. cit.*, p.399; Beschloss, *op. cit.*, p.458.
- 36 Kenneth O'Donnel & David Powers, *Johnny, We Hardly Knew Ye* (Boston, Mass.: Little Brown, 1972), pp.319-20; Beschloss, *op. cit.*, p.459.<sup>3</sup>

- 37 See Department of Defense, *Chronology*. The script of the speech which President Kennedy might have delivered if an American air strike against Cuba were to have begun has been declassified recently.
- 38 Minutes of October 19, 11:00 a.m. Excomm Meeting, 10/19/1962, NSA 00699, p.2; also quoted in Beschloss, *op. cit.*, p.459.
- 39 Minutes of October 19, 11:00 a.m. Excomm Meeting, pp.10-12.
- 40 Blight & Welch, *op. cit.* (1989), pp.50-51; quoted in Beschloss, *op. cit.*, p.460.
- 41 For the full text of the speech, see Address by President Kennedy, October 22, 10/22/1962, NSA 00847.
- 42 See Kennedy, *op. cit.*, pp.22-24.
- 43 Bundy, in an interview with NHK (fn.20 *supra*).
- 44 Dobrynin's cable to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the U. S. S. R. about his Conversation with Robert Kennedy on October 23rd (declassified in August 1992). The original English translation has been changed slightly here to make it more readable.
- 45 Kennedy, *op. cit.*, pp.43-44.
- 46 In the morning of October 24th, JFK had a short conversation with RFK:  
JFK: It looks really mean, doesn't it? But then, really there was no other choice. If they get this mean on this one in our part of the world, what will they do on the next?  
RFK: I just don't think there was any choice, and not only that, if you hadn't acted, you would have been impeached.  
*Ibid.*, p.45.
- 47 See Khrushchev's Letter to President Kennedy of October 26, 1962, 10/26/1962, NSA 01388.
- 48 Jupiters were first-generation Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missiles (IRBMs) that were deployed in Turkey under the aegis of NATO. For traditional accounts on the relationship of the Jupiter missiles with the Cuban Missile Crisis, see Donald L. Hafner, "Bureaucratic Politics and 'Those Frigging Missiles': JFK, Cuba and US Missiles in Turkey," *Orbis*, Vol. 21 (Summer 1977), pp.307-33; Barton J. Bernstein, "The Cuban Missile Crisis: Trading the Jupiters in Turkey?" *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol.95 (Spring 1980), pp.97-125.
- 49 See Khrushchev's Letter to President Kennedy of October 27, 1962, 10/27/1962, NSA 01489.
- 50 Transcript of October 27 Cuban Missile Crisis Excomm Meetings, 10/27/1962, NSA 01544, p.4.
- 51 *Ibid.* p.9. The traditional account stated that President Kennedy was reluctant to remove the Jupiters from Turkey or simply rejected the deal. See Sorensen, *op. cit.*, p.714; Schlesinger, *op. cit.* (1965), p.756; Hafner, *op. cit.*, passim. See also Nash, *op. cit.*, pp.10-15.
- 52 Even the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Maxwell Taylor and Deputy Secretary of Defense Nitze confessed that they did not know that the conversation between RFK and Dobrynin had taken place. Blight & Welch, *op. cit.* (1989), chap. 3.
- 53 Kennedy, *op. cit.*, pp.85-87.
- 54 From Dobrynin's Cable to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the U. S. S. R., October 27, 1962 (declassified in August 1992). The original English translation has been changed slightly here to make it more readable. Dobrynin once explained at the Moscow Conference that he and RFK had met briefly on the night of October 26th and that RFK proposed withdrawing the Jupiter missiles; see Allyn, Blight & Welch, *op. cit.* (1990), pp.143-44. More recently, however, Dobrynin changed the whole story and even denied that this meeting had taken place: Anatoli A. Dobrynin, in an interview with NHK in August 1992; Prof. David A.

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Welch's conversation with the author on July 19th, 1993 in Tokyo.

- 55 Sorensen gave the details at the Moscow Conference:

...After the Excomm meeting, a small group met in President Kennedy's office, and he instructed Robert Kennedy, at the suggestion of Secretary of State Dean Rusk, to deliver the letter to Ambassador Dobrynin for referral to Chairman Khrushchev, but to add orally what was not in the letter: that the missiles would come out of Turkey.

Allyn, Blight & Welch, *op. cit.* (1990), p.92. This story coincides with Dean Rusk's recent revelation that President Kennedy instructed Rusk on the night of October 27th to prepare a contingency plan whereby Andrew Cordier, former American delegate to the United Nations and then President of Columbia University, would contact Acting Secretary General of the U. N. U Thant to ask the U.N. to propose a public trade between the missiles in Cuba and those in Turkey. See Letter from Dean Rusk to James G. Blight on "Cordier ploy", 2/25/1987, NSA 03322; Rusk, *op. cit.*, pp.240-41.

- 56 Oleg Troyanovski, in an interview with NHK in August 1992.

- 57 Allyn, Blight, & Welch, *op. cit.* (1990), pp.92-93.

- 58 This point was raised by Prof. Joseph S. Nye in a conversation with the author in January 1991 in Tokyo.