

## Critical Reading: Comparing & Contrasting Historical Narratives on the Cuban Missile Crisis

Purpose: the purpose of this exercise is to improve students' critical reading skills and sensitivity to discrete elements of historical narrative.

Directions: Compare and contrast Sample A and Sample B, both narratives concerning the Cuban Missile Crisis. Be prepared to report your findings concerning the accuracy, the author's purpose, the author's perspective, sufficiency of evidence used to support assertions, clarity, breadth, and depth. Determine which essay is better and explain why.

### **Sample A: The Cuban Missile Crisis: The Triumph of Mutual Empathy**

Robert McNamara, former Secretary of Defense under Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, revealed that during the Cuban Missile Crisis, the world came "closer than we knew at the time" to a nuclear holocaust.<sup>1</sup> Former Secretary of State Dean Rusk called the event the "most dangerous crisis the world has ever seen."<sup>2</sup> The crisis erupted over the Soviet's deployment of nuclear missiles to Cuba that were capable of striking targets across the United States. Fidel Castro, the communist revolutionary who seized control of Cuba in 1959, had been the target of a failed coup orchestrated in 1961 by Cuban exiles and the United States' Central Intelligence Agency, and was subsequently persuaded by Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev to house nuclear missiles on the island as a way to defend the island from future invasions and as a means of adjusting the balance of power between the United States and the Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup> On October 14, 1962, American spy planes captured images of sites used to store the missiles, triggering a confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union that lasted for 13 days and resulted in the Soviet removal of missiles from Cuba, the American removal of missiles from Turkey, the pledge that the United States would not invade Cuba, and the Soviet promise not to invade Turkey.<sup>5</sup> Though the crisis nearly ignited a nuclear war, both President John F. Kennedy and Premier Khrushchev averted an atomic catastrophe by rejecting the demands of belligerent advisors and by allowing empathy central stage in their decisions.

The resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis did not follow the traditional scenario and process of military crisis management; it was characterized by consideration of multiple non-competing options, the act of setting goals while in the process of decision-making, and the prioritization of avoiding failures rather than of achieving success.<sup>6</sup> This approach differs from traditional models of crisis management in which goals and objectives are established prior to exploring courses of action and thus automatically limit the scope of viable alternative responses. During the crisis, both Kennedy and Khrushchev readily understood that the two superpowers inched closer to nuclear war as long as they clung to the traditional idea that victory required them to inflict a public humiliation on the other and the attainment

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<sup>1</sup> Leonard, M., and Blachurst, R. "I don't think anybody thought much about whether Agent Orange was against the rules of war." *The Guardian*, May 18, 2002. Retrieved from:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2002/may/19/theobserver>

<sup>2</sup> Blight, J. G., Nye, J. S. Jr., and Welch, D. A. (1987). The Cuban Missile Crisis revisited. *Foreign Affairs*, 66 (1), 170-188.

<sup>3</sup> Graham, A. and Zelikov, A. (1999). *Essence of division: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*. New York, NY: Addison Wesley Longman.

<sup>4</sup> Pious, R. (2001). The Cuban Missile Crisis and the limits of crisis management. *Political Science Quarterly*, 116 (1), 81-108.

<sup>5</sup> Fersenko, A. a. and Naftali, T. J. (1997). *One hell of a gamble*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Company.

<sup>6</sup> Anderson, P. A. (1983). *Decision making by objection and the Cuban Missile Crisis*. *Administrative Science quarterly*, 28 (2), 201-222.

of a new strategic advantage over the other. Rather than follow a course that made atomic strikes inevitable, the two executives came to the conclusion that although both parties had legitimate concerns regarding national security, it was not worth the horrible cost in human lives to win every point of contention by way of bombing the other into submission. This was possible because they recognized that each had a tremendous amount of empathy for humanity and knew that each had to contend with bellicose advisors who wanted to flex their military muscles and lay waste to the enemy.<sup>7</sup>

Throughout the 1950s, confrontations between the United States and the Soviet Union routinely involved tough language that drove negotiations to the brink of nuclear war, but then ebbed as officials backed away from the brink. The thinking in Moscow and Washington had been to that point that no one would actually be serious enough to “pull the trigger;” this thinking, of course, always reserved doubt as human error and irrationality were constant variables.<sup>8</sup> Kennedy was a dedicated cold warrior inasmuch as he rejected communism as a viable and moral alternative to democracy, and while he had no objections to the harnessing of atomic energy, he felt mankind was ethically bound to refrain from using it in warfare and sought nuclear disarmament.<sup>9</sup> The tension between his anti-communism and desire to disarm was magnified by his responsibility as the Commander in Chief of a global superpower, and early in 1962 he admitted to the world that under some circumstances the United States, regrettably, may have to launch a first atomic strike.<sup>10</sup>

Kennedy’s discovery of Soviet missiles in Cuba on October 16, 1962 sparked profanity and bewilderment over what could have motivated the Russians to take what he thought was unreasonable and miscalculated action.<sup>11</sup> His advisors in the Executive Committee for National Security included General Maxwell Taylor, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who like the Assistant Secretary of Defense, Paul Nitze, and John McCone, Director of Central Intelligence, wanted to initiate strategic bombing of the missile sites in Cuba. Dean Acheson, former Secretary of State, detested the moral anguish that defined the first few days of deliberation and supported an air strike to destroy the sites.<sup>12 13</sup> General Curtis LeMay, member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, openly criticized the President, comparing his treatment of Khrushchev to the British appeasement of Hitler at Munich in 1938, and characterizing the conflict as a great defeat of the United States.<sup>14</sup> Others, such as Llewellyn Thompson, Kennedy’s advisor on Russian affairs, insisted that no measure of concession ought to be extended and that the ultimatum to remove the missiles ought to be absolute and unconditional.<sup>15</sup> The hawkish members of the committee held that it was better to risk nuclear war than to lose face. Ultimately, for the sake of combating the threat the missiles represented and for the sake of buttressing his political reputation with both Republicans and Democrats, Kennedy issued an ultimatum to Khrushchev to remove the missiles. The ultimatum was announced on October 22<sup>nd</sup> and was reinforced by the establishment of a United States’ naval blockade of ships to Cuba.

In Moscow, Premier Khrushchev was subjected to formidable pressure by his own military advisors to be steadfast in his commitment to Castro. Hardline communist expansionists wanted Khrushchev to install

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<sup>7</sup> Douglas, J. W. (2008). *JFK and the unspeakable. Why he died and why it matters*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

<sup>8</sup> Anderson, 1983.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Taubman, W. (2003). *Khrushchev: The man and his era*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Company.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Isaacson, W. and Thomas, E. (1986). *The wise men: Six friends and the world they made*. New York, NY: Touchstone.

<sup>13</sup> Schlesinger, A. Jr. (1978). *Robert Kennedy and his times*, Vol. I. Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company.

<sup>14</sup> May, E. r. and Zelikow, P. D. (1997). *The Kennedy tapes: Inside the White house during the Cuban Missile Crisis*.

<sup>15</sup> Pious, 2009.

Soviet weapons in the Caribbean as a way of showing the Americans that Russians were not afraid to attack American soil. In 1962 the United States possessed about 300 nuclear missiles capable of striking Russia while Russia had only 20 that might strike the United States. The crisis unfolded against the backdrop of a constant appeal for Khrushchev to increase the size of Russia's military budget.<sup>16</sup> <sup>17</sup>Khrushchev recalled after the event that:

*Our missiles would have equalized what the West calls the "balance of power." The Americans...would learn just what it feels like to have the enemy missiles pointing at you; we'd be doing nothing more than giving them a little of their own medicine... We Russians have suffered through three wars over the last half century...*<sup>18</sup>

Khrushchev's remarks indicate that he believed the Americans had little empathy for what Russians had endured in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As the hawkish sentiments of Kennedy's advisors suggest, many Americans were unsympathetic to the Russians and what they had endured in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>19</sup>

In the end, both Kennedy and Khrushchev refused to take the advice of their most combative advisors. They remained composed under the hail of insults from their harshest critics that asserted unfavorable things about their manhood and patriotism, and they had done so, because both men, in their own ways, empathized with the other's desire to see that their people were able to live out their lives in comfort and peace.<sup>20</sup> <sup>21</sup>The fact that Kennedy and Khrushchev had begun a secret correspondence in 1961 in which dozens of letters were exchanged over the course of two years enabled them to develop a sense of familiarity and trust. As Khrushchev described the tranquil life near his dacha in Pitsunda on the Black Sea and shared stories about his family and the son he lost in World War II, Kennedy described the delights of Hyannis Port and shared the sadness of his losses including a brother in World War II and a son who did not survive long after birth.<sup>22</sup> The two explored the complexities of conflicts in Germany and South East Asia and sipped from the well of empathy as they learned how the duress of militant extremists in their respective governments often made rational diplomacy very difficult.

In his first letter to Kennedy, Khrushchev described their fate as that of Noah whose ark inevitably carried the "clean" and the "unclean—" a metaphor the Catholic president appreciated, and one that clearly underscored the reality that without cooperation, friends and foes alike would perish under the nuclear fire.<sup>23</sup> Kennedy had recently read Barbara Tuckman's historical monograph, *The Guns of August*, which chronicled the events leading to World War I and disclosed the arrogance of Edwardian aristocrats and industrialists, their inability to anticipate the scale of carnage and ruin wrought by modern industrial warfare, and their incapacity to explain how the war took on a monstrous life of its own. Kennedy did not wish to repeat the blunders of 1914. Robert Kennedy recalled his brother's anguish over the "specter of death" embodied in the crisis and reported that John F. Kennedy has no heart to see the devastation of nuclear war that would inevitably kill "children of this country and all

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<sup>16</sup> Nathan, J. A. (1975). This missile crisis: His finest hour. *World Politics*, 27 (2), 256-281.

<sup>17</sup> Graham, A. and Zelikov, A.. (1999). *Essence of decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*. New York,, NY: Addison, Wesley, Longman.

<sup>18</sup> Khrushchev, N. (1970). *Khrushchev remembers*. Ed. And trans. By Strobe Talbot. Boston: Little Brown.

<sup>19</sup> Gaddis, J.L. (1972). *The United States and the origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947a* New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

<sup>20</sup> Douglas, 2008.

<sup>21</sup> Zubok, (2007). *The failed empire: The Soviet Union and the cold War form Stalin to Gorbachev*. Chapel Hill, NC: North Carolina University Press. pp. 143-153.

<sup>22</sup> Douglas, 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, pp. 24-25.

over the world—the young people who had no role, who had no say, who knew nothing of the confrontation, but whose lives would be snuffed out like everyone else’s.”<sup>24</sup> On October 27, 1962, Robert Kennedy met with the Russian Foreign Ambassador, Anatoly Dobrynin and described the President’s agony. He beseeched Dobrynin to emphasize the President’s desperate position in his conversation with Khrushchev, stating that once the shooting started, the President could not promise that the military would not rush to escalate and perhaps even seize the President’s power; it was this urgency and sincere appeal to avoid the death of tens of millions that finally moved Khrushchev to withdraw the threat.<sup>25</sup>

The empathy Kennedy demonstrated during the crisis for the Soviet Premier and the human race did not radically alter American foreign policy, but it did inspire his brother Robert to offer future generations lessons on how to work effectively with conflict by refraining from humiliating one’s adversaries, providing an honorable way out of confrontation, respecting world opinion, and being humbled by the potential consequences of one’s judgment.<sup>26</sup> It also moved former Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, to recognize the value of empathy for the enemy, being open to re-consider convictions, never assuming that everyone will be rationale, and respecting the fact that there are things that are bigger than oneself in the world.<sup>27</sup> By way of embracing these principles in the face much pressure to otherwise, Kennedy was not only to temper military American reaction to events, but was able to agree to measures that sacrificed military installations abroad, required the United States to abandon its agenda to remove communists from Cuba, and to allow Khrushchev an honorable way of a conflict for which he was partially responsible.<sup>28</sup>

### ***Sample B: The Cuban Missile Crisis: JFK’s Bleeding Heart and a Lost Opportunity***

Historians agree that the Cuban Missile Crisis was one of the most dangerous episodes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Between October 15, 1962, the day President John F. Kennedy received information that the Soviets were installing missiles in Cuba, and October 28, 1962, the day the United States and the Soviet Union reached an agreement to remove nuclear missiles from Cuba, the world waited anxiously to see which side would be the first to rescind its threat of nuclear strikes—a threat all too routine in the game of brinkmanship. In the end, Kennedy’s unwillingness to risk the loss of innocent lives led to make compromises with the Soviet Union, which some people believe was an empathetic and noble act while others believe led to an additional 28 years of cold war.

The Cuban Missile Crisis has its roots in U.S. Cuban policy since 1959. After Fidel Castro overthrew the regime of Fulgencio Batista and established a communist government, Americans and Cuban exiles had sought a way to depose Castro and install a government would restore normal relations with the U.S. To restore the Cuban government to democracy, Cuban exiles with the support of the C.I.A. invaded Cuba at the Bay of Pigs in April, 1961. They failed to take Cuba because President Kennedy refused to send air support for the invasion. Premier of the U.S.S.R., Nikita Khrushchev took advantage of the situation and sent nuclear missiles to Cuba to protect it from U.S. invasion and to show the U.S. that it was not going to stand by and let the U.S. put nuclear weapons all over Europe and point them at Russia without some

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<sup>24</sup> Douglas, J. W. (2008). *JFK and the unspeakable: Why he died and why it matters*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press. p. 26-27.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Kennedy, R. (1969). *Thirteen days: A memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Company.

<sup>27</sup> Morris, E. (2003). *The Fog of War*, a documentary film. Distributed by Sony Picture Classics, New York.

<sup>28</sup> Fursenko, A. and Naftali, T. (2006). *Khrushchev’s cold war*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Company.

kind of retaliation. One historian said the Soviets wanted to give Americans a taste of “their own medicine.”<sup>29</sup>

Khrushchev made his plans to build missile sites in Cuba even after Kennedy had made a speech telling the world that he was not above using atomic force to protect certain things and that the U.S. would not tolerate the presence of missiles and mass amounts of combat forces on the island of Cuba. This speech was delivered on September 4, 1962 at a time when Russian ships load with missiles and construction supplies were sailing merrily to the Caribbean. Khrushchev’s response to Kennedy’s speech was to speed up the delivery times of weapons and the Russian shipment of September 7, 1962 included 6 atomic bombs that could be dropped from airplanes and 12 short-range missiles containing nuclear warheads. The U.S. at the time did not know that these shipments were going on behind its back, but since Khrushchev knew about Kennedy’s speech, he should have turned the ships back to Russia and avoided the whole crisis. What made matters worse was the fact that Soviet contacts in Washington and the U.N. kept telling Americans that nothing was going on, which was an obvious lie.

President Kennedy found out that Russia was giving Cuba nuclear weapons even though they knew he was against it. He assembled a group of consultants known as the Executive Committee for National Security, or EX-COMM, and proceeded to explore ways to get the Soviets out of Cuba. This was not an easy task because taking action against the Russians in Cuba might have an effect on how things would go in other parts of the world where Americans and Russians clashed. Historians tell us that Khrushchev and Kennedy already disagreed about lots of things like whether Berlin should be unified and given to East Germany and whether the superpowers should get involved with politics in Vietnam and Laos, so it was important that they not get into another struggle in Latin America.<sup>30</sup> EX-COMM was made up of 12 men who all hated communism. Many of them had fought in World War II and hated to see Russia take advantage of the defeat of Nazi Germany by imposing communism onto helpless nations such as Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The Russians had already demonstrated their malicious intent to spread communism around the world by getting involved in Middle Eastern and Asian affairs. EX COM did not want to see Reds in America’s back yard!

Basically, Kennedy had a few choices: he could do nothing and accept the idea of missiles in Cuba as a fair trade-off for American missiles in Europe; he could appeal to Castro to send the missiles back; he could go the U.N. and ask for help; he could enforce a blockade; he could bomb the missile sites; he could launch an all-out invasion of Cuba and get rid of Castro once and for all; or, he could attack the Soviet Union and put an end to their communist empire. The EX-COMM was stacked with hawks who rallied to war and pressured Kennedy to use forceful military action.<sup>31</sup>

At first, Kennedy wanted to attack the missile sites in Cuba. Robert Kennedy even suggested that the U.S. launch an invasion and take advantage of the crisis to depose Castro. After some debate, the more moderate voices of the EX-COMM began to be heard. Robert McNamara, Secretary of Defense and General Maxwell Taylor, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, favored a blockade which would prevent ships from reaching Cuba. The debate about what to do had to go on for days because the administration had never had to deal with a nuclear threat so close to home and they had never created any strategies for this kind of scenario. By October 21, 1962, Kennedy reached a decision and then the next day announced it in a televised speech. He declared that the Soviets were acting aggressively and

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<sup>29</sup> Taubman, W. (2003). *Khrushchev: The man and his era*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Company

<sup>30</sup> Munton, D. and Welch, D. (2011). *The Cuban Missile Crisis: A concise history*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

<sup>31</sup> The Cuban Missile Crisis. Oracle Think Quest. Retrieved from:  
<http://library.thinkquest.org/11046/days/index.html>.

posing a threat to the peace of the western hemisphere. He demanded that all missiles be removed and told the world that Cuba was now under quarantine. He warned that in crossing over the blockade, Soviet ships would risk attack and just to prove his point, he placed the U.S. armed forces on high alert, which meant they were ready attack on the President's command.<sup>32</sup>

Kennedy took lots of criticism for this blockade. General Curtis LeMay, a general in the U.S. Air Force wanted to drop 5,000 bombs on Russia and end the confrontation with the communists by ending the U.S. S. R.. He believed that war against the Soviet Union was inevitable and that the U.S. ought to strike while they had the advantage.<sup>33</sup> LeMay had already made a career for himself as one of the World War II generals that supported mass bombing of civilian targets. He believed that by setting whole cities on fire, the war would come to a swift end. Kennedy rejected this option as he understood that the U.S. Air Force of 1962 was using nuclear weapons instead of regular incendiary bombs commonly used in 1944.

Kennedy took the choice of a blockade because he did not want to start a nuclear war. He was open to bombing missile sites in the beginning, but then came to believe that he could not risk creating a war by attacking Cuba. The war would have killed millions of people all over the world if Russia retaliated with atomic bombs and Robert Kennedy said that his brother could not bring himself to cause the death of so many innocent children and young people who "had no say, and who knew nothing of the confrontation."<sup>34</sup> Thus, because Kennedy had a soft spot in his heart for civilians, he opted to end the crisis in Cuba but not end the Cold War.

### ***Sample A: The Cuban Missile Crisis: The Triumph of Mutual Empathy***

Robert McNamara, former Secretary of Defense under Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, revealed that during the Cuban Missile Crisis, the world came "closer than we knew at the time" to a nuclear holocaust.<sup>35</sup> Former Secretary of State Dean Rusk called the event the "most dangerous crisis the world has ever seen."<sup>36</sup> The crisis erupted over the Soviet's deployment of nuclear missiles to Cuba that were capable of striking targets across the United States. Fidel Castro, the communist revolutionary who seized control of Cuba in 1959, had been the target of a failed coup orchestrated in 1961 by Cuban exiles and the United States' Central Intelligence Agency, and was subsequently persuaded by Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev to house nuclear missiles on the island as a way to defend the island from future invasions and as a means of adjusting the balance of power

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<sup>32</sup> The Cuban Missile Crisis. United States History. Retrieved from: <http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h1736.html>.

<sup>33</sup> Curtis LeMay. Spartacus Educational. Retrieved from: <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAlemay.htm>.

<sup>34</sup> Douglas, J. W. (2008). *JFK and the unspeakable: Why he died and why it matters*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, p. 26.

<sup>35</sup> Leonard, M., and Blachurst, R. "I don't think anybody thought much about whether Agent Orange was against the rules of war." *The Guardian*, May 18, 2002. Retrieved from: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2002/may/19/theobserver>

<sup>36</sup> Blight, J. G., Nye, J. S. Jr., and Welch, D. A. (1987). The Cuban Missile Crisis revisited. *Foreign Affairs*, 66 (1), 170-188.

between the United States and the Soviet Union.<sup>37</sup> <sup>38</sup>On October 14, 1962, American spy planes captured images of sites used to store the missiles, triggering a confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union that lasted for 13 days and resulted in the Soviet removal of missiles from Cuba, the American removal of missiles from Turkey, the pledge that the United States would not invade Cuba, and the Soviet promise not to invade Turkey.<sup>39</sup> Though the crisis nearly ignited a nuclear war, both President John F. Kennedy and Premier Khrushchev averted an atomic catastrophe by rejecting the demands of belligerent advisors and by allowing empathy central stage in their decisions.

The resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis did not follow the traditional scenario and process of military crisis management; it was characterized by consideration of multiple non-competing options, the act of setting goals while in the process of decision-making, and the prioritization of avoiding failures rather than of achieving success.<sup>40</sup> This approach differs from traditional models of crisis management in which goals and objectives are established prior to exploring courses of action and thus automatically limit the scope of viable alternative responses. During the crisis, both Kennedy and Khrushchev readily understood that the two superpowers inched closer to nuclear war as long as they clung to the traditional idea that victory required them to inflict a public humiliation on the other and the attainment of a new strategic advantage over the other. Rather than follow a course that made atomic strikes inevitable, the two executives came to the conclusion that although both parties had legitimate concerns regarding national security, it was not worth the horrible cost in human lives to win every point of contention by way of bombing the other into submission. This was possible because they recognized that each had a tremendous amount of empathy for humanity and knew that each had to contend with bellicose advisors who wanted to flex their military muscles and lay waste to the enemy.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Anderson, P. A. (1983). *Decision making by objection and the Cuban Missile Crisis*. *Administrative Science quarterly*, 28 (2), 201-222.

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<sup>42</sup> Anderson, 1983.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Taubman, W. (2003). *Khrushchev: The man and his era*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Company.

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In the end, both Kennedy and Khrushchev refused to take the advice of their most combative advisors. They remained composed under the hail of insults from their harshest critics that asserted unfavorable things about their manhood and patriotism, and they had done so, because both men, in their own ways, empathized with the other's desire to see that their people were able to live out their lives in

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<sup>46</sup> Isaacson, W. and Thomas, E. (1986). *The wise men: Six friends and the world they made*. New York, NY: Touchstone.

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<sup>53</sup> Gaddis, J.L. (1972). *The United States and the origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947a* New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

comfort and peace.<sup>54 55</sup> The fact that Kennedy and Khrushchev had begun a secret correspondence in 1961 in which dozens of letters were exchanged over the course of two years enabled them to develop a sense of familiarity and trust. As Khrushchev described the tranquil life near his dacha in Pitsunda on the Black Sea and shared stories about his family and the son he lost in World War II, Kennedy described the delights of Hyannis Port and shared the sadness of his losses including a brother in World War II and a son who did not survive long after birth.<sup>56</sup> The two explored the complexities of conflicts in Germany and South East Asia and sipped from the well of empathy as they learned how the duress of militant extremists in their respective governments often made rational diplomacy very difficult.

In his first letter to Kennedy, Khrushchev described their fate as that of Noah whose ark inevitably carried the “clean” and the “unclean—” a metaphor the Catholic president appreciated, and one that clearly underscored the reality that without cooperation, friends and foes alike would perish under the nuclear fire.<sup>57</sup> Kennedy had recently read Barbara Tuckman’s historical monograph, *The Guns of August*, which chronicled the events leading to World War I and disclosed the arrogance of Edwardian aristocrats and industrialists, their inability to anticipate the scale of carnage and ruin wrought by modern industrial warfare, and their incapacity to explain how the war took on a monstrous life of its own. Kennedy did not wish to repeat the blunders of 1914. Robert Kennedy recalled his brother’s anguish over the “specter of death” embodied in the crisis and reported that John F. Kennedy has no heart to see the devastation of nuclear war that would inevitably kill “children of this country and all over the world—the young people who had no role, who had no say, who knew nothing of the confrontation, but whose lives would be snuffed out like everyone else’s.”<sup>58</sup> On October 27, 1962, Robert Kennedy met with the Russian Foreign Ambassador, Anatoly Dobrynin and described the President’s agony. He beseeched Dobrynin to emphasize the President’s desperate position in his conversation with Khrushchev, stating that once the shooting started, the President could not promise that the military would not rush to escalate and perhaps even seize the President’s power; it was this urgency and sincere appeal to avoid the death of tens of millions that finally moved Khrushchev to withdraw the threat.<sup>59</sup>

The empathy Kennedy demonstrated during the crisis for the Soviet Premier and the human race did not radically alter American foreign policy, but it did inspire his brother Robert to offer future generations lessons on how to work effectively with conflict by refraining from humiliating one’s adversaries, providing an honorable way out of confrontation, respecting world opinion, and being humbled by the potential consequences of one’s judgment.<sup>60</sup> It also moved former Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, to recognize the value of empathy for the enemy, being open to re-consider convictions, never assuming that everyone will be rational, and respecting the fact that there are things that are bigger than oneself in the world.<sup>61</sup> By way of embracing these principles in the face of much pressure to otherwise, Kennedy was not only to temper military American reaction to events, but was able to agree to measures that sacrificed military installations abroad, required the United States to abandon its

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<sup>54</sup> Douglas, 2008.

<sup>55</sup> Zubok, (2007). *The failed empire: The Soviet Union and the cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev*. Chapel Hill, NC: North Carolina University Press. pp. 143-153.

<sup>56</sup> Douglas, 2008.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, pp. 24-25.

<sup>58</sup> Douglas, J. W. (2008). *JFK and the unspeakable: Why he died and why it matters*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press. p. 26-27.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Kennedy, R. (1969). *Thirteen days: A memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Company.

<sup>61</sup> Morris, E. (2003). *The Fog of War*, a documentary film. Distributed by Sony Picture Classics, New York.

agenda to remove communists from Cuba, and to allow Khrushchev an honorable way of a conflict for which he was partially responsible.<sup>62</sup>

### ***Sample B: The Cuban Missile Crisis: JFK's Bleeding Heart and a Lost Opportunity***

Historians agree that the Cuban Missile Crisis was one of the most dangerous episodes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Between October 15, 1962, the day President John F. Kennedy received information that the Soviets were installing missiles in Cuba, and October 28, 1962, the day the United States and the Soviet Union reached an agreement to remove nuclear missiles from Cuba, the world waited anxiously to see which side would be the first to rescind its threat of nuclear strikes—a threat all too routine in the game of brinkmanship. In the end, Kennedy's unwillingness to risk the loss of innocent lives led to make compromises with the Soviet Union, which some people believe was an empathetic and noble act while others believe led to an additional 28 years of cold war.

The Cuban Missile Crisis has its roots in U.S. Cuban policy since 1959. After Fidel Castro overthrew the regime of Fulgencio Batista and established a communist government, Americans and Cuban exiles had sought a way to depose Castro and install a government would restore normal relations with the U.S. To restore the Cuban government to democracy, Cuban exiles with the support of the C.I.A. invaded Cuba at the Bay of Pigs in April, 1961. They failed to take Cuba because President Kennedy refused to send air support for the invasion. Premier of the U.S.S.R., Nikita Khrushchev took advantage of the situation and sent nuclear missiles to Cuba to protect it from U.S. invasion and to show the U.S. that it was not going to stand by and let the U.S. put nuclear weapons all over Europe and point them at Russia without some kind of retaliation. One historian said the Soviets wanted to give Americans a taste of "their own medicine."<sup>63</sup>

Khrushchev made his plans to build missile sites in Cuba even after Kennedy had made a speech telling the world that he was not above using atomic force to protect certain things and that the U.S. would not tolerate the presence of missiles and mass amounts of combat forces on the island of Cuba. This speech was delivered on September 4, 1962 at a time when Russian ships load with missiles and construction supplies were sailing merrily to the Caribbean. Khrushchev's response to Kennedy's speech was to speed up the delivery times of weapons and the Russian shipment of September 7, 1962 included 6 atomic bombs that could be dropped from airplanes and 12 short-range missiles containing nuclear warheads. The U.S. at the time did not know that these shipments were going on behind its back, but since Khrushchev knew about Kennedy's speech, he should have turned the ships back to Russia and avoided the whole crisis. What made matters worse was the fact that Soviet contacts in Washington and the U.N. kept telling Americans that nothing was going on, which was an obvious lie.

President Kennedy found out that Russia was giving Cuba nuclear weapons even though they knew he was against it. He assembled a group of consultants known as the Executive Committee for National Security, or EX-COMM, and proceeded to explore ways to get the Soviets out of Cuba. This was not an easy task because taking action against the Russians in Cuba might have an effect on how things would go in other parts of the world where Americans and Russians clashed. Historians tell us that Khrushchev and Kennedy already disagreed about lots of things like whether Berlin should be unified and given to East Germany and whether the superpowers should get involved with politics in Vietnam and Laos, so it was important that they not get into another struggle in Latin America.<sup>64</sup> EX-COMM was made up of 12

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<sup>62</sup> Fursenko, A. and Naftali, T. (2006). *Khrushchev's cold war*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Company.

<sup>63</sup> Taubman, W. (2003). *Khrushchev: The man and his era*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Company

<sup>64</sup> Munton, D. and Welch, D. (2011). *The Cuban Missile Crisis: A concise history*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

men who all hated communism. Many of them had fought in World War II and hated to see Russia take advantage of the defeat of Nazi Germany by imposing communism onto helpless nations such as Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The Russians had already demonstrated their malicious intent to spread communism around the world by getting involved in Middle Eastern and Asian affairs. EX COM did not want to see Reds in America's back yard!

Basically, Kennedy had a few choices: he could do nothing and accept the idea of missiles in Cuba as a fair trade-off for American missiles in Europe; he could appeal to Castro to send the missiles back; he could go the U.N. and ask for help; he could enforce a blockade; he could bomb the missile sites; he could launch an all-out invasion of Cuba and get rid of Castro once and for all; or, he could attack the Soviet Union and put an end to their communist empire. The EX-COMM was stacked with hawks who rallied to war and pressured Kennedy to use forceful military action.<sup>65</sup>

At first, Kennedy wanted to attack the missile sites in Cuba. Robert Kennedy even suggested that the U.S. launch an invasion and take advantage of the crisis to depose Castro. After some debate, the more moderate voices of the EX-COMM began to be heard. Robert McNamara, Secretary of Defense and General Maxwell Taylor, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, favored a blockade which would prevent ships from reaching Cuba. The debate about what to do had to go on for days because the administration had never had to deal with a nuclear threat so close to home and they had never created any strategies for this kind of scenario. By October 21, 1962, Kennedy reached a decision and then the next day announced it in a televised speech. He declared that the Soviets were acting aggressively and posing a threat to the peace of the western hemisphere. He demanded that all missiles be removed and told the world that Cuba was now under quarantine. He warned that in crossing over the blockade, Soviet ships would risk attack and just to prove his point, he placed the U.S. armed forces on high alert, which meant they were ready to attack on the President's command.<sup>66</sup>

Kennedy took lots of criticism for this blockade. General Curtis LeMay, a general in the U.S. Air Force wanted to drop 5,000 bombs on Russia and end the confrontation with the communists by ending the U.S. S. R.. He believed that war against the Soviet Union was inevitable and that the U.S. ought to strike while they had the advantage.<sup>67</sup> LeMay had already made a career for himself as one of the World War II generals that supported mass bombing of civilian targets. He believed that by setting whole cities on fire, the war would come to a swift end. Kennedy rejected this option as he understood that the U.S. Air Force of 1962 was using nuclear weapons instead of regular incendiary bombs commonly used in 1944.

Kennedy took the choice of a blockade because he did not want to start a nuclear war. He was open to bombing missile sites in the beginning, but then came to believe that he could not risk creating a war by attacking Cuba. The war would have killed millions of people all over the world if Russia retaliated with atomic bombs and Robert Kennedy said that his brother could not bring himself to cause the death of so many innocent children and young people who "had no say, and who knew nothing of the confrontation."<sup>68</sup> Thus, because Kennedy had a soft spot in his heart for civilians, he opted to end the crisis in Cuba but not end the Cold War.

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<sup>65</sup> The Cuban Missile Crisis. Oracle Think Quest. Retrieved from: <http://library.thinkquest.org/11046/days/index.html>.

<sup>66</sup> The Cuban Missile Crisis. United States History. Retrieved from: <http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h1736.html>.

<sup>67</sup> Curtis LeMay. Spartacus Educational. Retrieved from: <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAlemay.htm>.

<sup>68</sup> Douglas, J. W. (2008). *JFK and the unspeakable: Why he died and why it matters*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, p. 26.