

On the Brink: The Cuban Missile Crisis
With Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., Theodore Sorensen, Sergei Khrushchev
and Josefina Vidal; Moderated by James G. Blight and Introduced by
Caroline Kennedy

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CAROLINE KENNEDY: Good afternoon. Welcome to the John F. Kennedy Library, and to this special forum on the Cuban Missile Crisis. This season of anniversary and reflection provides us all with a remarkable opportunity to give thanks and to learn from the past. We give thanks for the fact that, because of the wisdom and judgment of our leaders, we're all here today, living in a relatively peaceful and prosperous world.

On a personal level, this was brought home to me when I had the chance earlier this afternoon to meet Sergei Khrushchev, who has done so much to increase understanding between the United States and his native country. It was quite emotional to realize that when our fathers transformed the hours of danger into the beginning of peace they did it for us and for all children threatened by world at war.

Today, it is our collective obligation to carry on that legacy and learn from the past, and to believe in the possibility of peace. As President Kennedy said, "Our problems are man-made. Therefore, they can be solved by man. And man can be as big as he wants. No problem of human destiny is beyond human beings. Man's reason and spirit have often solved the seemingly unsolvable."

"And we believe they can do it again. There is no single simple key to this peace, no grand or magic formula to be adopted by one or two powers. Genuine peace must be the product of many nations, the sum of many acts. It must be dynamic, not static, changing to meet the challenge of each new generation. For peace is a process, a way of solving problems."

Before this forum began, Dr. Khrushchev and I surveyed the special exhibit downstairs about the Cuban Missile Crisis which I hope you'll all have a chance to see, and saw my mother's copy of the Test Ban Treaty which was signed by both of our fathers and British Prime Minister, Harold McMillan.

Signing that document was not a victory of one party over another, or one country over another, but a triumph of peace over war, of negotiation over faith, of faith over fear. And the spoils of that victory are shared by all people wherever they live.

In retrospect, the outcome of the Missile Crisis almost seems preordained, but the lesson for us and our children is that it did not have to work out that way. In fact, our discussion this afternoon will probably reveal how close the world came to experiencing a nuclear disaster.

On October 28, 1962, when President Kennedy announced that the crisis had ended peacefully with a commitment by Chairman Khrushchev to withdraw the Soviet missiles, he told the American people, "It is my hope that the governments of the world can, with the solution of the Cuban Crisis, turn their attention to the compelling necessity for ending the arms race and reducing world tensions."

In the months that followed, recognizing the dangers that they had so narrowly avoided, President Kennedy and Chairman Khrushchev agreed to install a hotline to improve communications between their two countries. And they stood up to the hard-liners in their own governments in order to begin to dismantle the nuclear Sword of Damocles that threatened the entire world.

Negotiations began in earnest the following spring. In part to convince the Soviets that he was serious about reaching an agreement on a nuclear test ban treaty and also to persuade the American public of the wisdom of signing that pact, President Kennedy delivered a speech on world peace at American University in which he announced that the United States would cease testing nuclear weapons in the atmosphere and encourage other nations to follow.

He said, "Let us not be blind to our differences. Let us also direct attention to our common interest and the means by which those differences can be resolved. And if we cannot end our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity. For in the final analysis, our most common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's future. And we are all mortal."

The future that my father, Chairman Khrushchev, and the other world leaders of their time cherished is the present that each of us enjoys today. We gather this afternoon to understand how, at the moment when we stood on the brink of a nuclear war, catastrophe was avoided. And consider what lessons we can learn and apply to the perils that confront us today.

We are fortunate to have with us a distinguished panel of experts who bring perspectives from all sides of the crisis. As the son of Nikita Khrushchev, and an accomplished engineer in his own right, Sergei Khrushchev accompanied his father on a number of major foreign trips, and meetings where Chairman Khrushchev transacted business with key leaders in the Soviet defense establishment.

He is currently a Fellow at the Watson Institute of Brown University, and the author of many books including *Khrushchev on Khrushchev* and *Nikita Khrushchev and the Creation of the Superpower*.

Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., renowned historian, public intellectual and political activist, tremendous friend of this institution and all of our family. He served as special assistant to my father, and won two Pulitzer prizes: In 1946 for *The Age of Jackson* and in 1966 for *A Thousand Days*.

Theodore Sorensen served as special counsel and advisor to President Kennedy. He has been practicing foreign affairs in international law for over 34 years as a senior partner, senior counsel in the law firm of Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Morton, and Garrison. He is now a Fellow at the John F. Kennedy Institute of Politics at Harvard. A great friend to this institution and all of our family as well.

Josefina Vidal is the First Secretary of the Cuban Interests Section in Washington, D.C., the official voice of the Cuban government in our nation's capital. In that role, she was appointed this year by the Cuban Foreign Ministry to represent the Interests Section at the conference last week on the Missile Crisis convened by Fidel Castro in Havana, and to represent her country today at today's forum. Thank you.

Our moderator this afternoon is James Blight, a professor of International Relations at Brown University. Professor Blight has developed a research method, a critical oral history which he's applied to important chapters of history including the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Bay of Pigs Invasion, and the Vietnam War. His books include *Intelligence and the Cuban Missile Crisis* and *Sad and Luminous Days: Cuba's Secret Struggle with the Superpower After the Missile Crisis*.

I would also like to briefly recognize two other members of my father's administration who are here today: Former Director of this Library Chuck Daly and Ambassador Kenneth Galbraith.

I want to thank all of you for coming and express my gratitude to our panelists for engaging in this historic discussion. Thank you very much.

[APPLAUSE]

JAMES BLIGHT: Thank you very much, Caroline Kennedy. We're going to proceed in a relatively orderly fashion, I hope, in a way that makes some historical sense. From Sergei Khrushchev, my colleague at Brown, explaining a little bit of what may have been in his father's mind when the idea arose to suggest the deployment of nuclear missiles in Cuba.

And then Josefina will say some things about why this particular overture was made in the first place. And what was appealing about it to the Cuban government even though all of them knew the deployment of nuclear weapons in Cuba-- Soviet nuclear weapons in Cuba would be very unpleasant at best to the United States Government.

And from there, I'd like to move to Ted Sorensen to say a few things just in an introductory way about the President's approach to this problem. And also something that I think fascinates all of us who know this only after the fact and from far away, of what the mood-- what the feeling was like when people are actually sitting around debating what amounts to the fate of the world.

And then Arthur Schlesinger, our anchor man-- I'd like Arthur to say some things if he would about this rather unusual President. I was mentioning to my wife on the way into the Library this afternoon that almost everything we've learned about the Missile Crisis since 1962 suggests that it was much more dangerous than anyone could have imagined at the time.

But there's one exception to that. And that is that we know a lot more now about President Kennedy and the way he managed his own administration and this Crisis. And the more you know about the way he did that, the more improved you have to be.

So I'd like to turn to Sergei Khrushchev, whose office is just down the hall from mine in our brand new building in Providence, Rhode Island. And who is the second most famous inhabitant of the state of Rhode Island after the controversial Mayor of Providence. [laughter] Sergei.

SERGEI KHRUSHCHEV: Thank you, Jim. When we talk about why my father decided to send missiles to Cuba, you have to remember that, at the time of the Bay of Pigs, Fidel Castro announced that now he is on the Soviet side, he will be a part of the Socialist family. It put obligation on the leader of the family, the same as the United States is the leader of the opposite family, to defend all their allies, all their friends, and all their clients.

And how we could defend Cuba. We were told that, if we would try to do this diplomatically, no one would listen to us in the United Nations. If we tried to bring the conversion arms as many as, as much as we can, still communication was so poor that Americans, would they want to invade, they would take over this.

So he thought that there'd have to be a very strong diplomatic signal, "Don't invade Cuba because we are very serious." And this way, it was not only our relations to the new revolutionary government and our positive feeling for the things, but it was the understanding, the self-understanding of the great nation and the leader.

From this perspective, we can compare Cuba in 1962 with West Berlin in '58 and '63 when President Kennedy told "I am West Berliner." The small piece of land had to be defended. We could not defend them, you will send the message to the opposite, or the rest of the world that you are weak. You're just ready to give up this piece and then another piece of your family. So he decided to send these missiles.

The problem was that he has his Soviet or Russian experience, very different than Americans. We there all the time were surrounded by the enemies. Our territory was vulnerable to the foreign weapons. So we didn't too much care how many weapons were there until this government not making the decision to attack us.

And Americans was very-- you and I-- now I am also American-- we are now very different because this country was secured by two oceans. So when Americans found that enemies at the

gate, just 90 miles from the shore, they went crazy to what they-- just American psychological crisis. Nobody cared about missiles in Siberia. They wanted to push these missiles out of Cuba.

Nobody could imagine that the Soviet Union would start the war with Americans. It was 36 missiles in Cuba, 25 in the Soviet Union, and Americans had 2500 strategic bombers, 150-200 containers of missiles, and many other deadly weapons. But it was there.

And it is very important, because you're living in different cultures, you have this misperception and misunderstanding when we are making decisions. Sometimes bringing us very close to the real war without any intentions.

There is a great deal of speculation around the Khrushchev decision to deliver these missiles secret. Possibility if he signed this treaty before, but we sent all these missiles, and then Americans told, "We welcome your missiles in Cuba."

I think what maybe happened, my father never could do that because he was a pragmatic. If he signed this agreement in June and published this, I think that it was imposed in July before the first ship even left the Soviet port. In August, there would be an invasion in Cuba. And I think that Castro, no other leadership because they were saved in the Cuban Revolution was saved with the Cuban Missile Crisis. On that magnitude what happened.

It was filled with problems and with the mistakes. One most important thing, what was making different the Cuban Missile Crisis from the others was that my father and President Kennedy started secret negotiations from the first day, from the very beginning. It never happened in the previous crisis. That showed that they, at that time, trusted each other more than any in the previous ten years. They knew that they could solve this problem through negotiation. And they solved it.

And, of course, the consequences of the crisis were very important. They signed the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, established the hotline, the Soviet Union signed the Peace Treaty with Germany without any crisis. And they were ready to go forward because my father told that, "President Kennedy defended his ideology. I defended my ideology. We had one in common. We wanted to prevent the war."

And it was some possibility that if they had stayed in power a little bit longer, maybe Cold War would have ended in the late '60's. Because in 1963, my father announced the program to reduce the Soviet armed forces to half a million, cyclic program, to stop production of the conventional arms. Because his idea was that we should have 500 intercontinental nuclear missiles. America will never start war against us. And we need these resources to increase production of food and apartments. It was his main goal in this race. It was not missile race. In our side, it was a race with the production meet and kept it.

There were signs everywhere on all the walls of the Soviet Union. But history decided different. They just removed President Kennedy from the scene in November, 1963. My father was removed from the political life in October, '64. And we returned to the same Cold War behavior, producing more and more weapons, and tens of thousands nuclear weapons, fully useless. And it brought the Soviet Union just to the collapse half a century ago.

Would it maybe if they both stayed in power, seven or eight years longer, maybe it would still be reformed Soviet Union and maybe these friendly relations with the United States.

Thank you, Jim.

[APPLAUSE]

JAMES BLIGHT: I'd like now to call on Josefina Vidal but, before I do that, I would like to reveal for the first time a piece of classified information about her. Which is that she has a very personal Kennedy connection. Hmm.

Some of you may remember that, after the Bay of Pigs Invasion and the imprisonment of the members of Brigade 2506, Robert Kennedy took the lead in trying to put together the deal that would bring those prisoners back to the United States. Part of the deal was a substantial shipment of Gerber baby food. And Josefina has explained to us that Cuban children who were born shortly after that are known in Cuba as "Gerber Babies".

I'd like now to introduce a woman who, I think, all of us who have worked with her feel that you are now looking at the future of Cuba. Our "Gerber Baby", Josefina Vidal.

[APPLAUSE]

JOSEFINA VIDAL: Thank you for inviting me here today to this panel with these prestigious members of the Kennedy administration and Mr. Sergei Khrushchev. I will try to explain what I have learned.

When the Missile Crisis happened, I was only 1½ years old. But I remember growing up, and my father telling us about not being at home any time me or some of my brothers and sisters were born, because they were difficult times. And almost every year, he had to go mobilize to different places of the island. And I was born only two months before the Bay of Pigs and my brother was born during the Missile Crisis. So he was never at home.

But we grew up listening to these stories, and I was curious all my life to learn more about all these years at the beginning of the Cuban Revolution. You know, the Missile Crisis is called in Cuba, "The October Crisis". And for us this crisis did not begin when the United States discovered the presence of missiles in Cuba, nor was this crisis limited to the 13 days that history reports.

From the Cuban perspective, the roots of the crisis lay not in the U.S. Cold War with the Soviet Union, but in the drive of the U.S. Government to overthrow the Cuban Revolution right after January, 1959. The immediate causes of the Missile Crisis are found in the actions undertaken by the U.S. Government right after the defeat of the Bay of Pigs Invasion in April, 1961.

After this failure, it became clear to the Cuban government that the U.S. administration would consider the use of its own armed forces in a direct invasion aimed at overthrowing the Cuban government.

We remember that right after the failure of the Bay of Pigs Invasion under the guidance of the White House, Operation Mongoose was launched in November, 1961. And the goal of that operation was to overthrow the government of Cuba, provoking a revolt of the Cuban people as a basis for direct military intervention by U.S. armed forces.

By far, Operation Mongoose is considered the most ambitious and sinister plan against Cuba, as it included acts of sabotage and terrorism, covert operations, subversion, support from armed counterrevolutionary bands, psychological warfare, and assassination attempts against Cuba's revolutionary leaders. Solving the Cuban problem was considered the top priority in the U.S. Government at that time.

In parallel, following the Bay of Pigs Invasion, the Pentagon developed a number of contingency plans for deploying U.S. forces in Cuba. And carried out military exercises to prepare the forces that might be involved.

Despite repeated statements from members of the Kennedy administration who have claimed the U.S. Government never had the intention or made any decision to invade Cuba, the Cuban

government in 1962 had full reasons to believe that a massive military assault on Cuba was planned. The military contingency plans, together with the increase of subversive actions against Cuba beginning early in 1962, were interpreted in Cuba as clear indications of an imminent, direct military aggression.

Faced with the likelihood of a direct military attack, the Cuban government adopted measures to strengthen its defensive capabilities and ensure its national security. And at this moment, the Soviet Union was willing to supply the necessary weapons and military equipment.

On May 29, 1962, the Soviets proposed the installation of nuclear missiles on Cuban territory because they considered it to be the only way to deter a direct military intervention in Cuba. And Cuba's leadership decided to allow the missiles to be stationed in the island.

The Cuban government was convinced that missiles were not essential for the defense of Cuba. And that the same objective could be accomplished by a military pact making clear that any aggression against Cuba would be equivalent to an attack on the Soviet Union. But Cuba allowed the missiles to be deployed in Cuba in solidarity with the efforts of the Soviet Union in its aspiration to improve the balance of power-- the balance of nuclear weapons following the deployment of Jupiter missile bases in Turkey and Italy.

We had many differences with the Soviet Union at the time of the Missile Crisis. And one of them was the secrecy surrounding the placement of nuclear missiles in our territory. While the Soviet leadership insisted on a secret and covert deployment of the missile, Cuba argued from the outset the principle of the right of the Cuban people to defend themselves against U.S. aggression, and expressed the need to work out a mutual military accord, and to announce it publicly at the right moment.

But despite repeated warnings from Cuba, the Soviet leadership insisted the operation should not be announced until it was an accomplished fact which the U.S. would then have to accept. And due to the political mishandlings of the secret operation of the Soviet leaders, the deployment of the missiles became the pretext used by the U.S. to justify the naval blockade of the island that marked the outbreak of the crisis on October 22, 1962.

The Cuban leadership learned from Radio Moscow broadcast about the Khrushchev agreement with Kennedy on October 28, ordering the removal of the missiles from our country. The news of this agreement produced great indignation in the Cuban leadership who felt that Cuba had become a bargaining chip between the two superpowers. This decision was taken without informing or consulting the Cuban leadership and without Cuba's participation in the negotiations.

The withdrawal of the missiles was agreed upon without getting from the United States a firm commitment or satisfactory guarantee that it would not attack Cuba.

For Cuba, the danger did not end with the so-called Kennedy-Khrushchev agreements. Not only did the U.S. armed forces maintain its naval blockade of Cuba for a few more weeks and continue low-altitude reconnaissance flights over the island, but the October Crisis led to the November Crisis over the presence of IL-28 planes in Cuba.

Furthermore, Operation Mongoose, the covert action operation, was dismantled. In early '63, the U.S. continued to contemplate proposals for different actions against Cuba as well as a wide range of economic and covert programs including assassination plots.

For the Cuban government, an acceptable resolution of the October Crisis for Cuba was not reached. The promise of the U.S. Government not to invade Cuba, limited to giving its word and never formalized into an official agreement, constituted no guarantee whatsoever for Cuba.

For Cubans, the crisis was a lesson that confirmed our belief that the way to defend our country was with our own forces without depending on support from abroad that might be subject to

different factors of international politics. We believed sincerely that, if the United States has not invaded Cuba after the Missile Crisis, it has not been out of respect for the 1962 agreement, but because of the high political and military costs that such an action would present.

The events of 1962 left behind feelings of disillusionment and bitterness in Cuba with regard to the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union accepted all demands of the United States in order to solve that conflict, but without obtaining a firm commitment of non-aggression towards Cuba, and in complete disregard of the interests and opinion of the Cuban leadership, leaving the Cuban government completely out of the negotiation process.

From these experiences, the Cubans drew heartfelt lessons regarding the Soviet leadership's ability in solving international conflicts.

As for the confrontation between the United States and Cuba, the resolution of the Missile Crisis or the October crisis, as we call it, did not go to the root of the problem. Even though a war was avoided and the danger of direct military aggression against Cuba was pushed back, the roots of the problem were left intact with ever-present potential for aggression and violence.

A significant opportunity, in our opinion, was lost to resolve the conflict between our two countries definitely. And for Cuba, after 43 years, we can still say that the Cold War is not over.

Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

JAMES BLIGHT: Thank you, Josefina. She's just done in ten minutes what it took my colleague, Phil Brenner, and I 400 pages to do. It was a very concise and lucid presentation of the Cuban position.

I'd like now to call on one of the great political writers that the country has ever known, Ted Sorensen. Three of my students attended the recent Havana Conference and had never met Ted before or been in his presence. And each of them individually came up to me since we've been back, and said, "My goodness, he speaks just like he writes-- in complete paragraphs." [laughter] Ted Sorensen.

TED SORENSEN: Thank you, Jim. Sitting here listening to Sergei Khrushchev telling us about his father's peaceful and benign intentions, I could not help but think of a press conference exchange some months after the Cuban Missile Crisis. A JFK press conference exchange which, I think, illustrates the question before us today.

Some of you will recall this. Nothing was so secret about it. There had been a fishing boat in the Caribbean, two U.S.-based fishermen in the boat found themselves being buzzed by a Soviet Mig. The days were still tense after the crisis, as Josefina has indicated. There was somewhat of a mini-crisis in November over the IL-28s following the huge crisis in October over the nuclear missiles.

Obviously, nobody knew whether Cuban or Russian pilots were flying the plane. But it was an international incident and it came up at President Kennedy's press conference. And he was asked the question by a reporter when he was trying to minimize it, because he was trying, of course, to get relations as back to normal as possible.

"Mr. President, do you think those fishermen were the target of that Pig?" I don't remember the exact wording of the question or the answer. But the President replied something like, "I don't know. But if I'd been in that boat, I would've thought so." [laughter]

On October 16, the President and his advisors felt like they were in such a boat. And Chairman Khrushchev was discovered to have suddenly, surreptitiously, secretly, under cover of deception, moved into Cuba, 90 miles from our shore, Soviet nuclear missiles of the medium and

intermediate range class which were perfectly capable of reaching any major city in the United States and most of the western hemisphere. And wiping out the populations of those cities.

The fact that it was done secretly, swiftly, and under cover of deception, direct deception by Chairman Khrushchev, himself and his foreign minister on a visit to President Kennedy during that very week made it look all the more like an offensive move, a threat. And one that the United States had to take seriously and had to respond to if it was to not only protect its own citizens, but show its allies in the world that it was willing to stand up to Soviet nuclear threats.

Because if we would not do so when they were 90 miles off our shores, they could hardly depend upon us to do so if the threat were to Berlin or to some other locale in western Europe, a far distance from our shores.

And so President Kennedy felt that we had to respond. And he called together those whose judgment he wanted to advise him on that response. And on October 20, 1962, exactly 40 years ago this afternoon, we called him back from the political speaking tour he was on, on that day being in Chicago. And told him that a consensus had developed in the ExCom as it was called as to which course of action we thought he should direct the United States Government to take.

And he came back and we met that afternoon. And he chose, after we had reviewed all the possible options, a review I hope and pray the U.S. Government is going through again this week, all the possible military options-- not merely the easy ones like dropping bombs. All the possible diplomatic options, all the possible means of getting rid of the weapons of mass destruction that might be hurled upon us.

Somehow, we didn't think that removing the Chairman of the Soviet Central Committee regime change would accomplish much by way of safeguarding our interests. But the President then spoke to the nation on the Monday evening that followed, two days later, including a special address-- you weren't old enough to hear it, Josefinia -- to the Cuban people, making clear that Cuba was not our enemy, that the Cuban people were certainly not our enemies, and that this was a contest in the Cold War between two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union.

And I must say, with great respect, Josefinia, that Cuba was not the highest priority in United States foreign policy in those days. There were those on the ExCom who said to President Kennedy, "The Soviets are giving you a wonderful excuse to go in there militarily and take Cuba away from Castro." But President Kennedy had no interest in a regime change in Cuba either.

The threat was not Castro or Cuba. The threat was the Soviet Union and its weapons of mass destruction poised to strike the United States.

And so, as Sergei said, he did keep the channels of communication open between the White House and the Kremlin. He was not worried that some of the hard-liners to which Caroline referred would attack him as being some kind of a wimp, not after the record he had carved for himself in the Navy in World War II.

But he knew that communications were essential. And negotiations if possible were the only way to obtain the removal of those missiles without a large loss of life on the part of Americans, Russians, or Cubans.

The transcript of our deliberations has been published in the form of a marvelous book a few years ago called *The White House Tapes*, which includes transcripts of the Cuban Missile Crisis deliberations.

They show that it was the leadership of John F. Kennedy-- cool, calm, persistent, objective leadership that steered us through those 13 days, insisting that we find a solution that would not lead to nuclear war, insisting that we not drive Chairman Khrushchev into a corner where his only

choices were humiliation or escalation. Because he clearly would be required to choose escalation under those circumstances.

But the conference last week in Havana brought to my mind and Arthur's and Bob McNamara's-- all of us who participated-- as never before, how close the world 40 years ago came to stumbling into a nuclear exchange that would have escalated very quickly on both sides to a nuclear Holocaust that would have left both countries in ruins, and soon most of the world as well.

The Soviets thought they could sneak missiles into Cuba without the United States finding them, or reacting to them. They were wrong. The United States thought the Soviet Union would never place nuclear weapons outside of its own borders because it never had before. We were wrong.

The Joint Chiefs recommended that President Kennedy invade Cuba, following an air strike against the missile sites and all other relatively potential hostile sites in Cuba. Because they were certain that no nuclear warheads were in Cuba at the time. They were wrong.

Had President Kennedy followed the Joint Chiefs' recommendation and launched those air strikes against the missile sites followed by an invasion, we now know-- but we did not know at that time-- the Chiefs did not know at that time that Soviet commanders in Cuba were armed with tactical nuclear weapons. A more than ample supply of such weapons. And had the authority to use them in the event of any American attack.

And clearly, had they used nuclear weapons against an American force, we would have responded with nuclear weapons and the world would be fast heading for disaster.

We thought that the so-called quarantine, in effect, a blockade against-- not against food for the Cuban people, not against oil and petroleum for the Cuban people-- but a blockade only against more Soviet military offensive weapons, parts, and supplies for the missiles.

We were convinced that that quarantine, as we called it, was the most peaceful, the least belligerent option of those available to us. And had no chance of exploding into war. We were wrong.

It turned out, as we discovered and discussed in Cuba last week, that the Soviet submarines accompanying the supply ships as they approached the quarantine barrier were equipped with nuclear-tipped torpedoes. It is now known that the commander of each submarine had the authority to fire such torpedoes in times of extreme urgency. It is also known that the captain of one of those ships, when discovered by a destroyer in the quarantine barrier that was dropping depth charges on the submarine, felt that the time had come to fire the nuclear torpedoes.

Fortunately, clearance from Moscow was required. Two other signatures besides the captain's were required on the order, we were told. One other signature was obtained. The third one felt that everybody would be better off waiting for a direct word from Moscow. There we were in the blockade, the peaceful alternative. And it was that one unknown Soviet submariner that probably saved the world from being blown to smithereens.

We like to congratulate ourselves, especially here at the Kennedy Library, on superb crisis management. Next time, let's do a little better job of crisis avoidance.

[APPLAUSE]

JAMES BLIGHT: Thank you, Ted. As we were coming back last week from the remains of a Soviet missile site in Pinar del Rio in western Cuba, our colleague, who is a chief organizer of that conference from the National Security Archive, leaped to his feet, having forgotten one of the essential things he was supposed to do. And said, "Today is the 85th birthday of Arthur Schlesinger, Jr."

And we all tried to stand up. There were a few minor injuries because the bus was going rather fast. Happy birthday, Arthur. [APPLAUSE] The microphone is yours.

ARTHUR SCHLESINGER, JR.: Well, as Ted suggested, the Cuban Missile Crisis was the most dangerous in the Cold War. It can be argued further that it was the most dangerous moment in human history. Because never before had two contending powers possessed between them the technical capacity to blow up the world. This was an unprecedented moment in the history of humankind, and we're lucky to have survived it.

Much of the analysis of the Missile Crisis goes back to the Bay of Pigs. The Bay of Pigs was not an adventure that Kennedy would have initiated. He inherited it from the previous administration. He began to try to minimize the size of the covert action. But Allen Dulles, who was the Chairman, who was the Director of the CIA, kept mentioning what he called the "disposal problem".

The disposal problem was what to do with the 1200 Cuban exiles who had been trained for almost a year in Guatemala. They would disperse, Mr. Dulles said, around Latin America. They would say that the Eisenhower administration was prepared to go forward and to take Castro out and the new Kennedy administration was showing the like fetter. This would, Mr. Dulles said, have great impact in Latin America in strengthening the appeal of Fidel Castro.

He also might have added, though he did not, that it would have considerable impact inside the United States where Barry Goldwater, for example, was working on a book to come out later that year called *Why Not Victory?*

And Kennedy was, in a sense, trapped. If he cancelled-- a former naval lieutenant vetoed-- an expedition ordained, organized, and blessed by the commander of the greatest amphibious landing in history, June 6, 1944, he would have been subject to severe criticism.

He had no choice. He was, as I say, he was trapped. The expedition which he decided would not have American arms support. He told this to the architects of the expedition. The expedition was, as some historian described it, the perfect failure. It necessarily left the impression on the minds of both Havana and Moscow that the United States would, in time, invade Cuba itself.

Though President Kennedy had no idea of invading Cuba by military force, I do now see how one can easily understand why the Castro government and the Khrushchev government felt otherwise.

Kennedy's main objective, main policy toward Latin America was the Alliance for Progress. The Alliance for Progress was a multilateral effort to raise living standards and strengthen democratic institutions throughout South America, throughout Latin America.

A great showcase for the Alliance for Progress was Venezuela which had, at that time, a progressive democratic government under Romulo Betancourt. Fidel Castro was involved in supporting and arming guerrillas seeking to overthrow the Betancourt regime in Venezuela. That was one reason why the Kennedy administration regarded the Castro regime in Cuba as an impediment to the peace.

Another reason was that the possibility that Cuba might become a Soviet military base in the midst of the center of American zone of and this, too, should be considered in the background of Operation Mongoose. Operation Mongoose was essentially a sabotage operation. It was a foolish and futile operation. It did not do much more than pinprick the Castro regime. But this strengthened the Soviet view and the Cuban view that we were bound on invasion.

Fortunately, the Bay of Pigs, which took place in the first few weeks of the Kennedy Administration, was an important, significant, effective, and expensive education for President Kennedy. Because the CIA had organized the plan and the Joint Chiefs of Staff had endorsed it,

he had no trouble thereafter in rejecting the council, and overruling the recommendations of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, or the CIA.

I remember going into his office one day in the spring of 1961, and he said, "If it weren't for the Bay of Pigs, we might be deeply involved militarily in Laos," he said, showing me some telegrams from the general Lemnitzer, the Chairman of the Joint Chief, urging military intervention in Laos.

As I say, he had been in the war himself. He was not buffaloed by the Joint Chiefs. And that was why he had not hesitated about rejecting their recommendations during the Missile Crisis.

I think, you look back at the Missile Crisis, I do not think that there was ever a moment when the United States or the Soviet Union would have initiated war. But the great concern of Kennedy and the great concern probably of Khrushchev, too, was the issue of command and control. That somewhere down the line, someone might act on his own. The *Dr. Strangelove* situation where the mad general launched a nuclear weapon directed toward Moscow.

And the feeling, the fear, that is why in the film *13 Days*, you see the argument between Secretary McNamara taking the Kennedy position and the admiral Anderson, the naval member of the Joint Chiefs saying to him, "The U.S. Navy has run blockades for 200 years. We don't need a civilian intervention."

The issue of command and control was so desperately important. And Kennedy understood this, and took every precaution to make sure that nothing would go wrong down the line.

We learned last week at the conference more vividly than ever before the extent of the Cuban resentment of the Soviet Union. Castro did not want the missiles, as Josefina has reminded us. He wanted Soviet protection. He would have liked to have joined the Warsaw Pact, or have Soviet troops stationed in the island.

By the way, we learned that there were 42,000 Soviet troops in the island. The CIA at the time estimated 10,000 Soviet troops. Khrushchev, in his memo, says about this, Castro's resistance to nuclear missiles, "We argued and argued, and I finally persuaded Fidel Castro that he had moral duty to accept these weapons because it would strengthen the socialist bloc."

Fidel Castro then argued for making this a public transaction, doing it in the open. That would have made it very difficult for the United States to respond, because there was nothing illegal about the Soviet deployment of nuclear missiles in Cuba. But Khrushchev's insistence on secrecy and deceit gave, in a certain sense, a moral advantage to the United States. And Castro was perfectly right on that.

Then when Castro, having made this great sacrifice for the benefit of the solidarity of the socialist bloc, when he turned on the radio toward the end of October and discovered, and heard for the first time that Khrushchev had decided to withdraw the Soviet missiles, the solidarity of the socialist bloc did not extend to the consultation or even the notification of Cuba that this was going to happen.

And Castro was furious about this. And I got the impression at the recent Havana meeting that Castro was far madder at Khrushchev than he was at Kennedy. It was this disillusionment of Castro which led to Kennedy's effort to explore the possibility or normalization of relations in the autumn of 1963.

Castro communicated his rage, his disillusionment, his disenchantment with the Soviet Union to Sekou Ture, the Dictator of Guinea. And Sekou Ture communicated some of this to the American Ambassador to Guinea, Bill Attwood.

Bill Attwood had been the former editor of *Look* magazine. He had been associated with Adlai Stevenson in the pre-convention. And Kennedy commissioned him as Ambassador to Guinea. Bill

Attwood got polio, a mild attack of polio, and returned to the United States. And while recuperating, was assigned to work with Adlai Stevenson at the United Nations.

Attwood, having learned that Castro was fed up, or seemed to be fed up with the Soviet Union, conceived the idea of a normalization of relations, at least an exploration thereof. He got the support of Averell Harriman, of Robert Kennedy, of McGeorge Bundy for this project, and JFK heartily endorsed it.

Bill Attwood and Lechuga, the Cuban Ambassador to the U.N., worked out the modalities of it. Ambassador Lechuga has written a book about this effort, which seems to be unknown. And Bill Attwood was supposed to go to Cuba in December, 1963. But the project was aborted after November 22. And came to naught.

But there was a lot of talk about the Kennedy obsession with Cuba. If they had ever wanted to invade Cuba, the most reasonable pretext for it was presented by the Cuban acceptance of nuclear missiles. And yet, it was Robert Kennedy who led the fight against the invasion. And JFK who decided, I think was always determined on the peaceful removal of the missiles, decided against it. Some obsession.

I tell you, the Kennedys, in the summer and the autumn of 1963, were all behind the exploration of the normalization of relations. Looking back, it was a very scary time. It's even scarier now that we know the full possibilities of horror and holocaust. We were very lucky to have leaders in the United States and the Soviet Union of wisdom and restraint-- belated restraint in the Soviet days, perhaps. But Kennedy and Khrushchev deserve the gratitude of humanity.

[APPLAUSE]

JAMES BLIGHT: Thank you, Arthur. We are now ready to take some questions. We have about ten minutes. If you'd like to ask a question of our distinguished panel, I ask you to step up to the microphone in the center aisle. Please, if you don't mind, state your name, and it's always interesting to know where you're from. And if it's directed toward a specific panelist, please let us know.

Also, please try to be as brief and succinct as possible so that those behind you could also ask a question. Yes?

HERB GAINES: My name is Herb Gaines. I'm from Cape Cod. And this is an equal opportunity question for the entire panel. Do you think, in view of the 40 years that's passed since the crisis, that it's time for the embargo to be lifted, and normal relations established with Cuba?

If yes, why? And it's an equal opportunity question. If no, why not?

ARTHUR SCHLESINGER: I wholly agree with the implication of the question. The embargo should have been removed with the end of the Cold War, if not before. The end of the Cold War meant that Castro was no longer a possibility for the Soviet military base, and he'd long since ceased his support of guerrilla operations of armed conflict in Latin America.

The best way to deal with the Castro revolution would be to drown it in a flood of American tourists, American investors. [laughter]

[APPLAUSE]

SERGEI KHRUSHCHEV: I don't fully agree with that. I think that all the embargo and blockading with any country only increases tension. And if you're lifting embargo, it will help this country to the transformation to a better life, and to the democracy, and will help people. If you impose an embargo, you're just punishing the ordinary people, not the leaders of the countries.

JAMES BLIGHT: Would either Ted or Josefina like to weigh in on this?

TED SORENSEN: Well, I'll speak first because that way Josefina can rebut me, which she will want to do. [laughter] I agree with Arthur that it's a long time overdue that the embargo should have been dropped. American merchants and farmers are having a natural market of theirs taken over by Canadians and French and Germans and Swiss and Mexicans, and everyone else. And America is the loser from the embargo.

Second, I think that Fidel, having been nice enough to invite Arthur and me and others down there last week, I am concerned that dropping the embargo may upset him because he uses the embargo to blame the failure of the Cuban economy.

Third, it takes two to tango. I don't know whether the Cuban government is interested in negotiating a range of issues between the United States and Cuba. And there are other issues. The embargo is one of them, and I think that we ought to be able to negotiate away. But I would hope that the Cubans would be able to enter into the negotiations on other issues, including democratization, including the release of political prisoners.

JOSEFINA VIDAL: With all due respect, I have to disagree with the idea that the embargo is convenient for us. We are ready to have this embargo lifted. This is one of the reasons why we have a staff in Washington, working very hard for many years now in order to educate American people to understand that we want the lifting of the embargo.

We want Americans to travel to Cuba. We want trade with the United States. Now there is an opening. At least we are able now to buy food in the United States, which is the first step in many years. And we are waiting for the embargo to be lifted. We don't want to live under embargo. That enough-- 43 years, that's too much.

[APPLAUSE]

JAMES BLIGHT: Yes, next question please?

JAMES WILLIAMSON: My name is James Williamson. I live in Cambridge. At the panel at the Kennedy School of Government Friday in which Mr. Sorensen participated, there were some interesting remarks made regarding whether President Kennedy had authorized attempts to assassinate Fidel Castro.

My question is, first of all, is there any doubt as to whether President Kennedy unfortunately may have, in fact, authorized attempts to assassinate President Castro?

Secondly, if as was stated by some of the speakers today, there was no interest in overthrowing the government of Cuba, then why was there-- apparently why were there attempts authorized to assassinate the President of Cuba?

TED SORENSEN: If that question is aimed at me, let me say I don't have any doubt in my mind. I testified before the Church Committee that President Kennedy would never have authorized attempts to assassinate President Castro. That was not the way President Kennedy thought or acted.

Assassination efforts by the CIA began, not only with respect to Cuba, but with respect to Congo and other countries, under the previous administration. It may well be that those efforts continued during the Kennedy administration. It is even possible that Robert Kennedy, who headed a special committee, was aware of some of those efforts. But I do not believe that President Kennedy would have ever endorsed them.

ARTHUR SCHLESINGER: I would underline what Ted has said. The Eisenhower administration hired "The Mob" to-- they established Sam Giancana and John Rosselli in a Miami hotel in August of 1960, months before Kennedy became President. I do not believe that Eisenhower or Kennedy knew about or authorized these assassination projects.

I believe that the CIA, operating under the possible deniability creed, kept the word from the President. Dick Helms testified before the Church Committee that they had not informed John McCone, who Kennedy brought in to clean up the CIA after Dulles resigned. They had not told John McCone about the assassination efforts, the assassination operations.

And if they had told Kennedy, they would have had to say, "Well, you can't mention it to John McCone," who he had just brought in to, as I say, to clean up the CIA. And that's an improbable bureaucratic situation. So I fully agree with Ted.

JAMES WILLIAMSON: Is it possibly that sadly, if what the speakers have just said is true, then unauthorized attempts carried on by the CIA after President Kennedy was sworn in as President may have been a factor in the assassination of President Kennedy?

Do any of the panelists believe as, for example, Gaeton Fonzi, who is perhaps one of the most--

JAMES BLIGHT: Excuse me, but that's your second question.

JAMES WILLIAMSON: Well, it was actually part of the first question.

JAMES BLIGHT: I'd like you to take that up afterward. I'm sorry. I'd like to take one more question. And who's your panelist?

MIGUEL DE LA PENA: My name is Miguel De La Pena. And I live in Lunenburg, Massachusetts. I look at the panel, and there seems to be unanimity against the embargo. So I'm assuming that the gentleman advised Kennedy to give Cuba to the Soviet Union at the time in order to avoid the crisis. I tried to listen carefully, but I didn't hear much about it.

The question is really, what would you advise if you had to advise President Bush to give to Iraq now to avoid conflict?

JAMES BLIGHT: As we catch our breath-- [laughter] Would anyone like to begin the conversation? [laughter]

ARTHUR SCHLESINGER: I would like to advise President George W. Bush-- It's too late.

MIGUEL DE LA PENA: They haven't invaded yet, so it's not too late.

ARTHUR SCHLESINGER: But I believe that the whole shift in American foreign policies from containment and deterrence on the one hand to preventive war on the other is a most dangerous and ominous shift.

There were people who were in favor of preventive war during the Cold War. Fortunately, none of them ever came into power in any democratic state. They were regarded as a bunch of loonies. Well, the loonies have now taken over our policy. [APPLAUSE]

I regard the advocacy of preventive war-- some of you may remember a film, Steven Spielberg's most recent movie called *Minority Report*, not a very good movie [laughter]. But the basis of *Minority Report* was a group of people known as precogs, who were so psychically equipped to foretell crimes that have not yet been committed in time to avert those crimes. Well, I think that Donald Rumsfeld and Vice President Cheney are a couple of Precogs. [laughter]

I tell you history is filled with surprises, and continues to outwit our certitudes and to arrest war-- life and death-- particularly in this dangerous world, on your capacity to foretell the future is a very risky enterprise. Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

SERGEI KHRUSHCHEV: I don't think that I'm the right person to advise President Bush, the American President. [laughter] So I would not advise, but I would say, would President Bush be in the White House in 1962, we would have no chance to discuss the Cuban Missile Crisis in 2002. [APPLAUSE]

TED SORENSEN: I say what I learned about presidential decision-making I learned at the feet of a pretty good teacher, John F. Kennedy. And I learned from him not to make a decision of life or death, war or peace, without having all the information, and having the opportunity to review all the options. As I said in the previous remarks, the military options, the diplomatic options, all of the options.

Strangely enough, not having been consulted by President Bush, I don't have all the information, I haven't had any opportunity to see all the options. But I certainly hope he has, because there are much better options, I am certain, than a preemptive strike against a madman who possesses weapons of mass destruction that, if we strike him, he may well choose to strike back against Israel, against us, against American interests, allies, friends, who knows?

And there are other ways to get rid of those weapons of mass destruction than a preemptive strike, I'm convinced. [APPLAUSE]

JAMES BLIGHT: I note a hand up over here in the front row. I call on Ken Galbraith.

KENNETH GALBRAITH: I'm Kenneth Galbraith. I would like to-- first of all, to say that while I was with the administration at that time, I was not involved. I had been given charge of war in Asia between the Chinese and the Indians over a territory that nobody knew previously had existed.

It was the kind of military operation-- the only kind of military operation in which I could rejoice. Nobody got hurt. The further observation I have to make was after that fuss in India and China was over, as it suddenly was over, and not through any intervention of us, I was back in Washington.

I went to the theatre that night with JFK. And he was assailed by autograph hunters. So he moved behind the screen. And I now exempt anybody here from the role of an advisor. For the compelling comment that he made to me that night was, "Ken, you have no idea how much bad advice I had." [laughter]

The advice that we've had here tonight from the people who have assembled for this discussion is very much as I would wish it. And I end these remarks with my wish in which I trust everybody in this room shares, that we could have the four men and the distinguished woman that have been here tonight take charge of our policy in relation to Iraq.

[APPLAUSE]

JAMES BLIGHT: Thank you, Ken Galbraith. I don't know what Josefina may be thinking about becoming a member of the National Security Council. [laughter]

Before we close, I'd like to thank collectively-- I'd like all of us to thank collectively our four panelists, our four distinguished and diverse panelists.

[APPLAUSE]

As moderator, I think I owe you one last remark. I would direct this to the young people. And by "young", I mean anybody younger than I am. [laughter]

On the evening of October 26, 1962, a young 22-year-old man from Minnesota was holed up in a basement apartment in Greenwich Village owned by the folksinger, Dave Van Ronk. He was known as Bob Zimmerman, but by that time had preferred the name Bob Dylan. And that night

Bob Dylan wrote a song called "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall". A hard rain of missiles, a hard rain of atmospheric fallout.

And he wrote that song, so he told a biographer later on, so that each line could serve as the last line in case there was no time to write any more lines.

For you out there who don't recall this, I'd suggest that you think about this event at least every October. That it become a kind of "Virtual Hiroshima" for your generation. When you go to Hiroshima, you come away and you say, "Never again." We don't have a physical presence to go to here, but I'd urge you to keep that flame alive long after all of us up here have gone.

Thank you very much.

[APPLAUSE]