

CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

James Blight, Philip Brenner, Julia Sweig, Svetlana Savranskaya, Graham Allison as moderator

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JOHN SHATTUCK: Good afternoon. It's a beautiful afternoon, and we all have a spectacular view. As a special incentive for having us all be inside on this lovely day, we've opened up the-- you can see what we rarely do— the screen. And only our speakers, unfortunately, will not be able to see it. But afterwards, we'll give them a special treat.

I'm John Shattuck, the Chief Executive Officer of the John F. Kennedy Library Foundation. And on behalf of myself and Deborah Leff, the Director of the Kennedy Library, I want to especially welcome you here today to this wonderful second in our series of discussions of an event that took place 40 years ago, but is very much alive today in many, many dimensions as you will hear.

I want to thank the sponsors of these forums, Boston Capital and the Lowell Institute, and our media partners who will help project far beyond the walls of this forum on the radio and in the Internet, the *Boston Globe*, WBUR and Boston.com.

I also want to commend the former historian of the Kennedy Library, Sheldon Stern, who many of you have probably seen, who is in the audience today and has a piece on this Cuban Missile Crisis in today's *Boston Globe*.

This afternoon, we will look at something that took place 40 years ago and something that historians have all agreed were 13 of the most perilous days in world history. The Cuban Missile Crisis was in many ways the event more than any other that shaped the course of the Kennedy presidency and the way it would be remembered for generations to come. It was also the event above all that defined the nature of the Cold War and demonstrated how to survive it.

And it was one of the events in a stream of events that took place over those thousand days in the Kennedy administration that perhaps best defined the character and the qualities of leadership of President Kennedy.

The background of the Missile Crisis is very simple, and you will hear much more about this from our distinguished panel of historians.

Nikita Khrushchev expected the United States to invade Cuba and drive Fidel Castro from office before the end of 1962. Khrushchev thought he had a daring idea about how to deter the invasion while, at the same time, demonstrating to the world that the Soviets could compete with the United States in missile power. And so, he decided secretly to send offensive nuclear missiles to Cuba and then to call Kennedy's bluff when they were installed.

As we know, President Kennedy did not let that happen. But the means he used to achieve that end were extremely complex and subtle. And his leadership in that regard especially speaks across the decades as Americans today confront another crisis under a different President with the world again on the brink of war, apparently.

President Kennedy's approach to the Cuban Missile Crisis is important to understand today perhaps more than at any time in the 40 years since these events occurred. In his biography of JFK, Ted Sorensen wrote that, and I quote: "Above all, Kennedy believed in retaining a choice, not a choice between red or dead or Holocaust or humiliation, but a variety of military options in the event of aggression and an opportunity for time and maneuver in the instruments of diplomacy, and a balanced approach to every crisis which combined both defense and diplomacy"

To help us understand that essence of decision, we have an extraordinary panel of historians who will guide us through this most dangerous moment in world history.

Our moderator today in many ways owns the very title, essence of decision, because his seminal book by that name is still the best-selling account of the Crisis 31 years after it was first published. Professor Graham Allison directs Harvard's Center for Science and International Affairs. He served as the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs in the first Clinton administration and before that, as Dean of the Kennedy School at Harvard, where he was credited with building one of the country's best schools of government. Professor Allison is a long-time Russian expert and authority on nuclear policy and weapons of mass destruction. In recent years, he has been instrumental in assembling teams of scholars to analyze terrorism in its multiple dimensions.

Professor James Blight is a professor of international relations at Brown University and an expert of the Cuban Missile Crisis. He is the co-author of a new book with Robert McNamara who spoke here last week, *Wilson's Ghost: Reducing the Risk of Conflict, Killing, and Catastrophe in the 21st Century*, and of another new book with Philip Brenner which is on sale in our bookstore, and I will shamelessly publicize it to you, *Sad and Luminous Days: Cuba's Struggle with the Superpowers after the Missile Crisis*. Professor Blight has also published many other books on U.S.-Cuban relations, Vietnam, and other areas of international relations.

Svetlana Savranskaya is Director of Russia Programs at the National Security Archive in Washington, D.C. She has a distinguished academic background, having received her diploma with highest academic honors from Moscow State University in 1988 and the best dissertation in the year in international relations in 1998 from Emory University. She is a specialist on Russian Affairs. Two years ago, she was appointed adjunct professor in international relations at American University in Washington, D.C.

Julia Sweig is Senior Fellow and Deputy Director of the Latin American Program at the Council on Foreign Relations, where she also directs a roundtable series on U.S.-Cuba relations. And her book, *Inside the Cuban Revolution: Fidel Castro and the Urban Underground*, will be published next summer by Harvard University Press. It was published. It's out front. There's another book to shamelessly promote to you, and it will be on sale afterwards, and I'm sure Dr. Sweig, as Phil Brenner and Professor Blight, would be willing to sign her book as well. She is a professorial lecturer at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies.

And finally, Philip Brenner is a professor of international relations at American University specializing in U.S. foreign policy process with an emphasis on Congress and U.S. policy toward Latin America and, as you've heard, he is the co-author with James Blight of the new book that will be available after this for your purchase and his signature. He has published widely on U.S. policy toward Cuba and Central American and on the Cuban Missile Crisis, and is a member of the Advisory Board of the National Security Archive.

So please join me in welcoming this distinguished panel of historians to discuss and elucidate for us the Cuban Missile Crisis then and now.

[APPLAUSE]

GRAHAM ALLISON: I think we're going to start with five minutes from Phil and Jim, particularly focused on their book. Then I'm going to try to put that in a little bit larger perspective. We're going to have five minutes of our other two members of the panel. And then, after a little bit of conversation here, we'll go to questions from the audience.

PHILIP BRENNER: Thanks very much, Graham. Thanks to the Kennedy Library. Thank you all for coming out on such wonderful day. At the Library here, I particularly want to thank Kiki Helffenstein and Tom Putnam who've made coming here just a pleasure, and very easy. Two of the nicest people I've ever worked with.

John Shattuck may be too modest. Other people may not tell you this, but the whole process of getting information about the Missile Crisis very much owes a debt to him. He was very much involved in helping to create the National Security Archive, which has been very important in declassifying or getting declassified government documents. And John was the Chairman of the Board for a number of years. So it was really a pleasure to see him again here.

History, as he suggested, is very important to all of us. And we often use the cliché about understanding history so we won't make mistakes again. But it's interesting that also history can be either misused or, in this case, I want to help us see that history can be understood very differently from different perspectives.

We know from reading *Essence of Decision* how important the Munich analogy was to President Kennedy. The notion that if you give anything essential to a rapacious dictator, it won't satisfy their appetite. It will only make them more hungry, and they won't be appeased. It will only bring on more war. And that lesson hung over much of the decision-making in the Missile Crisis.

So listen to Fidel Castro talking on October 30. On October 28, as you know, the Missile Crisis, from our perspective, is over. The 13 days has ended. But in order to verify that the Soviets have taken missiles out of Cuba, we're demanding that we be allowed to inspect inside Cuba the missiles being removed. And we're also demanding they remove some other weaponry. Soviets are willing to oblige, but Cuba is not.

And so, the Secretary General -- the Acting Secretary General goes to Cuba to meet with Fidel Castro. And this is what Castro says to him. He said, "The road to the last world war was the road that included the toleration of German's annexation of Austria and its dissolution of Czechoslovakia. That's what led to the war. These dangers are a warning to us. We know the course that aggressors like to follow. In our case, we can foresee the course that the United States wants to follow."

Munich was important to Cuba. But they took exactly the opposite lesson. The United States was the aggressor from his perspective. He was not going to give in to this rapacious aggressor, because it was surely going to lead to war. A very interesting use of that. And in some sense, the whole point of our book, *Sad and Luminous Days*, is to try to get inside the head of the other side so that you can understand how they think so you don't make mistakes before it's too late. Because those kinds of mistakes, when you're dealing with nuclear weapons, can be devastating.

Let me give you just one small sense of this, how differently each of the three countries thought about the Missile Crisis. You know, in the United States, we call it the Cuban Missile Crisis. This was a crisis between the superpowers about the missiles in Cuba that occurred in Cuba. Cuban Missile Crisis. Thirteen days is the focus of this and because that's the period from which Kennedy learned about it to the time that Khrushchev agreed to withdraw the missiles.

The Soviets call the Missile Crisis the Caribbean Crisis. They focus on the fact that this was a superpower confrontation in the Caribbean. They wanted to de-emphasize Cuba. This was between the United States and the Soviets. Cuba wasn't really involved in this. And it was not about missiles, but it was about the Cold War. This is sort of like a teenager's acne. You never know where it's going to pop up. That pimple. This time it popped up in the Caribbean. Okay. But the Caribbean wasn't the place that caused it. It was the Cold War.

And from their perspective, what was most important probably was the U.S. military build-up in 1961 after Kennedy's elected -- elected on the notion that there is a missile gap. And then discovers that the missile gap is in the U.S., favoring continues to build up a kind of threat to the Soviet Union. The generals there fear that there's going to be a first strike by the United States. They're pressing Khrushchev. Part of the motive was to save Cuba, but part of the motive was to get medium-range missiles closer to the United States so that they could have a deterrent effect.

Cuba's perspective. Cuba calls this the October Crisis. They had had a lot of crises with the U.S. This one happened to occur in October. This was about the United States trying to overthrow Cuba. The Cuban Missile Crisis for them begins at the Bay of Pigs in April 1961. And it's a period when afterwards they experience a covert war that the United States is waging against them. They're sure there will be yet another invasion, this time with U.S. troops. And so their concern is about their devastation.

It's very interesting the notion of sad and luminous days that comes out of this. Just as Svetlana's going to help us understand something about the Soviet perspective, let me just give you a final glimpse into the Cuban perspective. We along with the Soviets thought this was great relief, a moment when the world came to the brink and we were saved. Only one U.S. soldier died and he was the pilot of the U2.

Who could imagine that this would be called *Sad and Luminous Days*? But that's how the Cubans think about it. Che Guevara, in a famous letter to Fidel Castro, talks about the sad and luminous days -- he called it the Caribbean Crisis, actually -- of the Caribbean Crisis. And how could anyone imagine that it would be sad not to blow up the world? What would be luminous about going to Armageddon?

From a Cuban perspective, what was luminous was that they were arm in arm. They were ready to do battle with the United States. They were ready to defend themselves. Castro says to U Thant, "We won't be like Austria and Czechoslovakia. We will defend ourselves to the very last person."

So there was that kind of adrenaline rush of what was said. What was said was that they'd been betrayed by their friend, their ally, the people they trusted, the Soviet Union. They were prepared to put themselves on the front line for the cause of international socialism. The Soviets weren't. The Soviets were willing to sell them out. To take not only the missiles out, but every last piece of weaponry they were going to use to defend themselves from U.S. attack. And this sad and luminous sensibility remains today. From the Cuban perspective, the crisis actually never ended. War was avoided, but the crisis continues. I'll let Jim pick up with that.

JAMES BLIGHT: I was told once by one of my professors to watch out for professors standing in back of podiums, because they will speak for at least 50 minutes. And possibly for an hour-and-a-half because that's how long their classes are. So I'm velcroed to this chair.

Before I say something about the Missile Crisis, I want to say something about this fellow over here to my left who's now my mentor with regard to the Missile Crisis. I spent close to ten years at the Kennedy School when Graham was Dean. But he's everybody's.

In the 1960s, this guy got the Kennedy administration together on many occasions when the memories were still fresh and was able to put that into one of the great scholarly works of the history of American foreign policy, *The Essence of Decision*, which is now out in a new edition. And I would say worth re-reading, except it's not re-reading. You'd have to read it as a new book, because so much has happened in the interim. I will also say that Graham and I had a lunch on the date I can't remember, somewhere in 1985 or '86. And my proposal was to study the Cuban Missile Crisis. And he said, "That's kind of a dumb idea. There's a guy here named Graham Allison who did this. And, well, I don't think there'll be anything new."

But who could tell in 1985 that by the late 1980s, this country called the Soviet Union under Mikhail Gorbachev would open up. And by January 1989, we were all together -- Phil, Graham, and I -- in Moscow, treated to the most amazing array of people from Andrei Gromyko and Anatoly Dobrynin to generals to other people who were telling us basically everything they remembered and knew about the crisis. So, thank you, Graham. And I'm glad that absolutely nobody has followed your advice, including yourself.

To get inside the view of the Cubans is not so easy. And one of the things that one has to do, I think, in regard to the Missile Crisis is kind of set aside most of what we -- if you're at least my age -- remember about the crisis or think we know about the crisis. That it was two superpowers banging heads. And either we won or they lost, or a more charitable and more accurate description from their point of view is that, instead of one side backing down, both sides backed off. But just barely in time. This has absolutely no relationship to the ways the Cubans see the crisis.

And what I would ask you to do as I give you essentially what is a composite of Fidel Castro's objections to the way the crisis was handled from the standpoint of the Soviet behavior. Just ask yourself, in anticipation of the question and answer period, whether this situation reminds you of anything going on in the world right now. Somebody might have weapons of mass destruction. Somebody who's not nearly as large as we are. And obviously there's some problem because they think differently than we do about these weapons and about a lot of other things.

Number one, Khrushchev refused to make a public announcement of the missile deployment. Kennedy's speech on October 22, 7:00 p.m., 1962 is about lying. It's about deceit. That is the principle message in that speech. People who lie and deceive about nuclear weapons cannot be trusted and this is a grave situation that has arisen. Because it's not only a secret deployment, it is a deceptive deployment. The Cubans recommended, right from the very beginning, that they do it publicly. I think that speech would have been a lot harder for Ted Sorensen to write if that deployment had happened publicly.

Second, the Soviets refused properly to camouflage the sites where the missiles were to be deployed. When the Cubans said, "How are you going to keep the Americans from finding out? Don't you know that Key West is 91 miles north of here?" They said, "We'll move them in where the palm trees are. The Cuban palm trees were only roughly half to two-thirds as tall as the missiles. [laughter] But it's this sort of cavalier treatment of all this stuff that bothered the Cubans.

The Soviets refused to publish what the Cubans regarded as a legal and binding treaty between the two countries that defined the terms of employment that would have justified it. We had missiles in Turkey. We had missiles in Italy. We had missiles in Great Britain. We had nuclear weapons in West Germany. What's wrong with this? Just go public and say that this is a fact, and that's the way it is. Validate this. Legitimate this. "No," the Soviets said, "We have to do this secretly."

Well, the Soviets refused on all occasions to challenge the United States at the blockade line which went up, the quarantine line which went up at 10:00 a.m. on the 24th, Wednesday, the 24th of October. The Cubans really and truly were hoping that those Soviet ships would try to crash through that line. Many of us are glad that they didn't.

I remember watching Walter Cronkite and a very young-looking Dan Rather, who was moving around little pieces of paper on a map with a semicircle roughly 500 miles North-Northeast of Cuba. And when those ships stopped, they seemed almost to be touching the U.S. ships, the pink pieces of paper representing it, that is. And many of us breathed deeply for the first time in quite a while.

Charles Collingwood, who was covering this for CBS, said shortly afterwards, "This was the time that I and all of us thought that World War III would begin." The Cubans were furious that the Soviets didn't try to crash through the line, because it indicated to them that the Soviets perhaps had already given up and were already going to cave in to the Americans.

The Soviets refused to consider in the resolution of the crisis any of Cuba's interests. Cuba wanted Guantanamo Bay back. Cuba wanted no more flights over their territory. Cuba wanted guarantees that the base CIA back to bases in Central America that were being used for attacks on Cuba by Cuban exiles would be ended. They wanted this, and they wanted more. And none of this figured in the resolution of the crisis.

Six, the Soviets refused to consult with or even properly to inform the Cubans of the Soviet decision to terminate the crisis and the deployment. Fidel Castro heard about it on the radio. He is reported to have -- depending on the orientation of who was reporting -- to have gone berserk, to have thrown things. But what it said to him was two things.

One is, "They're treating us like children. You get this constantly in Cuba in regard to the Soviet what they call 'the Soviet imperialists'. They treated us like children."

And secondly, because our interests were never involved in this, what is going to happen is that the Soviets will withdraw all those missiles which the Americans say are offensive, namely everything, including the Soviet troops in Cuba. And Khrushchev won't make it a condition that the Americans stand down their forces -- their nuclear forces and their conventional forces.

So the minute these weapons are gone, the Americans will invade. They'll occupy the country. They'll destroy the Cuban Revolution. And they'll put in a puppet regime that's probably locked up in a hotel room somewhere in Miami right now. Because that's exactly the situation during the Bay of Pigs invasion: there were some people locked up in hotel rooms in Miami who were not transported to Cuba.

Finally, seven, the Soviets refused to leave all but a faint residue of a tripwire to deter a U.S. invasion. There were 43,000 Soviet fighting men on that island by late October 1962. Three, four, five times what the CIA was recommending. And the only troops that were left, once the deployment was undone, was a couple of thousand Soviet soldiers that actually wound up in a rather humiliating fashion, calling themselves "a training brigade," not much of a tripwire at all.

So from the Cuban point of view, they found out a lot about the Soviet Union. And what this book contains, *Sad and Luminous Days*, chapter 2 is a speech by Fidel Castro in January 1968 to the Central Committee that was kept secret until now. It's never been published even in Cuba until now. And it is the most scathing attack on the Soviet Union I have ever read. And if any of this had gotten out, the Soviets would undoubtedly have broken relations with Cuba, cut off their oil in 1968, and essentially strangled Cuba. But Fidel wanted these people to know that, even though we need them, you must never ever trust them.

GRAHAM ALLISON: Thank you, gentleman. I think that, from both Jim's and Phil's initial comments, one sees how the wonderful complexity of the Missile Crisis continues to fascinate historians and analysts as we try to understand both what happened in that specific instance and also as we think about what the lessons may be.

So let me step back with these few comments to put just a little bit larger perspective and then we'll have two more comments. And then I'm going to put a question to the panel about similarities and difference between what we see in the Missile Crisis and Iraq.

John has already rightly said that the events of October 1962, whose 40th anniversary we're just now on the edge of. Next week will be the 40th anniversary of these famous 13 days with the most dangerous moments in recorded history.

President Kennedy said at the time, and afterwards reflecting on the crisis, that he thought the odds of war were somewhere between 1-3 and even in this confrontation. That was dismissed by some people immediately afterwards as an exaggeration.

And I think, thanks to the work that Jim did, he did not take my advice and pursued, as we did, these postmortems, and kept digging the documents out, and it became more evident that there were so many possibilities in the confrontation that even were not known to President Kennedy at the time. For example, the extent of the deployment of tactical nuclear weapons in Cuba by the Soviets. Tactical nuclear weapons that would have almost certainly been used against American troops who would have been invading in the aftermath of an air strike, which was a very, very

likely outcome in the events that actually occurred. So I would say, myself, that President Kennedy's estimate is a quite sensible, a quite justifiable estimate.

Had such an event in the worst of wars, within a day, 100 million could have died. Mostly not Americans. But 5-10 million Americans could have been among them. Mostly Soviets and Europeans. But this could have been the worst event in recorded history.

And as a consequence, this crisis, I think, has continued to have a hold on the imagination of commentators, and historians, and analysts, and even policy-makers. Any of you that have been reading the newspapers lately will notice that the Bush administration talks almost every week, indeed sometimes almost every day, about the Missile Crisis.

And Assistant for National Security Affairs, Dr. Rice, has said that the President, President Bush seems to keep going back to the Missile Crisis to try to locate himself, or to have some point of reference for what he sees as going on in the current Iraqi situation.

But because the crisis has so many dimensions, and has so many layers, once seen in the historical efforts to better understand it, a number of almost successive waves in which, in the first instance, books that came out immediately afterwards by the insiders which were discussed here last week including books by Ted Sorensen and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., named this "Kennedy's finest hour". And that has stuck. There followed after that a number of scholarly works trying to analyze the crisis, of which my book, *Essence of Decision*, was one of the earlier versions.

The next wave of risk activity, Jim Blight and his colleague, Bruce Allyn, instigated as we had postmortems in which participants from the U.S. and the Soviet Union, and then ultimately participants from the U.S. and Cuba, plus documents, cross-examined each other about what people were saying and thinking in order to dig up layers and layers of additional ...(inaudible). The standard histories of the Cold War in which the Missile Crisis is characterized as the defining event of the cold, the defining crisis of the Cold War.

And, finally, there's the latest efforts which is represented by the book that Phil and Jim are just now publishing, which is to see that there were a lot of other parties who were interested, with interests at stake, but whose part of the story hasn't been told. So this is, I think, kind of coming round in a circle here as we try to bring in yet another set of interests. In the documentation, I want to call out just for special note, one very interesting fact for people who are interested in trying to learn more about this.

In the development of the documentation, there emerged a book called *The Kennedy Tapes*, which were the secret tapes that Kennedy made of the deliberations during the Missile Crisis, which have now been transcribed in a book by my colleague at Harvard, Ernest May and Philip Zelikow called *The Kennedy Tapes*. So you can actually go sit in a National Security Council meeting. Here at the library, you can actually listen to the tapes. But since they're a bit scratchy and people are talking at the same time, it's helps to have the transcript, the *Reader's Guide*.

And here to talk to you about making decisions that they think could lead to a nuclear war. So this is actually a wonderful microcosm for both trying to understand a very dangerous moment of history, but also to ask what the lessons of these events are, or events and issues like the confrontation over Iraq.

So the members of the panel will be forewarned about the first question. Let me turn now, I think, to Svetlana.

SVETLANA SAVRANSKAYA: I'll try to be brief. And I will try to make just several points about the Soviet view of the crisis, and I hope I will be able to come to those points later in the discussion.

The first important point that I'd like to raise is what were the causes of the crisis. And several speakers before me touched upon this issue, and said that there are three very different perspectives. So for the Soviet Union, of course, the cause -- the source of the crisis was not the fact that missiles were in Cuba.

The Soviet Union, by deploying missiles in Cuba, thought it was performing quite a legal act of assistance to Cuba, which was threatened by the United States. And for the Soviet Union and for Cuba, of course, the seriousness of that threat was shown in the Bay of Pigs invasion. So the cause was the U.S. threat to Cuba.

Of course, another cause was the strategic imbalance which was felt very acutely by Khrushchev and, of course, his desire to adjust the military balance. Both sides, the United States and the Soviet Union were forced through the intelligence data to realize that there was a military build-up going on in the summer of 1962 around Cuba.

The Soviet intelligence was aware of U.S. contingency plans, or training exercises which were perceived as training or preparation for an immediate invasion of Cuba. That's how it looked from the Soviet side.

Therefore, the act of putting the missiles in Cuba was seen as an act of legitimate assistance to an ally. Of course, projecting the influence in Latin America is nice, too. So this is the first point I wanted to make. Review of the causes is very different.

The immediate crisis for the United States starts on October 14, when the missiles are discovered. But the Soviet Union -- the Soviet Union asked the question, "Why Kennedy reacted in the way he reacted? Why missiles in Cuba were unacceptable? Why missiles in Turkey, then, were acceptable to the Soviet Union?"

Because for the Soviet Union, the missiles in Cuba were the direct equivalent to the U.S. missiles in Turkey and Italy. The Soviet Union sort of felt surrounded by U.S. bases at the time. My second point, how dangerous was the crisis? I think we will return to this question again and again and again. And more and more documents are being declassified and coming out now. The public has access to these in the Soviet Union, in Cuba. And based on the reading of the newer declassified documents, I can say that it was even more dangerous than we thought. Even more dangerous than we thought a couple of years ago.

What about the tactical nuclear weapons in Cuba? The United States, at the time, did not realize that the Soviet Union actually deployed nuclear-capable bombers, cruise missiles, and short-range launchers that could carry nuclear warheads and nuclear warheads in Cuba.

The standard procedure was that the commanders on the island could use both the strategic and the tactical nuclear weapons, only with authorization from the Soviet Premier. However, it was not exactly like that on the ground. We know that the Defense Ministry in the Soviet Union prepared draft orders to the Commander of the Soviet forces in Cuba, pre-delegating authority to use tactical nuclear weapons in two cases: U.S. air strikes or U.S. invasion landing on Cuba. The order was never signed by Khrushchev himself or by Defense Minister Myunorvsky (?). But ...(inaudible) was informed of that order, was ...(inaudible) so what? He did not get the final authorization.

But we also know that the U2 spy plane was shot down over Cuba without any authorization from Moscow. And Moscow was quite unhappy with that fact, but could do nothing about it. So based on the reading of the new documents and on my interviews with Russian military officials -- and I underline here, *military* officials, who were in Cuba at that time -- I would say that the probability of use of tactical nuclear weapons in case of either U.S. air strikes or land invasion of Cuba was very, very high.

And the third point that I want to raise is what is there to learn? What's interesting is what remained. Returning to Jim's point that there's nothing we can learn about the Cuban missile crisis.

JAMES BLIGHT: No, no, that was Graham's point. [Laughter.]

SVETLANA SAVRANSKAYA: Oh, sorry, that's right. Graham Allison's point, that there's nothing to learn about it. Well, I think there is a whole new chapter opening right now. First of all, it's the Cuban perspective. But secondly, because I am speaking from this perspective, it's the November crisis. We think, Cuban missile crisis, what is that? We know that in October there were 13 days. Right. Well, there was a second crisis that happened in November. What we did not know up until very recently is that the Soviet Union intended to leave other, other than strategic nuclear weapons, and other weapons, and the mentors of 43,000 people in Cuba.

We know that even in early November, the expectation was in Cuba and the decision was in Moscow, that Cubans were being trained to use the Soviet technology, and that the technology will be transferred, the weapons will be transferred to the Cubans. And then over the course of November, in negotiations with the Cubans and with the United States, the Soviet Union realized that it had a real crisis on its hands. And the crisis was not in the relations between the United States and the Soviet Union; it was in the relations between the Soviet Union and its own ally, Cuba. And apparently Khrushchev realized that it was easier for him to negotiate with the Americans and control the situation in the relations with the Americans than it was with the Cubans.

And the final decision was made to withdraw the L-28 bombers, nuclear capable bombers, the short range, dual-use launchers, and the cruise missiles that could carry nuclear weapons. So this, I think, is the next chapter in our study of the Cuban missile crisis and also the chapter that raises the question: what about those small allies, small countries? Do they matter? And how can they affect what's going to happen in the world overall? And I hope we can talk about it a little.

GRAHAM ALLISON: Good question. Thank you.

JULIA SWEIG: I think I was asked to participate in this panel because I've spent a great deal of time in Cuba, and my book is based on documents from Fidel Castro's Presidential Archive. And it's a book that deals with the period of time in the 1950s when Castro and others in Cuba were fighting to overthrow Batista. And it's given me a very strong sense of several elements of who Cubans were that the Soviets were dealing with in the 1960s that I'll try to share with you and try to make some of this dynamic of the missile crisis current in today's relationship that the United States has with Cuba.

And I would tell you that one of the most important things that I learned about Fidel Castro and about the core people around him that took power in 1959 was of their absolute allergy to alliances with groups or individuals on whom they depended excessively for money or weapons when they were fighting the dictator. And among those that the Castro movement, the 25th of July movement, was deeply allergic was, in fact, the Communist Party of Cuba, the Popular Socialist Party.

And it was really only out of a necessity that after 1959 the local Communists came to play the kind of role that they did domestically in helping to run the economy and to serve as a liaison with the Soviets in the 1960s. But fundamentally, Castro and his core group of people that made the Revolution distrusted the Cuban Communists and saw them as highly unreliable allies. So that is a bit of background to what follows.

The speech that is published in this book, Fidel Castro makes a number of references to concessions and he talks about the imperialist attitude vis-à-vis concessions. And he's absolutely struck by the notion that there is an expectation that Cubans would make concessions in order to get the world out of this impending war, and humiliated -- deeply humiliated -- that the Soviets

have negotiated a settlement with the United States on the missiles that prevents Cuba from negotiating a couple of key matters directly and bilaterally with the United States: specifically, the return of the Guantanamo naval base to Cuban possession.

He believed that the Soviets themselves had made a number of concessions themselves without getting anything back from the Americans until he later found out about the missiles in Turkey and Italy, and comes away incredibly dumbfounded that there's an expectation that by the great powers that Cuba will sit back and take all of this. And of course his obsession with not making concessions without getting something back, his obsession with reciprocity, is deeply intertwined -- it's not only about how to conduct itself in international relations, but also very much about domestic politics and about his job as the new leader of the country to maintain a coherent and legitimate base on ...(inaudible). And I'll just read to you a couple of sentences to give you a sense of who Fidel Castro was at this time.

And he's talking about the over flights and how the Cubans could not permit Americans to fly overhead during the crisis.

"No revolutionary, no soldier, no one can get used to such infamy, such passivity. In that case it's better to throw down your weapons and quit being a revolutionary soldier, abandon everything. I don't think that any nation with an iota of dignity would be willing to accept such humiliation, and we were face-to-face with the terrible reality of their total obliviousness to these truths and circumstances."

Now the "their" to whom he's referring at the time is the Soviets. But of course now, especially since 1989 -- if I can just skip ahead -- it's the obliviousness of the Americans that Fidel Castro must contend with habitually in trying to map out a relationship; I wouldn't say a better relationship. It's just not always clear that that's always been a priority for Cuba. But clearly, it was politically demoralizing at home to tolerate the over flights.

And if we think to 1996 when there was the shoot-down, when the Cuban government shot down two civilians who were making over flights into Cuban territory, it was hard for many of us to believe that the Cuban government would risk throwing away what seemed to be a rapprochement coming from the Clinton administration for the sake of maintaining domestic political, revolutionary fervor and avoiding that humiliation. But indeed, I think, the missile crisis does give us a sense of the crucial point about not being seen as making a concession -- which doesn't mean that today and in the last ten years the Cubans don't make concession -- but rhetoric and how things are framed are extraordinarily important in the bilateral relationship.

And as you know, today we can't understand why the Cubans won't make a concession and have an election, or allow human rights inspectors, or allow inspections of their bio-weapons facilities, or amend their constitution, or etc. etc.-- all the sorts of demands that the United States continues to make. And it's interesting, because when those demands are made as demands that incite capitulation by the Cuban government, the wall goes up. But if you think of what's happened, though, since the collapse of the Soviet block and the ending of the Soviet aid to Cuba, in fact, there has been what could be construed to be a long string of concessions from the Cuban government, though we're not allowed to connect the dots because that would be humiliating.

But think of it: the withdrawal from Latin America, from Africa; the beginning of economic reforms on the island. It is a very different Cuba today than it was in 1989, and one that I think what we'll see is a continued obliviousness in Washington. And I guess I would throw out a question here, which is: with all of this documentation that we now have about the missile crisis with the focus in Washington on the lessons of the missile crisis, would those thinking about the missile crisis think about the perspective of the smaller country -- which is similar to yours? And I think the answer is no. My question is why.

And the final thing is Phil and all of you, if you could answer fundamentally, why is it that you think that the Cubans accepted the missiles, given their allergy toward a close alliance with the Soviets? And did they think they could really maneuver under those circumstances?

GRAHAM ALLISON: Good, good. Well, I think this is a great set of opening comments. We're going off in several different directions. But let's take just either Phil or Jim, quickly, in answer to this question.

PHILLIP BRENNER: Quick answer to why did the Cubans accept it. They were actually very concerned about this. They were fearful that in Latin America they would be seen as pawns of the Soviet Union -- this would undermine their standing in the non-aligned movement. But whether we want to give credence to what Castro says about this, he said the danger, first, was so great coming from the United States, but also they had been asking from the Soviets to join the Warsaw Pact. And this, in effect, made them a de facto member of the Warsaw Pact.

It showed that Cuba was willing to put its own self on the line, making themselves the frontier, a strategic threat to the United States, so that they would be a first target of the United States. It showed their willingness to do battle for the socialist cause. And, therefore, they hoped the Soviet Union would come to their aid.

JAMES BLIGHT: Take us back to the lessons, for a second, which we've already begun. I mentioned, as John Shattuck did in his introduction, that if you listen to the debate that's now emerging about Iraq, as Dr. Rice has said, President Bush, when he's speaking of an example, speaks often of the missile crisis. And let me just offer a couple of quotes from the administration for perspectives on lessons.

Condie says, thinking about the events of 1962, quote, "They settled on a strategy that actually was pre-emptive, but didn't use military force to do it, and thereby preserved the possibility for the Soviets to back down." Colin Powell says, quote, "President Kennedy did not negotiate out of the Cuban missile crisis, didn't negotiate the missiles out, because he and Khrushchev got along well. Khrushchev didn't have the cards, and President Kennedy had the power, and he made it clear that he was not going to tolerate this." Close quotes.

And finally, Donald Rumsfeld, at the Pentagon, quote:

Now what would you call the Cuban missile crisis action by President Kennedy? In my view, establishing what he called a quarantine what the world thought of as a blockade, and preventing the Soviet Union from placing additional nuclear missiles in Cuba, that was certainly self-defense. It was certainly anticipatory self-defense. It was certainly preventive, and we were very, very close to a crisis of historic proportions. And I think it's not unfair or inaccurate to say that he took a pre-emptive action.

Close quotes.

So let me turn to the panel and say, in terms of similarities and differences between the missile crisis and Iraq, whatever you think are the one or two most important similarities or differences -- and we'll go down the row. Phil?

PHILIP BRENNER: Well, Jim and I have talked about this and it's very frightening to us the way in which the missile crisis has been misused and misunderstood. Precisely the wrong lessons have been articulated and very much based on misinformation that's being conveyed about what the missile crisis is. So let me highlight one or two points.

First, we are dealing with a country that, if it's true, has weapons of mass destruction. If it doesn't, then we are really being quite misled. The talk in Washington is that we can manage this; we can get every last SCUD that they have. It's so reminiscent of what we hear in the tapes, the sense of

being able to control every last thing in Cuba, which we now know they had no idea what the full - scale operation was. The simple number of 43,000 Soviet troops versus -- they believed there were 10,000 Soviet troops on the island; they thought there were 100,000-armed Cubans, and in reality there were 270,000 armed Cubans. And they weren't sure. In fact, they were pretty sure the warheads hadn't gotten to the island. We know there were more than 100 on the island.

And so just those simple things were out of their control. But here are the three things that we've come to realize that are most important, that are really misleading people. First, this sense that Kennedy was inflexible, that Kennedy had a plan and went forward with it, without any sense that there were other options. Well, it's clear now, as both John Shattuck and Graham Allison have pointed out, that flexibility was very important. And in fact, quarantine is very different than a pre-emptive attack. What Kennedy tried to do was find ways to be flexible, even to the point of giving up the missiles in Turkey so that we wouldn't go to war.

The second point is that he understood it was very important not to box your opponent into a corner; to give your opponent some way of getting out, short of blowing itself up or blowing us up. And that understanding of giving your opponent some way out was extraordinarily important, that this administration doesn't seem to follow.

The third is it's very important to talk and continue to have conversations throughout a crisis. In the November crisis with the Soviets, Kennedy was quite respectful of being able to deal with the other superpower. The problem is he didn't bring that to Cuba. There was a sense that Cuba didn't matter, that it was a lesser power. And it's that attitude that's conveyed today about Iraq. When we deal with Iraq, we try to deal with the other powers -- Russia, China: if we can get them on our side we can just go in. We don't deal with the lesser power that is also our adversary -- in this case Iraq or in that case Cuba. And after the missile crisis there were severe dangers as a result of our not talking to Cuba.

GRAHAM ALLISON: Jim, do you want to follow up on that point?

JAMES BLIGHT: I just want to ... I'll say something about the way the history's being used here by people in the administration. And what I'm going to say is my own view, and none of the distinguished people with me here should be held to it. But what we're hearing is rubbish. This is not ...

GRAHAM ALLISON: I'll subscribe to that. [Laughter.]

JAMES BLIGHT: The view that the missile crisis is an example of pre-emptive action that is somehow analogous to pre-emptive military attack is not only rubbish, it's perverse. But it's exactly the option that President Kennedy worked very hard and ultimately successfully to avoid. The transcript of the three meetings on October 27, 1962, show a President almost uniquely trying to bring his people along toward some kind of negotiated settlement. He was able to do that.

Secondly, just before the very first retrospective that we ever had -- Graham and I were there -- Dean Rusk, who had in January of 1987 had a cardiac event and couldn't attend, wrote a letter to me which Mac Bundy read into the transcript, which said that in the event of those discussions that Kennedy was breaking down or the Russians somehow stonewalled and Khrushchev didn't remove the missiles, that Rusk should call Andrew Cordiay at Columbia University, who formerly worked for the United Nations, and he should call U Thant, the United Nations Secretary-General the acting Secretary-General. And he should say to him that he should call a press conference -- U Thant should call a press conference -- and suggest an open public trade of NATO missiles in Turkey for Soviet missiles in Cuba, and that were he to suggest this, the Kennedy administration would look favorably on this, so long as it was clear that this idea did not come from where it really came from, which was John F. Kennedy himself. That is more or less what happened, except that the trade of the missiles was kept secret. And those missiles, by the middle of the spring of 1963, were destroyed.

Now, this is a negotiated settlement. You give something and you get something. This is not a pre-emptive attack. And as Graham said, and as all of us, I think, believe up here, if a pre-emptive strike had occurred, followed by a land and sea invasion, it would have resulted in the total demolition of the Republic of Cuba, of millions of dead Americans in the southeastern part of the United States, and if escalation continued, probably the end of civilization as we know it. That's where you would have gotten in 1962 with a pre-emptive attack.

JULIA SWEIG: I'm going to draw the parallels or lack thereof. I'm passing.

SVETLANA SAVRANSKAYA: I'd like to add something which does not directly relate to the question. First of all, Jim just made a wonderful comment. If we ever think about any pre-emptive action in the Cuban missile crisis, then ask this question of yourself. If there was a pre-emptive strike on Cuba, where we would all be now? And it's a terrifying question.

And the second interesting point here, I think that Russia today is not the Soviet Union of 1962. Khrushchev deployed the missiles in Cuba, and then from the pressure from the United States, although in a negotiated way, he brought these missiles and all other troops back home. And he told his politburo comrades and the public that, "We actually scored a victory. What we got is Kennedy's pledge not to invade Cuba. Therefore, our mission is justified. We did the right thing. We put the missiles there, we removed them, but we achieved our goal to protect Cuba." And the public was happy with it.

Well, right now Russia is a democratic state. Well, maybe it's not a mature democracy, but there are differences of opinion. And if Putin is seen to retreat under the U.S. pressure and sell out Russian -- maybe not the most beloved -- but sell the ally who owes Russia a lot of money, Iraq, an ally where Russia has some real interest, not just ideological interest, Putin's political future might not be as bright as Khrushchev's was. Although we know that part of the reason why Khrushchev was removed was his failure to deal with the United States in a more successful way during the missile crisis.

So if we use the analogy of the Cuban missile crisis, yes, there are definite parallels. Maybe it is easier for Putin now to negotiate with the United States and get some mutual benefits and kind of leave Iraq aside. But it would not be accepted in Russia in the same way as it was accepted after Khrushchev brought the missiles back.

GRAHAM ALLISON: Let me offer a comment on that question, and then I'm going to go to the audience for questions that you might have, where you want to pursue any of these points. I'd say three points of similarity and difference, because I mainly agree with what's been said.

First, similarities between Iraq today and 1962: an eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation with war in the offing. In '62 about 100 times more dangerous, but nonetheless, eyeball-to-eyeball, and war in the offing.

Secondly -- and it goes to this new book that Jim and Phil have done -- many small state bystanders whose interests may be trampled, but who have little say in the matter. That was true for Cuba in 1962 and it's true for most of the regional states today, whether the Egyptians, as Mr. Mubarek has been complaining recently, or the Saudis, or the Turks, not to speak of the Iraqis.

Thirdly -- and this goes to Jim's point because I think you can do this layer by layer -- there's a strong similarity between the Bush administration's announced policy on Iraq and the beginning of the Cuban missile crisis, where one sees an initial attraction to a military first strike in order to eliminate the problem. And as Bobbie Kennedy says on the tapes to President Kennedy at one stage, "Well, I guess if we had decided in the first 48 hours, we would have gone with the air strike."

But now a very striking difference: in the missile crisis, one sees a President who doesn't take his first answer as his best answer, who keeps pushing people about the uncomfortable questions

and forcing his best advisers and even himself to reconsider his views and ask how might he be wrong and how might things go wrong, and why does this view differ from that view? So he thinks he can destroy all the missiles in a first strike, but as he keeps picking at it he hears from his best advisers that they're not sure they can get all of them. And then he hears other information that makes him uncomfortable.

So the course of exploring the uncomfortable avenues or the unsettled, unanswered questions, or the uncertainties, leads him then to a different course of action: to the blockade, called a quarantine initially, and then in the second week to what is ultimately a threat to use an attack, which is communicated clearly, but a carrot in terms of the withdrawal of U.S. equivalent missiles in Turkey as part of a negotiated settlement, as has been said.

Now, about Iraq the story is not over yet. And if at the end of this process, I would say, if President Bush were to take a page out of President Kennedy's book, one could imagine now some flexibility. And why doesn't Mr. Hussein go live in some other country? Well, he could be exiled to Egypt like Idi Amin evidently lived happily in Egypt, even though he's also guilty of many horrible things in the past, just as one for example. But there are probably three or four other examples if President Kennedy were working the problem.

So if you look at the lesson President Kennedy took away from the crisis, which is here in the Library and in his famous American University speech, it was in such confrontations, never leave your adversary with only two choices: humiliating defeat, on the one hand, or catastrophic war on the other. And I think that's a pretty good lesson for this one, too.

Well, let's go now to the audience. There's a microphone there and please introduce yourself and put your question. Disagreements are invited, please.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: My name is Jason Barlett, and I'm a graduate student at Providence College. I would like the panel to comment briefly, if they would, on the role of Robert Kennedy, with particular attention to back channel negotiation in dissolving this crisis, and the Russian reaction to his message.

JAMES BLIGHT: I'll give a quick answer to that and see if we agree or disagree. Bobby Kennedy's role throughout the crisis was crucial. In fact, if we go back, just if I can take one step back on the question of the air strike, a preventive air strike, a first strike to eliminate the problem, Bobby Kennedy was very attracted to that option to begin with. And as he began to think of it, he also says, "Now, I know how Tojo felt when he was planning the attack on Pearl Harbor." And the more he thought about that, the less attractive that seemed as an option. So this is an interesting story of him and his brother.

Also, the device that they developed, this Executive Committee of the National Security Council, President Kennedy was absent from a lot of the meetings and Bobby Kennedy therefore was kind of his rep at the meetings, because they found that people would talk a little more freely when the President wasn't there. So that was an interesting element.

Finally, at the end game, as you referred to, Bobby Kennedy went to see Dobrynin, who was the Soviet Ambassador in Washington and communicated the terms of, in effect, the secret proposition -- which remained a secret for 25 years after the missile crisis until it was finally confirmed by six of the participants who were part of the internal deal. He said to Dobrynin:

Tell Khrushchev the following. First, the missiles are going to leave Cuba for sure, and if necessary, they'll be destroyed by an attack. And we need to hear from you within 24 hours whether you're going to act, because early next week we're going to act. But secondly, if the missiles are withdrawn from Cuba within six months, our U.S. equivalent missiles in Turkey will be gone.

That secret, in private, but that's a fact. So Kennedy told us -- Robert Kennedy to Dobrynin. Dobrynin sent a telegram to Khrushchev, and the rest of it is part of the story of how the game was resolved. It's especially an interesting fact because while there were about 16 or 17 people sitting around the table of the Ex Comm, there were only seven who knew what had been decided privately. And that's an uncomfortable fact, but in the circumstances, after the fact, it looks pretty good to me.

GRAHAM ALLISON: Great summary.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: My name is Rosemarie Vigueros. I'm a professor of Latin American history at the University of Rhode Island. And what strikes me about what's going on now, the difference between Kennedy and his advisers and Bush and his advisers, is that Bush has a reputation of not second-guessing himself. And not only second-guessing; I almost get the sense he doesn't think about things more than twice. And that in terms of the way that they deal with their advisers, it seems like Bush has this kind of management style that, you know, the executive makes a decision, everybody goes with it, but he's not the expert in these matters.

And so he's listening to advice from Condoleezza Rice, who was a Soviet scholar, if I remember correctly, and didn't have much experience in terms of government, to Karl Rove and to others who are his political advisers, and to Rumsfeld and Cheney. Well, you can think of them however you like; I don't think much of them.

But the point that I'm making is that with Kennedy you had the sense of that he was thinking about things, that he was working it out, that he was listening, that he was waiting. And what you have with Bush is that he's going around, like putting pressure on the French to go with him and putting pressure on the English to get them to agree with us, and that actually staying our hand isn't a real possibility. And it seems to me that this is one of the major problems of what's happening now with this incident. So could you comment, please?

GRAHAM ALLISON: Let me make one disagreement, so we won't be such an agreeable panel. I think that if you look at President Kennedy and his administration during the missile crisis, when they wanted to get a vote from the OAS for a resolution that made a naval blockade a quarantine, they got the votes every way they could get them. That is, it was not only sweet reason. They were perfectly happy to twist arms or even to pay some modest price in terms of negotiation.

When they were trying to get the Security Council to line up with them, they sent people to talk to Charles de Gaulle. And when the envoy arrived, de Gaulle said "Have you come to consult me or advise me?" And the envoy said, "To advise you." And he said, "Thank you very much for the candor." So it was not a ... So the administration was quite, I think, tough about trying to line up allies for its position and point of view. So that's just a small point of difference in terms of the characterization. I won't go further. Jim?

JAMES BLIGHT: Yeah. Graham pointed out that President Kennedy, during the 13 days of tension, during what we consider to be the missile crisis, evolved. As Graham said, he didn't think the first solution necessarily was the best solution, and he worked -- everybody worked hard to preserve as much as time as possible to talk this over and to explore the options. And I think everybody that I ever interviewed from that group said that they were very grateful that the Bay of Pigs invasion occurred before and not after the missile crisis. Let's not forget the humiliation to which this president was submitted by April 20, 1961.

Were it not for one of the most amazing press conferences ever held or televised, where Kennedy took sole responsibility for this unbelievable fiasco where the greatest superpower in the history of the world had been slapped around by these bearded revolutionaries who had barely been in power two or three years, I mean the whole thing was just absolutely absurd. It would have been hilarious if it weren't so tragic -- in terms of not only who died on the beaches and that sort of thing, but in terms of the reputation of this particular president. Now the outcome of that,

as I have understood it, was that John F. Kennedy became incredibly skeptical of the advice given to him by experts, particularly intelligence experts and military experts.

I think he's still the only president in history who did anything remotely like firing the top two executives from the CIA. Allen Dulles and Dick Bissell were gone when this was over, and Allen Dulles was the only head the CIA had ever had, and he was out as was Bissell who was the mastermind of the operation. Now that is a very important disanalogy, as we say in academia, to the present situation. President Kennedy knew one hell of a lot about foreign affairs before he became President. It was his favorite subject. It was where he considered his expertise to be, and it probably had something to do with why Dean Rusk, rather than a more hands-on person, was chosen as Secretary of State. He wanted to do it himself.

But he really screwed up royally in ways that the current President never has. He's a governor; he didn't do foreign policy until quite recently. And one wonders whether this will be, in effect, something like his Bay of Pigs, rather than, as his advisers keep telling us, his Cuban missile crisis.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I'm John Sullivan; I'm a history teacher. One of the things, though, I think that needs to be brought out is that in the late summer of 1962 and into the early fall, Senator Keating in New York had made constant charges against the Kennedy administration. He had suggested there was a build-up in Cuba. He felt the administration wasn't doing anything about it. And I think we need to remember that this was a very political crisis as well as a great coup for the Kennedy administration. That came later. I think President Kennedy was very much afraid of the political consequences of what might happen if something wasn't done. And I want to make just one other quick thing, and I'll sit down.

I think one of the things that Kennedy would never have done is use a phrase -- which is a terrible phrase -- called "regime change," which is another way of saying overthrow of a government. And that is something, it seems to me, that's fundamentally against what the United States has stood for since its beginning. And why this hasn't been probed more, I can't understand it, because that kind of euphemism is, to me, unacceptable. And yet the vast majority of Americans tend to accept it, or believe that they should accept it. I don't think a government of ours should be doing this kind of thing. That's what Bobby Kennedy saw, I think, and which you just talked about. A country as large as the United States, with its reputation, could never do that kind of thing to Cuba.

GRAHAM ALLISON: I think we have two questions here, and they're both very good ones. Do you want to do the second one?

JULIA SWEIG: I want to respond to the gentleman, yes. And I want to talk about the domestic politics today of this issue, and raise a question, which is: there's a real tension in this administration over Iraq, clearly, and in general, between the traditional internationalist wing of the Republican party and a neo-conservative wing of the Republican party that very much does see Iraq today as Munich, and regards this as elemental to go and seize it as Germany and as Japan, and that we should dedicate 25 years to reconstructing Iraq once the regime change is effected.

I think I wonder whether at the end of the day -- you know, I'm not sure if it's what you read, Graham, or another comment I read that Ms. Rice made, where she compared the blockade in Cuba to an act of war, and as Kennedy administration's definition of preemption. Does Karl Rove perhaps understand that the Republican party can go very far toward placating the neo-conservative components who are arguing for force and forcefulness in Iraq by a rhetorical and a military and an international community build-up, stopping short of actual deployment; that the domestic politics can be covered with what we're seeing today, but that there is a line over which, because of Colin Powell and the others that have chimed in on this debate, they in fact will not follow?

PHILIP BRENNER: May I make one comment on the earlier 1962 event? Because again, this helps us to remember. This was a president in his second year in office, just coming up to the mid-term elections. So just like in the same month ... Now, President Kennedy did not choose to have a crisis in October. This was not an October surprise. Or if it was, he was surprised, or the administration was surprised. The Republicans had made Cuba the principal issue in the mid-term election. And it wasn't just Keating who was, as you said rightly, making the decisions. But also just in the general campaign, because of what Jim mentioned, the terrible failure in the Bay of Pigs just a year before. And here was this problem right on our door.

So President Kennedy felt politically quite sensitive about this, and this may actually have affected Khrushchev's calculations about whether he would be likely to enter into a confrontation. He may have been actually -- this might have been timed in such a way -- and certainly, he wasn't unaware of that element. In this instance, unless some new piece of evidence comes forward, the event is forced by the U.S. hand, not by some action that Saddam has taken.

JAMES BLIGHT: You know, one way to think about this is not only November elections, but to see that Congressional pressure, linked with the misinformation Kennedy had got ... actually he boxed himself in ways that President Bush seems to calculate to box himself in. What happened was that because of Keating and Kapart's statements, which it seems they got from dissidents in the CIA -- There was a debate during the summer as to whether or not missiles were being put in Cuba. There were reports from Cuban exiles, "We see these huge things going down the road. They're moving houses to move these things." I mean, and so that was one piece of information.

Except that the CIA had been getting that kind of information since 1960: Cuban exiles were coming in with that kind of information. So they tended to discount these reports. And on top of that, the analysis was the Soviets had never put missiles like this outside. So the summary judgment was they are not putting missiles in. The dissidents felt they were; seems to have leaked this information to Keating and Kapart, who then demanded that Kennedy do something about it.

So early in September, Kennedy says "There are no missiles in Cuba. And if we find there are, we'll take any and all means to get rid of them." Theodore Sorensen in 1989 said a very interesting thing. He said "Had Kennedy known that they were putting in 42 missiles, I think he might have said: 'And if they put in more than 50, we'll do anything to'"-- because he did not want this kind of confrontation. And so it was partly the pressure from the Congress that made him feel he had to do something. Doing nothing was no longer an option, because he had boxed himself in, and I think he learned a lesson in that: presidents shouldn't exclude their own options.

And it almost feels as if President Bush has boxed himself in, in a calculating way, so that he has to do something that he doesn't have to do. As Graham quite well said, this was precipitated by our own actions here, not by a discovery of missiles.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Hi. My name is Donna DuPlorio. I'm retired but I'm a computer specialist by trade. I lived through both crises in the Cuban crisis, and that's why I'm retired, I guess. [Laughter.] But one of you said earlier that the Cuban crisis was 100 times more dangerous than what's going on right now. I'm not sure I feel that way, and maybe you can talk a little bit about that.

GRAHAM ALLISON: I made the statement, so let me try to defend it, and then maybe somebody will disagree. But I was trying to think how to think of the comparison. Certainly now the danger of war is very great. The President has said that absent something that he doesn't think is very likely to happen, that he thinks it's highly probable that the U.S. will lead military air strikes and then a military invasion to Iraq to change that regime.

Now, if I play out that scenario and ask how does it unfold, I can imagine in the worst case -- maybe not the very worst case -- but I can imagine some hundreds of thousands of people dying. I can maybe even imagine a million people dying. But I can't imagine a hundred million people

dying. Whereas in the Cuban missile crisis, incredible as it seems, and especially as we get away from it, it just -- oh well, of course there could never have been a nuclear war.

But in the missile crisis, if as Jim said, the U.S. had had an air strike and then an invasion, and if the troops that were there -- the Soviet troops -- had used their tactical nuclear weapons against the American invading forces and even against American homeland, and if indeed, some of the missiles might have been fired against the U.S. homeland, and if then the U.S. had fired our missiles against Cuba and theirs against us, at the end of that story I can tell you how in 24 or 48 hours, maybe a hundred million people could have died. So it was just in terms of the potential casualties, not in terms of the probability of it getting to a war that I was thinking.

JAMES BLIGHT: Just a quick follow-up. On October 26 -- I guess we both remember it, then -- the U.S. went to Defense Condition II, Def Con II, the last step before actually initiating nuclear war. This involves keeping one-third of your B-52 bomber force in the air at all times so it doesn't get hit on the ground. It involves flying up to the -- and possibly over -- the border of the Soviet Union, beginning to target radar and this sort of thing. It involves the lids coming off the missile silos in North Dakota for the first and only time. It involves Strategic Air Command taking over part of Miami International Airport. It involves activating the nuclear weapons that were at Guantanamo. There were nuclear weapons on the island before the Soviets put them there, and they were ours. It involves taking the entire military establishment of the time -- and at the time there were many times the mega-tonnage of potential destructiveness as there are now -- and winding it up to the point where it is just on a hair trigger. And it's very difficult under those circumstances, I am told by people who study systems, to imagine a small event occurring once you push that button and go to nuclear war.

Just a final comment. Of course, that knowledge that was present on both sides has got to be one of the main reasons why basically nothing happened. Here we don't have that situation. I don't think we feel threatened here the way we did in 1962. I don't think people are buying Campbell's soup cans and putting them underground as they were in Detroit where I grew up during this period. And that may be one of the things that liberates an administration to go ahead with something rather than to look for every conceivable possible route short of that.

GRAHAM ALLISON: Svetlana, did you want to comment on that?

SVETLANA SAVRANSKAYA: I would just comment about the danger. I spoke with the Soviet KGB resident in Mexico, and he said that according to the information, based on the information that they were collecting, they were prepared to a large-scale evacuation of your citizens in southern states through Mexico. And one of the questions that they had to deal with is what do they do if it actually happens, in the event if things got out of control? And that was a serious expectation. They were cabling Moscow about that. So the level of danger, I think, or at least danger as it was perceived by the public, was much higher in the Cuban missile crisis.

GRAHAM ALLISON: I think that unfortunately we had told people that we had to stop by 5:30, so we'll be happy to take your questions after, if we can.

I think we've had a good panel. This is an issue that deserves much more consideration, but it seems to me that it's only fair to let President John F. Kennedy have the last word. So a quotation with him with reference to the missile crisis:

He says, quote:

The essence of ultimate decision remains impenetrable to the observer, often indeed to the decider himself. There will always be the dark and tangled stretches in the decision making process, mysterious even to those who may be most intimately involved.

So let's thank our panel very much for illuminating the mystery.

[Audience applause.]

JOHN SHATTUCK: I want to thank our panel personally and John F. Kennedy Library would like to thank them for this marvelous afternoon alternative to that beautiful sunlight out there. And I think the sunlight that has been cast on the Cuban missile crisis by these historians is wonderful and disturbing and chilling, which is, I know, why all of you have come out.

But let me personally thank Svetlana Savranskaya, Julia Sweig, our wonderful moderator, my friend Graham Allison, James Blight, and my old colleague, Phil Brenner. And let me also, in closing, direct your attention to the fliers that you have on the seats in front of you, because we have three more of these explorations of the Cuban missile crisis in various dimensions coming up. On Sunday, October 20th we will have Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. and Ted Sorensen will be back, along with Nikita Khrushchev's son, Sergei Khrushchev and a Cuban diplomat, Josefina Vidal, who will look at the brink from their personal perspectives.

And then we will turn on October 24th to the more contemporary issue which I thank this panel for exploring as extensively as they have: curbing Iraq's use of weapons of mass destruction, with the obvious question of how much of a parallel is there and what are the options and the decision points in that? And we will have a number of experts, including a former United Nations weapons inspector, Scott Ritter, and several others -- a former conservative member of Congress, Mickey Edwards, who has grave concerns about the nature of the Congressional debate, which he thinks has been far too limited, and others.

And then finally on Monday, October 28th *The Cuban Missile Crisis and the Media*, which should be very interesting. Judy Woodruff will be here to chair that panel, and we will have a number of distinguished media experts who were active in the time reporting on the Cuban missile crisis: Sandy Vanocur, Robert Pierpont, network news Moscow Bureau Chief Marvin Kalb, and the former Chair of the Federal Communications Commission, Newton Minow. So please join us for all of these. But thank you again to this wonderful panel. Please join me in thanking them personally.

[Audience applause.]