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Flexible Reponse and A Crisis in the Caribbean: John F. Kennedy's Shift in American Cold War Policy and its Influence on the Cuban Missile Crisis

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FLEXIBLE RESPONSE AND A CRISIS IN THE CARIBBEAN: JOHN F. KENNEDY'S SHIFT IN AMERICAN COLD WAR POLICY AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

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FLEXIBLE RESPONSE AND A CRISIS IN THE CARIBBEAN: JOHN F. KENNEDY'S
SHIFT IN AMERICAN COLD WAR POLICY AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE CUBAN
MISSILE CRISIS

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my children John, Rosie and Clare.

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I wish to thank my wife Kate, for her tireless support and editorial assistance. I also wish to thank the teachers and professors throughout my life who have brought me to this point.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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The following examines the correlation between John F. Kennedy's shift in American Foreign Policy and Nikita Khrushchev's decision to deploy nuclear missiles to Cuba. It summarizes Dwight D. Eisenhower's "New Look" strategy and then analyzes Kennedy's "Flexible Response" in order to demonstrate the shift which occurred between the administrations. It then examines how this shift impacted Khrushchev's decision making, summarizing the series of events that led to the Soviet Premier's idea to place Soviet strategic weapons on Cuba in defense of Castro's Revolution. The study also includes a discussion of the historiography of the subject and an examination of Eisenhower and Kennedy's styles of leadership, focusing on how their different preferences shaped the policies their administration's pursued.

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Introduction

On a bright but cold January afternoon in 1961, on the steps of the United States Capitol, newly sworn in President John F. Kennedy proclaimed to the world a new era of American leadership. “Let the word go forth...that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans.”¹ While this declaration at the beginning of the new president’s speech is not often quoted, it communicates a daring attitude which defined his administration. Kennedy and his advisors believed that as the first leaders of the new generation, it was their upmost duty to generate new and innovative ideas to solve old problems. Bold and decisive movement was the pace of this new style of American leadership, and Kennedy took this idea so seriously that he was reluctant to be photographed playing golf to avoid being compared to his older and more leisurely predecessor.² Even to most contemporary Americans, Kennedy’s approach defined his leadership and decision making during the upcoming emergency over nuclear missiles in Cuba, the Cuban Missile Crisis.

The quarantine and superpower standoff around Cuba in the fall of 1962 has been hailed as a triumph of President John F. Kennedy’s steady composure and leadership, representing one of the tensest periods of the Cold War.³ Beginning with a secret U-2 flight which exposed the existence of the Soviet missile construction on October 14, 1962 and throughout the fifteen days which followed, the fate of the world hung in the balance as the leaders of the United States and Soviet Union debated their next moves.⁴ Mercifully, each side recognized the potentially disastrous consequences of their brinkmanship and came to a peaceful compromise. The roots of

¹ John F. Kennedy “Inaugural Address, January 20, 1961” *The American Presidency Project* (2011) <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=8032> (Accessed 30 August, 2015)

² John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 197.

³ “The Lessons of the Cuban Missile Crisis” *Time* 120:13(1982), 89.

⁴ John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, “The World on the Brink” John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, <http://microsites.jfklibrary.org/cmc/> (accessed August 14, 2015)

“The Lessons of the Cuban Missile Crisis” *Time* 120:13(1982), 92.

the Cuban Missile Crisis, however, run much deeper than just the month of October, 1962. The Crisis was the result of a clash of diplomatic and military policies employed by the United States and Soviet Union in a Cold War which had been ongoing for nearly fifteen years. During this period the United States utilized a series of strategies to contain the growth of Communist influence, with each presidential administration crafting their own unique form of “Containment Theory.”

The 1960 U.S. Presidential election was a significant event in this ongoing narrative, representing the fourth time since World War II that the American people had decided which leader would steer them through the modern nuclear world. At this point, both major U.S. political parties had tried to construct an effective response to the global Communist movement. However each passing year yielded new technological advances which signified new and frightening dangers to humanity. Kennedy’s commitment to forge a new path for the United States exemplified his desire to initiate a dramatic shift from the military, economic and political policies of President Eisenhower’s administration. In particular, Kennedy and his administration sought to expand the military power of the United States, both nuclear and conventional, in order to counter the seemingly rapid Communist expansion which he believed threatened the existence of an American way of life.⁵

This determination for, and commitment to change resonated with the U.S. voters of 1960, and continues to capture the hearts and minds of many modern Americans. In a 2011 Gallup poll asking who Americans believed was the greatest U.S. president, John F. Kennedy ranked fourth, ahead of presidents traditionally held in high esteem like George Washington and

⁵ John F. Kennedy: "Speech of Senator John F. Kennedy, American Legion Convention, Miami Beach, Florida", October 18, 1960.

Franklin D. Roosevelt.⁶ Only Ronald Reagan, Abraham Lincoln and Bill Clinton placed ahead of Kennedy in the eyes of everyday Americans. An argument could be made that Kennedy's legacy was secured by his tragic assassination on November 22nd, 1963, but his continued popularity reflects a strong and endearing image which Kennedy maintained throughout his nearly three years in office. This ambitious presence was established during his campaign and was embodied in his administration's fresh strategy for the containment of communism, which became known as Flexible Response.

The first studies and critiques of Kennedy and his Flexible Response strategy came from nearly two dozen memoirs and books by administration officials who served with the President, published after his death.⁷ Kennedy's presidential aide Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., military advisor Maxwell Taylor and brother, Robert Kennedy attested to the passionate leadership and poise which the President exuded throughout his presidency.⁸ These sources remained the only commentaries on the administration until the early 1970s, when reporters and historians began to take a more negative view of Kennedy's decisions and actions. Some, like journalist David Halberstam, publishing in 1972, limited their criticism to the president's policies and the War in Vietnam. Other authors, like Richard J. Walton, who also published in 1972, argued that Kennedy's entire foreign policy was dangerous and provocative.⁹ Unfortunately for this new revisionist viewpoint, most Kennedy-era source documents remained classified and locked away, forcing them to rely on speculation for most of their conclusions.¹⁰

⁶ Frank Newport, "Americans Say Reagan is the Greatest U.S. President" *Gallup* (February 18, 2011)

⁷ Anna Kasten Nelson, "President Kennedy's National Security Policy: A Reconsideration" *Reviews in American History* 19:1. (1991), 2.

⁸ Stephen G. Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World: John F. Kennedy Confronts Communist Revolution in Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 3.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁰ Anna Kasten Nelson, "President Kennedy's National Security Policy: A Reconsideration" *Reviews in American History* 19:1. (1991), 2.

As relations thawed between the superpowers during the late 1980's, these crucial records slowly made their way into the hands of the historical community. In addition to Kennedy's documents and correspondence, Soviet documents were also released, allowing analysts a first look into the secretive nation. As historians digested the new source material, the present viewpoint emerged which held both superpowers responsible for their part of the Cold War. This newer and more impartial narrative is best illustrated by the writings of historians John Lewis Gaddis, Thomas G. Patterson, Stephen Rabe and Frederick Nelson. While there is a wide array of conclusions regarding Kennedy's legacy in this post-revisionist history, in general his leadership is judged more harshly than it was by the original memoirists. For example, Gaddis concluded that while the administration had an almost manic obsession with progressive ideas and moving forward, the desire was tempered by an irrational fear of embarrassment and appearing to be weak.¹¹

Although Kennedy is popularly remembered as a president without professional fault, exercising a winning combination of toughness, restraint, and control, the historical reality behind his legacy reveals an administration which struggled just as much as any other Cold War presidency.¹² An analysis of Kennedy's military, economic and political policies raises serious questions regarding the execution and impact of Flexible Response, especially in relation to the Cuban Missile Crisis. Did Kennedy's new containment strategy really diverge from Eisenhower's as much as he claimed it did? With its emphasis on expanding conventional forces to expand non-nuclear options, why did the administration double down on the expansion of nuclear forces? Efforts like Latin America's Alliance for Progress expanded aid to the newly emerging Third World, but was this program meant to shore up anti-communist forces in the

¹¹ John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 211.

¹² Benjamin Schwarz, "The Real Cuban Missile Crisis" *The Atlantic* (January/February) (2013), 2.

Western Hemisphere or merely a new avenue to assert United States dominance of the region? How did the combination of conventional force expansion and economic aid improvements change the Soviet's calculus in Latin America? Did Nikita Khrushchev feel that the Soviet interests in Cuba were threatened by the new U.S. strategy? Or, was there a preexisting vulnerability from Eisenhower's policies which led the Soviet leader to place nuclear weapons in Cuba?

The following study will investigate these ideas, focusing on the shift in Containment strategies which occurred between Eisenhower and Kennedy's presidencies and the effect this change had on Soviet decision making. Each president's policies will be investigated in turn and the significant differences will be highlighted. Additionally, Soviet correspondence will be used to determine how Soviet perception and response of these U.S. policies changed between administrations. The emphasis will be the shift initiated by Kennedy and his policy of Flexible Response, characterized by a conventional expansion, nuclear build up, and economic efforts. Nikita Khrushchev's decision to place Soviet missiles on Cuba was ultimately the result of this change in strategy, with Flexible Response stimulating the Soviet leader's underlying motivations and fears, leading to the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Chapter I **Eisenhower's New Look**

In order for the impact of Kennedy's new strategy to be properly assessed, it is first necessary to discuss and analyze the policies which came before, particularly Eisenhower's New Look and its threat of Massive Retaliation. This initial analysis is important because it will establish a context from which Kennedy's strategy can be compared, demonstrating the policy shift which occurred after the 1960 election. Eisenhower's own election in 1952 is an excellent starting point for this study because it was the first change of American leadership to occur since the beginning of the Cold War. Additionally, it ended the twenty year tenure of continuous Democratic leadership in the White House.¹³

When Dwight (Ike) D. Eisenhower took office on January 20, 1953, he assumed command of a nation which was tired of sending its troops to wars in distant lands. As U.S. participation in the Korean War was coming to a close, there was a strong lobby led by Republican politician Robert A. Taft to withdraw from global affairs into neo-isolationism.¹⁴ Ike vehemently disagreed with this position, leading in part to his decision to run for President in 1952. His choice to run as a Republican, however, placed Eisenhower in a rather awkward position in terms of his opinion on policy. Because of his political party, Ike was now naturally at odds with Truman's containment strategies which he had helped to develop as Chief of Staff of the Army and the first NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR). Fortunately, Eisenhower and his team were able to articulate a new strategy which maintained many of

¹³ John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 125.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 125.

Truman's containment policies but reflected his own opinions on balancing fiscal responsibility with effective military deterrence.¹⁵

This policy, known as the New Look, was formally established in October, 1953 by the Planning Board of the National Security Council (NSC) in NSC 162/2 and reflected the thinking which Eisenhower had championed during his campaign.¹⁶ In particular, Ike highlighted two threats which he believed would endanger the United States. First and most obvious was that the U.S. could be defeated militarily by the Soviet Union. The second fear, which was more imprecise and controversial, was that the expenditures required to counter the Soviets would destroy the United States economically.¹⁷ The New Look was designed to coordinate a balanced response to both of these risks, maintaining a sensible defense which would protect the United States over the long term. This "in for the long haul" thinking was important to Ike because he realized the gruesome reality which thermonuclear weapons militarily represented for the Cold War. In a 1953 NSC meeting Eisenhower commented, "The only thing worse than losing a global war was winning one; there would be no individual freedom after the next global war."¹⁸ The invention of the H-bomb practically assured that there would be no military resolution of the Cold War through open conflict, meaning the struggle could last for many years.

In an effort to balance the New Look's two long term priorities, the Eisenhower administration sought a way to reduce military spending while maximizing the deterrence power of Western Forces. The solution which the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) forwarded to the NSC was twofold. First, an increased reliance on the deployment and planned use of nuclear weapons would optimize the amount of strength required to defend Europe from a Soviet invasion. While

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Keith A. Barlow, "Massive Retaliation" (Carlisle Barracks: Army War College, 1972), 12.

¹⁷ Ibid, 11.

¹⁸ Norman Friedman, *The Fifty Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2000), 193.

each nuclear weapon was extremely costly, it would replace scores of conventional ones and also eliminate much of the manpower required to conduct a conventional war.¹⁹ The second part of the JCS proposal was for the administration to push for bigger military participation from its NATO allies. In particular, England, France and Germany were highlighted in NSC 162 as the most potentially capable countries, proposing a more integrated defensive plan which reduced the requirements for U.S. troops in favor of European self-defense.²⁰

To Eisenhower and his policy planners, the reduction of the number of U.S. troops was the most important element of his campaign to control spending. As a result, the Army suffered eight years of cuts while the Navy and Air Force enjoyed increasing shares of American Cold War defense funds. Nuclear-armed naval forces were of particular importance because of their ability to respond expeditiously to worldwide emergencies as they developed. For the first time, sustained forward carrier deployments to the Mediterranean and Far East were used to reassure allies and threaten Communist aggression with a rapid reaction to threats.²¹ Naval spending was focused on upgrading the fleet while reducing the number of non-nuclear WWII and Korean-era vessels in service. In particular, Polaris missile submarines and the new Forrestal class attack carriers were prioritized, leading to the procurement of a total of twelve of these pricey but capable naval craft by 1960.²²

For its part, the Air Force enjoyed the rapid advance of missile technology while leveraging public and congressional opinion against the administration to ensure its strategic arm would continue to grow. Beginning in 1956, the Air Force leadership and their allies in Congress

¹⁹ Ibid,194.

²⁰ United States National Security Council. "NSC 162/2" (Washington D.C.: United States National Security Council, 1953), 21.

²¹ Norman Friedman, *The Fifty Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2000), 197.

²² United States National Security Council. "NSC 6013: Status of National Security Programs on June 30, 1960" (Washington D.C.: United States National Security Council, 1960), 39.

began publicizing what it believed was a critical “bomber gap” developing between the two superpowers. Thanks to an elaborate trick by the Soviet Union involving its newest jet bomber, the M-4 Bison, U.S. intelligence analysts significantly overestimated how many Bisons would be available, potentially altering the deterrence value of America’s nuclear bombers.²³ With these new estimates, the Air Force’s Strategic Air Command began to worry that it would not have enough bombers to neutralize Soviet heavy bombers in a first strike scenario.²⁴ Unfortunately for Ike, this worry became very public and was openly discussed in Congress. In response to the public outcry which resulted, Eisenhower’s administration was forced to purchase additional B-52 bombers and fighter interceptors to counter the Soviet’s perceived advantage.²⁵

The U-2 and advancements in photo reconnaissance debunked the “bomber gap” only a few months later. However, the Air Force was not done generating crisis’. In the early part of 1960, a new intelligence estimate stated that the Soviet Union would possess 450 ICBMs by mid-1963.²⁶ This caused a wave of concern because it would mean a “missile gap” would develop, again threatening U.S. deterrence. Compounding the issue was that it was an election year, and candidates like John F. Kennedy spared no time attacking Eisenhower for his inadequate response to the growing Soviet missile threat.²⁷ As a result, the Air Force once again enjoyed an additional surge of military spending, this time in the form of more Atlas missiles and

²³ T.A. Heppenheimer, *The Space Shuttle Decision: NASA’s Search for a Reusable Space Vehicle* (Washington D.C.: NASA History Office. 1999), 193.

²⁴ Norman Friedman, *The Fifty Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press. 2000), 201.

²⁵ T.A. Heppenheimer, *The Space Shuttle Decision: NASA’s Search for a Reusable Space Vehicle* (Washington D.C.: NASA History Office. 1999), 193.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 194.

²⁷ Norman Friedman, *The Fifty Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press. 2000), 238.

accelerated development of the Minuteman ICBM. Between 1959 and 1961, the U.S. strategic missile force tripled in size, from five Air Force squadrons to fifteen.²⁸

For his part, Eisenhower refused to be drawn into a public confrontation with his services as his predecessor Truman had done. He believed that it was his duty as a civil servant to avoid the dramatic grandstanding which was so often associated with “normal” political behavior.²⁹ Also, in the cases of the bomber and missile gaps, Ike would have had to reveal sensitive intelligence capabilities like the U-2 and spy satellites to debunk the Air Forces claims, which he refused to do. It would be better to be criticized as too slow to react than endanger the United States’ only means with which to penetrate the veil of the Soviet Union.³⁰ While this particular belief left Ike and his administration wide open to public condemnation, his extensive military experience allowed him to rein in his services without compromising their civil-military relationship. This is an important concept to note considering the cold and uncomfortable relationship with the military services which characterized presidencies during the Vietnam years, including Kennedy’s.³¹

As the Navy and Air Force grew, the Army digested the frustration of Korea with no clear future mission and very little direction concerning Eisenhower’s new emphasis on tactical nuclear armament. The New Look only exacerbated the situation, especially as NSC 162 elevated fiscal and economic responsibility to the United States number 2 priority behind “meet the Soviet threat to U.S. security.”³² As was shown in WWII and Korea, the U.S. populace was

²⁸ United States National Security Council. “NSC 6013: Status of National Security Programs on June 30, 1960” (Washington D.C.: United States National Security Council, 1960), 19.

²⁹ Norman Friedman, *The Fifty Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2000), 202.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 202.

³¹ Thomas E. Ricks, *The Generals: American Military Command from World War II to Today* (New York: Penguin, 2012), 228.

³² United States National Security Council. “NSC 162/2” (Washington D.C.: United States National Security Council, 1953), 1.

more than able to mobilize to support wartime manpower requirements for conflicts which were fixed in duration. The overall cost of this mobilization was never a long term problem because of the short time periods involved. Eisenhower's conundrum therefore, was how to support a much larger standing force than was traditional while maintaining a defense budget that would not bankrupt the U.S. economy. NSC 162 expresses this new limitation as a three part requirement, "The national security programs of the United States rest upon the manpower to operate them, the economy to produce the material for them, and the financial resources to pay for them."³³ The New Look's solution has already been mentioned, and it was the strength and manpower of America's allies, particularly England, France and Germany.

From a manpower perspective, this idea benefited the Eisenhower administration two ways. First, it reduced the overall number of troops the United States needed to maintain while increasing the overall number of allied soldiers available to counter the vast Communist horde which allegedly remained poised to invade Western Europe at any moment. Second, in addition to reducing the overall U.S. numbers, it allowed fewer Americans to be deployed overseas, reducing the overall living cost of those units retained stateside. To the Army leadership, including General Matthew B. Ridgeway and Secretary Robert T. Stevens, this reduction of force made the Army far less capable of responding to national security emergencies as they arose, giving the Soviet Union a decided advantage. In an interview with *Fortune* in 1953, Stevens expressed his opinion that the nuclear threat which Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles relied on would not stop Soviet aggression: "as long as the initiative remains with the enemy, he is likely to attempt to avoid our strength and exploit our weakness."³⁴

³³ Ibid, 16.

³⁴ Keith A. Barlow, "Massive Retaliation" (Carlisle Barracks: Army War College, 1972), 20.

Unfortunately for Ridgeway and Stevens, both men would be replaced by 1956 and the Army would see massive cuts in manning. In 1953 the Army had nearly one and a half million troops serving in 20 divisions. By 1957, despite the Army's efforts to reorganize and adopt a new "pentomic" divisional organization, only fifteen divisions remained, of which nearly half were deployed to overseas assignments.³⁵ In 1959 the service reached a low point, totaling eight hundred and sixty two thousand soldiers and representing the least capable conventional fighting force the U.S. would have until after Vietnam.³⁶ The most notable effort by the Army to use public opinion against the Eisenhower administration was a failed 1956 "revolt of the colonels." Similar to the tactics employed by the Air Force during the same period, a series of studies were leaked which demonstrated how destructive a nuclear war would be, in an effort to show how dangerous it was to not have a non-nuclear option for general war with the Soviet Union.³⁷ The gambit failed however, when the revolt coincided with the Air Force's "Bomber Gap" campaign and the public showed more interest in the high-tech threat of nuclear aviation than in the graphs and tables demonstrating inadequate U.S. troop numbers. Regrettably, the colonels involved in the scheme were quietly moved on, leaving the Army to focus on its new mission, the employment of tactical nuclear weapons.

Low-yield tactical nuclear weapons came about because of the need to counter the threat posed by the several hundred Soviet divisions staged in Eastern Europe. Potentially, the Soviets could field so many tanks that it would be strategically impossible to stop an invasion, unless the

³⁵ Norman Friedman, *The Fifty Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press. 2000), 197.

³⁶ United States National Security Council. "NSC 6013: Status of National Security Programs on June 30, 1960" (Washington D.C.: United States National Security Council, 1960), 40.

³⁷ Norman Friedman, *The Fifty Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press. 2000), 197.

massive destructive advantage of the atomic bomb was introduced.³⁸ Beginning in 1953, NATO planners considered nuclear weapons their primary means to combat the Soviet Union should a general war break out.³⁹ Eisenhower and his policy makers believed that this small scale nuclear deterrent would replace the massive armies of the past, substituting manpower for sheer destructive power on the tactical scale. Additionally, he thought their use would not invariably lead to a general nuclear conflict, since their power was comparable to the large conventional “block buster” weapons which were employed in WWII.⁴⁰ While the Army did not like this point of view, the New Look ensured that this would be their new focus and by 1959 at least six different weapons systems had been fielded, ranging from the squad portable Davy Crockett recoilless rifle to the large Redstone rocket.⁴¹

With these weapons in the American arsenal, the power required to make deterrence work was real, but it would not count for much unless the Soviet Union knew about U.S. capabilities and respected their threats. For his part, Eisenhower was much better at the formulation of strategy than he was at publicly communicating it to the world. As has already been noted, his military background made Ike very hesitant to divulge American capabilities and intelligence. Luckily for Eisenhower, his Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles was a great orator who had very strong, deep-seated convictions regarding the defense of the “free world” from Communism. Their relationship determined another important quality of the New Look which will be compared to Kennedy’s policy. Dulles’ sometimes fiery rhetoric determined much

³⁸ John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 165.

³⁹ Keith A. Barlow, “Massive Retaliation” (Carlisle Barracks: Army War College, 1972), 24.

⁴⁰ John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 165.

⁴¹ United States National Security Council. “NSC 6013: Status of National Security Programs on June 30, 1960” (Washington D.C.: United States National Security Council, 1960), 80.

of the nature of Eisenhower's containment policy, and his speeches yielded one of its most identifiable ideas, the posture of Massive Retaliation.⁴²

The foundation of Massive Retaliation is built on the idea that the United States reserved the ability to respond to any contingency or aggression with nuclear weapons. The reality of this strategy is that Dulles never actually used those words in the speech from which it is credited, rather it was a small part of his larger discussion on deterrence and asymmetry.⁴³ More of a passing comment than talking point, for the press attending the Council on Foreign Relations dinner on January, 12, 1954, the concept eclipsed everything else that Dulles had said. For Eisenhower and Dulles, this public generalization did more to hurt their attempts to build up Allied deterrence than it helped. The problem they faced was how to make their threats to the Soviet Union harsh enough to ensure deterrence but not so outlandish that the American public and European allies begin to question their reasoning. For much of 1954, both men attempted to clarify Dulles' words and reassure the nations from which their conventional capabilities would soon rest.⁴⁴ At the heart of Massive Retaliation and Dulles' other famous idea, Brinkmanship, is the intricate concept of Asymmetric response and its effect on deterrence.

Asymmetry and its application was nothing new to Eisenhower and his administration. In fact, it was not a new concept in the conduct of war. Sun Tzu dedicated an entire chapter of his *The Art of War* to "Weaknesses and Strengths" advocating that, "To be certain to take what you attack is to attack a place the enemy does not protect."⁴⁵ Eisenhower employed asymmetry during his military career and believed it would provide the best chance of containing Soviet

⁴²John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 126.

⁴³ John Foster Dulles, "The Evolution of Foreign Policy" *Department of State Press Release No. 81* (January 12, 1954)

⁴⁴ John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 148.

⁴⁵ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Samuel B. Griffith (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 96.

aggression. Truman's administration had built its foreign military policy around a symmetric deterrence, to counter the Soviets wherever they would act but to limit the intensity to only as much as the initial provocation.⁴⁶ Unfortunately, this quid pro quo strategy left the United States vulnerable to overextension, sapping the U.S. economy which Eisenhower valued so much. The New Look tried to change this by obscuring the nature and intensity of the U.S. response to aggression. The idea behind this was to make the number of possible responses so wide that Soviet leaders would decide the risk of aggression did not outweigh its benefits.⁴⁷ Theoretically, there would be no need for a large conventional force because the only areas still vulnerable could easily be defended by small contingents of Marines brought in by Eisenhower's improved Navy.

One important thing to note, however, is that over the life of the Eisenhower administration the New Look continued to be evaluated and updated, particularly its guidance regarding the escalation of conflict and the use of nuclear weapons. The impetus for this change was the evolving state of the Cold War, specifically the continued development of nuclear weapons by the Soviet Union. Their concern was captured in a summary statement passed between the State Department and the Department of Defense in 1959: "As Soviet nuclear capability grows, so does Free World and Communist questioning that the U.S. would use its strategic nuclear capability in any situation that did not clearly and immediately endanger vital U.S. security interests."⁴⁸ As Soviet stockpiles grew, the worry became whether or not a credible deterrent could be maintained in smaller "limited war" contingencies. In 1957 Henry Kissinger articulated this limit on the use of nuclear weapons, "The greater the power, the greater the

⁴⁶ John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 148.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 148.

⁴⁸ United States National Security Council. "Summary Statement of Foreign Policy Requirements Bearing Upon US Strategy" (Washington D.C.: United States National Security Council, 1959), 1.

inhibitions against using it except in the most dire emergencies, and the more likely that no objective will seem important enough to justify resort to all-out war.”⁴⁹

While some historians have argued that this led Eisenhower to adopt a precursor to Flexible Response, the problem with this argument is it does not consider the economic considerations which still remained a high priority.⁵⁰ Although the first four years in office had exposed many of the faults inherent to the New Look, maintaining a stable economy remained one of Ike’s top priorities. This was dependent on reducing military spending to avoid a budget deficit. Controlling manpower was the key and the Eisenhower stuck to this concept despite the public’s misgivings about the nuclear deterrent. In the last year of Eisenhower’s eight year presidency, the U.S. Army had nearly six hundred and twenty seven thousand fewer troops than when he entered office.⁵¹ The President and Secretary Dulles publically emphasized the allied division of labor which remained an important part of the New Look. The U.S. would provide the air and naval power while regional alliances like NATO would field the conventional manpower necessary to respond to contingencies.⁵² This relationship did not change as it became clear that a threat of nuclear force would not always be credible enough to work. Instead, Ike focused his strategy’s resources toward what would be a sufficient enough deterrent to avoid the nuclear armageddon which general war would have been, while saving what he could to ensure the United States could economically endure the long haul of the Cold War.⁵³

The last area of Eisenhower’s Cold War strategy which is pertinent to this study is his administration’s decisions and policies in Latin America. The roots of the United States position

⁴⁹ Henry A. Kissinger, *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957) Page 172

⁵⁰ Keith A. Barlow, “Massive Retaliation” (Carlisle Barracks: Army War College, 1972), 2.

⁵¹ United States National Security Council. “NSC 6013: Status of National Security Programs on June 30, 1960” (Washington D.C.: United States National Security Council, 1960), 40.

⁵² John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 164.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 185.

in Central and South America under Ike ran much deeper than his initial actions in 1953. Since 1823, the Monroe Doctrine had defined and guided nearly all U.S. strategy in the region. First articulated by President James Monroe before a session of Congress, this tenant of U.S. foreign policy effectively declared the Western Hemisphere part of the United States' sphere of influence and off-limits to European colonization.⁵⁴ Monroe's goal was to protect the fledgling Latin American states from the threat of re-colonization by countries like France and Spain, who had recently been overthrown. He also intended to establish hegemony over the emerging Latin American economy and its potential benefits for U.S. global trade.

At the time of Monroe's speech, the United States did not have much capacity to enforce the doctrine, rendering it essentially passive, but by the beginning of the twentieth century this role would change. In 1904, President Theodore Roosevelt introduced his Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, asserting the United States' authority to unilaterally intervene in Latin America. While this policy was first presented as a preventative measure, allowing the U.S., as the dominant regional power to ensure the other nations of the Western Hemisphere pay their debts to international creditors, it was used as justification for several armed interventions, including Cuba, Nicaragua, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic.⁵⁵

Upon entering office, Eisenhower wasted no time in establishing an initial U.S. guiding principle for Latin America. During the 1952 election, a significant portion of Ike's campaign was built on criticizing Truman and the Democrats for being "soft on communism" and assuring voters that his leadership would fight back against the Soviet threat.⁵⁶ With this expectation set,

⁵⁴ Office of the Historian, "Monroe Doctrine, 1823" Bureau of Public Affairs, U.S. Department of State. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1801-1829/monroe> (Accessed 30 September, 2015)

⁵⁵ Office of the Historian, "Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, 1904" Bureau of Public Affairs, U.S. Department of State. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1899-1913/roosevelt-and-monroe-doctrine> (Accessed 30 September, 2015)

⁵⁶ Stephen G. Rabe, *Eisenhower and Latin America: The Foreign Policy of Anticommunism* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press Books, 1988), 29.

two months after his inauguration the President had already approved a preliminary statement of policy in Latin America which was built on combating communism. Hemispheric solidarity was the foundational element to this strategy, permitting the administration to work with any Latin American government who was willing to support a hard line against communism.⁵⁷ For Ike's first term and the first year of his second, this "come as you are as long as you hate communists" trend was the norm. The NSC articulated this style in NSC 5613, a statement of policy toward Latin America published in 1956.

Throughout the twenty-seven page secret circular, three themes emerge which characterize the administration's views toward their neighbors to the South. The first theme is economic, with the authors emphasizing the seven billion dollars of private U.S. investment that goes into the region annually.⁵⁸ This signifies the largest investment at the time besides Canada but also represented a large potential for gains as the region grew economically. The second theme was an attitude critical of the Latin American viewpoint, to the point of bordering on patronizing. At the beginning of the document its authors voice their concern for the strong nationalistic feelings that often express themselves through anti-U.S. rhetoric. Additionally, they also highlight "some sectors in Latin America (who) complain that our assistance is inadequate" with the intent to garner more U.S. aid through complaints.⁵⁹ This attitude reflects the relatively low priority Latin America had in the New Look's global strategy and the sense of superiority which the Monroe Doctrine established within the U.S. diplomatic system. The truth was that Latin American countries did have quite a bit to complain about with regards to aid. Between 1945 and 1960, Belgium and Luxemburg each received more economic assistance than the

⁵⁷ Ibid, 26.

⁵⁸ United States National Security Council. "NSC 5613/1: U.S. Policy Toward Latin America" (Washington D.C.: United States National Security Council, 1955), 1.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 2.

whole of Latin America, which is a staggering statistic given the low economic status of the region.⁶⁰

The third theme which can be identified within NSC 5613 is arguably the most controversial. At the beginning it is noted that because of the frequent turnover in Latin American governments by coup d'état, the militaries within these republics enjoy a strong and critical place within their political system.⁶¹ Because of this reality, the authors express the belief that it is important to maintain a positive influence with these groups, even going so far as providing military training and hardware purely for political reasons.⁶² The idea that the key to Latin American relations runs through a healthy relationship with the military led the administration to support controversial and oppressive dictators like Batista (Cuba), Perez Jimenez (Venezuela), and Manuel Odria (Peru). Even though the administration knew about and sometimes acknowledged the human rights abuses which occurred within countries like Cuba and Peru, the dictator's anti-communist stance made them a good fit for Eisenhower's tough line on communists in the Western Hemisphere. The theme of military support also had an effect on the economic assistance allotted to Latin America, based on the assumption that these dictators would maintain a more stable country through force.

In 1958, Eisenhower's policies toward Latin America were profoundly shaken up by the negative reaction Vice President Richard Nixon received during his tour of the region. Protests followed Nixon throughout his trip, culminating in a tense situation where he was assaulted by an out of control crowd in Caracas, Venezuela.⁶³ The administration's initial response was to

⁶⁰ Stephen G. Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World: John F. Kennedy Confronts Communist Revolution in Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 11.

⁶¹ United States National Security Council. "NSC 5613/1: U.S. Policy Toward Latin America" (Washington D.C.: United States National Security Council, 1955), 1.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶³ Stephen G. Rabe, *Eisenhower and Latin America: The Foreign Policy of Anticommunism* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press Books, 1988), 102.

blame the entire disturbance on a communist conspiracy developing within the region, but over time it began to reassess its policies, especially toward military dictators. The idea was helped along the way by a startling wave of revolutions which removed ten authoritarian governments from power between 1956 and 1960.⁶⁴ Eisenhower and his advisors turned to economic aid as the solution to the emerging instability, establishing the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) in 1959 and initially pledging three hundred and twenty million dollars toward the entity.⁶⁵

Unfortunately for the New Look in Latin America, the changes instituted after Nixon's trouble in Caracas were not enough to adjust the overall direction of the strategy. Europe still remained the frontline on the struggle with communism, especially with the ongoing Berlin Crisis. Additionally, Eisenhower's budget-conscious policies limited the economic resources available for aid while optimizing the nation's effective intelligence and covert operations apparatus' like the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). To put the 1959 IDB contribution in perspective, it was still not equal to the four hundred million dollars which the CIA covertly spent in South America throughout the 1950's reinforcing its defenses against communism.⁶⁶ Given the outcome of Cuba's 1959 revolution and the panic it caused for anti-communists throughout the Western Hemisphere, Eisenhower's policies in Latin America left quite a bit to be desired.

Overall, Eisenhower's New Look proved to be an adequate response to the Soviet threat following the Korean War. Additionally, his fiscally responsible ideas did succeed in reducing

⁶⁴ Stephen G. Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World: John F. Kennedy Confronts Communist Revolution in Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 11.

⁶⁵ Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Special Message to the Congress Recommending U.S. Participation in the International Development Association, February 18, 1960" *The American Presidency Project* (2011) <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=12050> (Accessed 1 October, 2015)

⁶⁶ Stephen G. Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World: John F. Kennedy Confronts Communist Revolution in Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 12.

the budget and reversing some of the debt which had built up since WWII. However, the cost associated with this strategy included the proliferation of nuclear devices to address the entire spectrum of war, the devastating reduction of the conventional capability of the Army and a Latin American policy which left the western hemisphere vulnerable to socialist ideals and revolution. In the next chapter, this study will make the transition to John F. Kennedy's presidency, summarizing his Flexible Response strategy in a similar manner and comparing the two policies.

Chapter II

Kennedy's Flexible Response to Communism

John F. Kennedy's role in the Cold War took shape several years before the cold January day in 1961 where he became President of the United States. Kennedy had been serving in the U.S. Congress since 1946, first as State Representative for Massachusetts eleventh district, and then as a Senator.⁶⁷ During his time in the U.S. Senate JFK served on the Armed Services Committee and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, where he had an inside view of Eisenhower's strategies and decisions on national defense. This perspective served the young senator well when he made the decision to run in the 1960 presidential election and was eventually awarded the Democratic nomination. During Kennedy's campaign is where I would argue the ideals of Flexible Response first took shape. While his containment policy was not formally articulated until early 1961, the rhetoric which JFK used throughout his campaign served as an introduction to his administration's new strategy to combat communism.

The foundation for this new strategy was a response to the Eisenhower administration's New Look policies. In particular, Kennedy highlighted what he believed to be a "critical situation which has been created by the steady erosion of American power relative to that of the Communists in recent years."⁶⁸ This image of a weakened America at risk was the touchstone of Kennedy's campaign, allowing him to emphasize his generation's forward facing and advanced style which would help them get the country moving again.⁶⁹ The reality of Kennedy's rhetoric is that very little of the substance can be credited to the president himself. Unlike Eisenhower, who employed a military style staff system and determined much of the strategy himself,

⁶⁷ John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, "Life of John F. Kennedy" John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum <http://www.jfklibrary.org/JFK/Life-of-John-F-Kennedy.aspx?p=3> (Accessed 4 October, 2015)

⁶⁸John F. Kennedy: "Speech of Senator John F. Kennedy, American Legion Convention, Miami Beach, FL"

October 18, 1960

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Kennedy preferred a form of ad hoc decision making in which a select group of close advisors would develop most of the policy.⁷⁰ Kennedy believed this system lent itself to flexibility and responsiveness, and used it with mixed success for his three years in office.⁷¹ The argument can be made that this executive scheme is reflective of JFK's overall lack of political confidence, with his advisors essentially telling him what to do most of the time, but I would argue it has more to do with his leadership experiences than his political instincts.⁷²

Kennedy was famous for his WWII leadership and heroics aboard PT-109, a twelve-man navy patrol boat in the South Pacific.⁷³ But this was the limit to his military leadership experience, after he had returned home and recovered from his action the war was over, leaving him to pursue politics. Because of the small size of his crew, Kennedy never had to learn the large unit leadership skills which Eisenhower was a master of, and in his political career he gravitated to similar leadership roles. Eisenhower was comfortable with large staffs, his career as a staff officer and experience as a general had forced him to be. In contrast, Kennedy was probably more at ease with a small group of subordinates helping him come to a decision, similar to what he had experienced with his small crew aboard PT-109. The shortcoming to this style is that it is only as good as the advisors it employs, and in this respect Kennedy has a spotty record, choosing a mix of Truman-era policy makers, young business minds, and a general whose close relationship with the president would determine the nature of Flexible Response.

⁷⁰ Norman Friedman, *The Fifty Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press. 2000), 255.

⁷¹ John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press. 2005), 198.

⁷² Norman Friedman, *The Fifty Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press. 2000), 252.

⁷³ John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, "Life of John F. Kennedy" John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum <http://www.jfklibrary.org/JFK/Life-of-John-F-Kennedy.aspx?p=3> (Accessed 4 October, 2015)

Kennedy's affiliation with the Democratic Party allowed him to inherit many of the strategic thinkers from Truman's administration whose ideas had gone out of style during Eisenhower's presidency.⁷⁴ Two examples of this group are Dean Acheson and Paul Nitze, both of whom participated in NSC-68, the document which articulated Truman's symmetrical containment strategy.⁷⁵ Acheson was among a select group of people who were consulted by Senator Kennedy's National Security Policy Committee, a research group that advised JFK and his campaign about national security policy.⁷⁶ The effect Truman's men had on Flexible Response was twofold. First, they advocated for a return to Truman-era spending levels, reprioritizing military spending over budget requirements, with the belief that the deficit spending would increase the size of the economy and pay back the balance incurred. This concept was foundational to NSC-68, and appears in Kennedy's speeches during his 1960 campaign.⁷⁷ Second, Flexible Response reflected their pull back toward a symmetrical containment strategy. NSC-68 advocated confronting communism wherever it advanced, providing an adequate military shield for social reform to take place, rendering communism irrelevant.⁷⁸ Kennedy used this kind of language in his campaign, telling a group of American Legionnaires in Miami, "I support our present effort to build strength, not merely to hold the line but to expand freedom all around the globe."⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Norman Friedman, *The Fifty Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2000), 254.

⁷⁵ S. Nelson Drew, ed. *NSC-68: Forging the Strategy of Containment*. (Washington DC: National Defense University, 1996)

⁷⁶ National Security Policy Committee for Senator John F. Kennedy. "Six Areas for Consideration in the Defense Field" (Washington D.C.: National Security Policy Committee, 1960), 1.

⁷⁷ S. Nelson Drew, ed. *NSC-68: Forging the Strategy of Containment*. (Washington DC: National Defense University, 1996), 91.

John F. Kennedy: "Speech of Senator John F. Kennedy, American Legion Convention, Miami Beach, FL", October 18, 1960

⁷⁸ S. Nelson Drew, ed. *NSC-68: Forging the Strategy of Containment*. (Washington DC: National Defense University, 1996), 87.

⁷⁹ John F. Kennedy: "Speech of Senator John F. Kennedy, American Legion Convention, Miami Beach, FL"

If men like Acheson helped guide the direction of Flexible Response, Kennedy's Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, determined how this new strategy would be employed. McNamara was part of a rising generation of government leaders who had made their careers in the automobile industry, popularly known as the "whiz kids" for their use of computers and statistics to increase the company's bottom line.⁸⁰ With the help of new management techniques based on systems analysis, the McNamara and his staff sought a way to streamline the Pentagon's budget system so as to ensure each service got what they needed with little redundancy.⁸¹ This system replaced the budgetary ceilings imposed on the services by the Eisenhower administration, instead allowing them to spend what they wanted but tightly controlling what they could spend it on.

Thanks to McNamara's close relationship with Kennedy and the poor one enjoyed by Secretary of State Dean Rusk, the Department of Defense took a significantly more direct role in the formation and direction of foreign policy.⁸² Additionally, Kennedy's quick ad hoc style of decision making automatically gave McNamara and his staff the upper hand against the JCS on any issue where the Secretary and his generals disagreed. McNamara could resolve the issue during informal meetings with the President while the JCS labored through its staffing process to reach consensus, effectively blocking their advice from reaching their Commander-in-Chief.⁸³ Thanks to the combination of flashy statistical analysis, direct access to the President and an unprecedented role in foreign policy, McNamara became a key figure for national defense in both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. Through his decisions on weapons development,

October 18, 1960

⁸⁰ Norman Friedman, *The Fifty Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press. 2000), 283.

⁸¹ John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press. 2005), 228.

⁸² *Ibid*, 198.

⁸³ Norman Friedman, *The Fifty Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press. 2000), 283.

the Secretary of Defense determined the inherent flexibility of Flexible Response. His decision to cap the number of U.S. Minuteman ICBMs at one-thousand also contributed to the rise of Mutually Assured Destruction, the counter-city strategy which became Kennedy's primary means of deterrence.⁸⁴

JFK's first public introduction of Flexible Response as a strategy came on May 25, 1961, in a special message to Congress in which he advocated for an increase in spending on defense and the national space program. His use of the term flexibility came in reference the rapid build-up of conventional non-nuclear capability which he had been promoting since his presidential campaign.⁸⁵ The idea for this term had come from one of Kennedy's advisors who can be credited as the father of Flexible Response, Army General Maxwell D. Taylor. Taylor first used the idea in his book *The Uncertain Trumpet* (1960), which criticized the New Look for its overreliance on nuclear weapons and reduction of conventional forces.⁸⁶ Published a year after stepping down as Army Chief of Staff, Taylor's opinions became favorites of Kennedy and his campaign, contributing to the soul of Kennedy's new deterrence strategy.⁸⁷

Taylor developed a very close relationship to the President and his inner circle, first as the president's personal military advisor and then as the Chairman of the JCS. The General's own recollection of this rapport speaks to the unconventional position he as a military man enjoyed within the Kennedy White House: "I would often see him several times a day on many

⁸⁴ David E. Hoffman, *The Dead Hand: The Untold Story of the Cold War Arms Race and Its Dangerous Legacy* (New York: Doubleday, 2010), 16.

⁸⁵ John F. Kennedy, "Special message to Congress on urgent national needs, 25 May 1961" *Papers of John F. Kennedy* (1961) <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKPOF-034-030.aspx> (Accessed 5 Oct, 2015), 5.

⁸⁶ "Flexible Response" *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, <http://www.britannica.com/topic/Flexible-Response> (Accessed 5 Oct, 2015)

⁸⁷ Thomas E. Ricks, *The Generals: American Military Command from World War II to Today*, (New York: Penguin, 2012), 219.

different subjects.”⁸⁸ Taylor used this position to push his ideas on modern conventional war and the use of force in limited conflicts like Vietnam. Unfortunately for Kennedy and the United States’ future in Vietnam, Taylor maintained this influence by occasionally compromising his ethical standards and supporting what was political expedient rather than sound military strategy.⁸⁹ Major General H.R. McMaster expressed these character flaws in a study written in 1997, “When he found it expedient to do so, he misled the JCS, the press and the NSC. He deliberately relegated his fellow military officers to a position of little influence and assisted McNamara in suppressing JCS objections.”⁹⁰ Although General Taylor’s actions proved detrimental to future civil-military relationship, his efforts toward a containment strategy which would give the U.S., in his own words, “the flexibility of response to hostile acts of aggression” were strong and direct, helping to shape the strategy he had given a name.⁹¹

Although President Kennedy was not responsible for the overall composition of Flexible Response, he most certainly championed its public image to the United States’ citizens and allies. The drive and determination which he and his administration approached their time in office has already been covered, but more important than this resolve was the policies and strategy which actually represented Flexible Response and how these were put into action by Kennedy’s team. It is in this area that the shift in policy between the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations becomes significant. One of the first differences between the two policies which can be noted is the lack of official wide dissemination guidance on Flexible Response. Unlike Eisenhower’s New Look, which was formally articulated in 1953 by NSC 162/2 and updated

⁸⁸ Ibid, 220.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 228.

⁹⁰ H.R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Johnson, McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1997), 106.

⁹¹ David W. Mabon, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963: Volume VIII* (Washington D.C. U.S. Department of State, 2013), 422.

occasionally through published Basic National Security Policy (BNSP), Flexible Response never had an officially published document which outlined or updated its ideas.

This absence of policy guidance reflected the ad hoc administrative style which Kennedy and his team favored, preferring to solve crises and confrontations as they arose through hastily arranged committees and working groups rather than the traditional NSC processes.⁹² In the opinion of Kennedy's closest advisors, the formal interagency policy papers which the State Department had produced throughout the previous administration were unnecessary work which reduced the flexibility of the President with regards to U.S. foreign policy. McGeorge Bundy, Kennedy's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, commented in November, 1961 that actual policy regarding a individual country, "was determined by adding up actions that the President had approved on the country concerned or by asking the White House staff how the President felt about a particular country."⁹³ Despite this negative attitude toward policy papers within the White House staff, the State Department Policy Planning Council, first under the leadership of George McGhee and then Walt Rostow, continued to push for a comprehensive BNSP which would formally articulate Flexible Response.⁹⁴ In the end, the most progress Rostow and the State Department were able to make was a series of drafts, culminating in a 186-page document released June, 1962, which achieved moderate circulation but was never approved by the President.

At the core of Flexible Response was a national objective that had a great deal in common with its predecessors. The goal of Kennedy's national policy was to work toward the creation of, "a community of free nations" in which, "a nation with values and purposes such as

⁹² Office of the Historian, "Summary of Foreign Relations of the United States 1961-1963, Vol VII, National Security" (Washington D.C., U.S. Department of State, 2013)
http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/ERC/frus/summaries/960930_FRUS_VII_1961-63.html (Accessed 6 Oct, 2015)

⁹³ Ibid

⁹⁴ Ibid

ours can flourish.”⁹⁵ The concept of an ideal international community was not new, John Foster Dulles and the drafters of Truman’s policies had both advocated for this ultimate objective. The biggest difference between the three policies was the lucidity and frankness with which Kennedy publicly expressed it.⁹⁶ As opposed to other presidents who often spoke vaguely regarding their goals, JFK clearly articulated the American interest in a balance of power throughout the international system, allowing diverse nations like the U.S. to thrive.⁹⁷

Additionally, the methodology with which Kennedy’s policy makers used to arrive at this aim mirrored Truman’s, primarily due to the adoption of Truman-era advisors which has already been discussed. Kennedy and Truman’s descriptions of policy both place the objective at the beginning of the process, with only a brief description of the threats which face U.S. national security. In contrast to this, Eisenhower’s NSC 162 opens by explicitly stating the basic problems facing the U.S., discussing the Soviet threat and then defining what goals its strategy needed to achieve. The significance of this difference lies in the priority each strategy assigns its means in relation to its ultimate ends. For Kennedy and Truman’s administrations, the means are subjugated to the desired end state, allowing for an unrestricted expenditure of effort in order to maintain the objective. The economically responsible New Look rejected this idea, instead subjugating the desired end state to a fixed set of available means. This method controlled the amount of effort the nation has to commit, but it did so at the expense of a more limited goal. To the Kennedy administration, Ike’s methodology was an obsolete strategy which restricted the nation’s ability to respond flexibly to any Soviet aggression.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ David W. Mabon, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963: Volume VIII* (Washington D.C. U.S. Department of State, 2013), 330.

⁹⁶ John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 199.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 200.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 202.

The importance of flexibility to Kennedy and his policy makers cannot be stressed enough. A thorough reading of the State Department's June, 1962 BNSP will find innumerable instances where the concept is mentioned. The idea behind this obsession is a response to the New Look's asymmetric answer to communist aggression. Democratic critics like Kennedy believed that by placing so much emphasis on a nuclear response, it exposed the U.S. to Soviet advances in more limited conflicts. To correct this overexposure, Flexible Response was organized, "so as to account for the full spectrum of force" which would allow the U.S. to, "deter or to deal effectively with the flexible arsenal of Communist techniques of aggression against or within the frontiers of the free community."⁹⁹ JFK's administration also believed that it could carefully calibrate its response to aggression thanks to its wide range of conventional and nuclear capabilities.¹⁰⁰ The ability to regulate the level of escalation was not only founded on the growth and modernization of conventional forces, but also on the deepening of presidential control. More centralized control of strategic weapons would offer the President a wider range of options from which to choose, allowing Kennedy to tailor a balanced rebuttal to Soviet advances.¹⁰¹

The increased emphasis on conventional force strength in conjunction with an advocate in General Taylor who possessed direct access to the President meant that for the U.S. Army, the future seemed very bright under Flexible Response. Kennedy's overall goal for non-nuclear forces, as articulated in the June, 1962 BNSP, was threefold. First, the U.S. conventional capability would be able to frustrate any communist assault long enough for diplomatic channels to find a resolution to the conflict, averting a general war. Second, U.S. forces would have the ability to frustrate Sino-Soviet forces in sustained combat which could be categorized as less

⁹⁹ "Basic National Security Policy" (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 1962), 20.

¹⁰⁰ John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 213.

¹⁰¹ "Basic National Security Policy" (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 1962), 41.

than a major assault, preventing escalation. Finally, non-nuclear forces would be prepared to support a general war in the event of an all-out communist attack.¹⁰² The broad mission set which these goals gave to the Army required a significantly larger and more modern fighting force. Fortunately for the Army, McNamara was prepared to construct this type of force to initially meet the growing demands of the Berlin Crisis and continue to build for the conflict in Vietnam.¹⁰³

In the course of two years, between 1961 and 1963, the strength of the Army grew dramatically, adding 5 combat ready divisions, for a total of sixteen. In addition to these active duty troops, the Army National Guard maintained another six divisions in a high state of readiness.¹⁰⁴ The overall number of active duty troops rose from the 1961 total of eight hundred and seventy thousand to over one million.¹⁰⁵ Because of the emphasis on a heavily armed, mechanized fighting force, the costs associated with this buildup were significant. The Kennedy administration acknowledged this but accepted the risks associated with it, in keeping with their economic strategy which believed the U.S. economy would grow to accommodate and pay back the deficit.

This style of thinking is evident in a 1961 Bureau of the Budget memorandum which summarized what it saw as policy issues associated with Secretary McNamara's proposed 1963 budget. The authors of the memo acknowledge the rising cost of complex conventional forces but question whether or not the forces programed for 1963 would be enough to meet the demand of the European theater and two or more local war situations where the U.S. may be called to

¹⁰² Ibid, 49.

¹⁰³ Norman Friedman, *The Fifty Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press. 2000), 288.

¹⁰⁴ United States Bureau of the Budget. "FY 1963 Defense Budget Issues" (Washington D.C.: Executive Office of the President, 1961), 8.

¹⁰⁵ Norman Friedman, *The Fifty Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press. 2000), 288.

intervene.¹⁰⁶ For Taylor and his reinvigorated modern Army, this question reflected not only the new limited role which they would assume in regions such as Southeast Asia, but also a new mission which Kennedy believed would meet the Soviet threat to the Third World, counterinsurgency (COIN).

The United States' modern experience with COIN before 1961 was very limited, although colonial powers like England and France had been combating insurgencies since the close of WWII, the U.S. had not borne the brunt of an insurgent threat since the beginning of the century in the Philippines. This all changed with the election of Kennedy and the January 6, 1961 speech by Nikita Khrushchev in which he explicitly offered his support for "wars of national liberation." The Soviet Premier's speech made a deep impression on Kennedy and his advising team, the new President read parts of the speech during his first NSC meeting and instructed all members of his staff to "read, mark, learn and inwardly digest" Khrushchev's words.¹⁰⁷ As a senator JFK had already shown concern toward the rise of insurgencies, having made several speeches to Congress criticizing Eisenhower's efforts to assist French combat insurgencies in Algeria and Indochina.¹⁰⁸ Khrushchev's speech would prove critical. For Kennedy, it was irrefutable proof that the Soviet Union viewed Third World unrest as the new battleground between democracy and communism, and he turned to the conventional Army and Flexible Response for the United States' answer.

The plan which Kennedy's policy makers crafted to address the communist insurgent threat was separated into two phases. First, in what the BNSP termed the "Preventative Action" phase, U.S. experts would recognize the vulnerable nations and take steps to strengthen these

¹⁰⁶ United States Bureau of the Budget. "FY 1963 Defense Budget Issues" (Washington D.C.: Executive Office of the President, 1961), 9.

¹⁰⁷ Phillip Nash, "Nuclear Weapons in Kennedy's Foreign Policy" *The Historian* 56:2 (1994), 288.

¹⁰⁸ Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 86.

societies against the insurgent tactics. In particular, an emphasis was placed on, “devising and implementing economic and political, as well as military, programs aimed at preventing situations that could lead to guerilla warfare.”¹⁰⁹ The second phase, dubbed “Crisis Situations” involved the mobilization of local defense, supported by aid programs, with the three part goal of (1) maintaining the independence and integrity of the nation involved, (2) minimizing the scope of direct U.S. involvement, and (3) minimizing the risk of escalation above guerilla action.¹¹⁰ The most important part of the counter-guerilla strategy was how to move forward with this two phase process, and interestingly, despite the emphasis placed on economic and political programs, the 1962 BNSP only directs development and growth toward the military role in this process. Specifically, it states, “The development of hardware, techniques and tactics appropriate to guerilla warfare should receive high priority in U.S. training and production progress.”¹¹¹ I would argue this idea reflects the dominant relationship McNamara’s Department of Defense enjoyed in the Kennedy administration, and the comparably weak influence which Dean Rusk’s State Department had maintained. If the President had upheld a more even association with the two departments, there may have been greater emphasis on a balanced COIN strategy which would have done more than just lip service to economic and social factors.

For the Army and its role in Kennedy’s emphasis on COIN, there was a great deal of resistance to the concept. Even General Taylor was skeptical of the need for special training and tactics to prepare his conventional forces for a more unconventional environment. During a meeting between the President and the JCS over the issue, Taylor told Kennedy, “We good

¹⁰⁹ “Basic National Security Policy” (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 1962), 56.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 57.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 57.

soldiers are trained for all kinds of things. We don't have to worry about special situations.”¹¹²

The President, however, was not satisfied with his armed services trepidation over the issue.

Shortly after taking office in 1961, JFK approved a five thousand man increase in the size of Army Special Forces, believing the newly minted “Green Berets” could trigger the cultural and doctrinal change the Army needed.¹¹³

A year later, and after even more resistance from the Army leadership, the President issued National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) 124, establishing a Special Group (Counterinsurgency) to coordinate the United States' response to the growing guerilla threat in the Third World. Kennedy's primary goal for this group, which included Maxwell Taylor, Robert Kennedy and McGeorge Bundy, was to “insure the development of adequate interdepartmental programs aimed at preventing or defeating subversive insurgency and indirect aggression...and to resolve any interdepartmental problems which may impede their implementation.”¹¹⁴ In essence, the new Special Group's role was to apply a more consistent level of pressure on groups like the Army with the hope that this increased prodding would bring their interests in line. Unfortunately for the President's goals, the emphasis on counterinsurgency failed to make a lasting impact on the Army and its modus operandi. The Army thinking that valued heavy units, massed firepower and high technology was too entrenched even for the President of the United States to change.¹¹⁵ A philosophy that also did not change under Kennedy was the United States' strategic use of nuclear weapons.

¹¹² Interview with Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, U.S. Army War College Senior Officer Debriefing Program, by Col. Richard A. Manion, 16-17 February, 1973, MHI.

¹¹³ Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 30.

¹¹⁴ United States National Security Council. “NSAM 124: Establishment of the Special Group (Counter-Insurgency)” (Washington D.C.: United States National Security Council, 1962), 2.

¹¹⁵ Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 36.

Despite Flexible Response's emphasis on the more conventional end of the conflict spectrum, the deterrence value of nuclear weapons still remained a foundational part of the Cold War. During his campaign, Kennedy used this idea very effectively in his criticism of Eisenhower's poor response to the alleged bomber and missile gaps. Once JFK entered office, however, this rhetoric forced him to address these issues, even after he learned that the numbers associated with the "gaps" were inaccurate at best.¹¹⁶ The strategic arms of the Air Force and Navy reaped the initial spoils of Kennedy's commitment, but at a great cost to their ability to control their own spending. As has already been discussed, the arrival of Robert McNamara to the Pentagon signaled a radical change in how the services procured weapons, with an emphasis on rational decisions based on "systems analysis." What this Programming, Planning and Budgeting System really represented for McNamara and his "whiz kids" was a way to deny service chief's spending requests with justification that was difficult for the senior officers to challenge.¹¹⁷

Nuclear strategy under Flexible Response drifted away from the emphasis on "first strike knockout" attacks which had characterized the New Look. McNamara expressed the problems with this capability in a budget memorandum to the President in September, 1961, listing three reasons why it was a poor choice. First, due to the Soviet's deployment of nuclear missile submarines and hardened ICBMs, the strategy was inherently infeasible, with a low probability that U.S. forces could destroy all the Soviet weapons in one strike. Second, McNamara feared a push for this capability would provoke an arms race between the two powers, though he neglects to admit that one was already on-going. The third and final reason was the cost associated with the strategy, because of the number of resources required to make the capability work

¹¹⁶ Norman Friedman, *The Fifty Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2000), 240.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, 289.

effectively.¹¹⁸ Instead of the first strike plan, McNamara proposed a strategy which was built on survivability, believing that a protracted nuclear war could be fought by carefully controlling the level of violence, allowing for a possible negotiated conclusion.¹¹⁹ This is in contrast to Eisenhower's opinion that due to the destructive capability of thermonuclear weapons and the associated fallout, no one "wins" in the event of a general nuclear war.¹²⁰

The way in which McNamara was able to articulate this strategy of survivability contributed to its draw, especially to those groups in the Kennedy administration that did not understand military realities as well as Eisenhower. Secretary McNamara stressed the importance of the capability to, "in the event of a Soviet nuclear attack, first, strike back against the Soviet bomber bases, missile sites...in order to reduce Soviet power and limit the damage that can be done by vulnerable Soviet follow-on forces, while second, holding in protected reserved forces capable of destroying the Soviet urban society...in a controlled and deliberate way."¹²¹ The emphasis on control and deliberate action is the bottom line of McNamara's plans, with the ability to retain a military superiority even after a Soviet attack its keystone.

To this end, McNamara directed a steady increase in the size of U.S. strategic forces, relying heavily on the relatively inexpensive solid-fueled Minuteman and Polaris missiles to provide the cost-effective flexibility he needed.¹²² Between 1961 and 1967, he planned to reduce the U.S. bomber force by more than half, while increasing the missile force to fifteen times its 1961 level. At the limit of this growth, the United States would possess one thousand, eighty

¹¹⁸ Robert McNamara, "Recommended Long Range Nuclear Delivery Forces 1963-1967" (Washington D.C.: United States National Security Council, 1961), 5.

¹¹⁹ Norman Friedman, *The Fifty Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2000), 291.

¹²⁰ John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 173.

¹²¹ Robert McNamara, "Recommended Long Range Nuclear Delivery Forces 1963-1967" (Washington D.C.: United States National Security Council, 1961), 1.

¹²² Norman Friedman, *The Fifty Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2000), 291.

seven missiles, contributing to the nearly five and a half thousand megatons of nuclear force in the American arsenal.¹²³ The terrifying firepower which these totals represent reflect a contradiction present in Kennedy's Flexible Response. While increasing emphasis on the lower side of the spectrum of warfare allowed the U.S. to fight more flexibly, the policy was also increasing the risks associated with escalation, ultimately putting the human race more in jeopardy.

The final area which must be addressed in this study of Flexible Response is Kennedy's policies and goals in Latin America. As was discussed in Chapter 1, the Eisenhower administration maintained the United States' Monroe Doctrine authority over the Western Hemisphere through a strategy which encouraged private U.S. investment and gave military aid in support of anti-communism. Although Ike and his advisors began to move toward economic aid as a strategy, European priorities and budgetary concerns limited its level of commitment. When Kennedy took office, his newfound goal of combating Soviet intervention in the Third World included a strong emphasis on engaging in the economic and political life of Latin America, with the hope that it would encourage reform rather than revolution.¹²⁴ Additionally, Kennedy continued Eisenhower-era covert efforts which targeted Fidel Castro's Communist government in Cuba. Although these CIA endeavors suffered a major setback after the failed April, 1961 Bay of Pigs Invasion, Kennedy maintained pressure on his covert agencies to deal with Castro until his assassination in 1963.¹²⁵

¹²³ Robert McNamara, "Recommended Long Range Nuclear Delivery Forces 1963-1967" (Washington D.C.: United States National Security Council, 1961), 2.

¹²⁴ Anna Kasten Nelson, "President Kennedy's National Security Policy: A Reconsideration" *Reviews in American History* 19:1 (1991), 10.

¹²⁵ Norman Friedman, *The Fifty Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2000), 255.

The public face of Kennedy's efforts in Latin America was formally announced at a White House ceremony on March 13, 1961. In front of a host of Latin American diplomats, JFK introduced the Alliance for Progress, a new venture by the United States to stimulate economic and social progress in the Western Hemisphere. His goal was for the Alliance to become a Marshall Plan for Latin America, designating the 1960's as the "decade of development" in which all Central and South American countries would enjoy significant developmental growth thanks to economic and social aid from the United States.¹²⁶ As a symbol of his initial commitment to this venture, Kennedy requested five hundred million dollars from Congress to combat illiteracy, hunger and disease in Latin America. Additionally, he challenged Central and South American institutions to work toward economic progress and social justice through a commitment to democratic principles.¹²⁷

From the beginning, the Alliance set lofty goals for itself, establishing a charter in August, 1961 which promised economic growth "not less than two and a half percent per year."¹²⁸ This predicted rate of economic development was important, because it formed the basis from which the other improvements to the societies would flow. Borrowing from Kennedy's domestic economic policies, the Alliance's strategists believed that additional spending would grow the Latin American economies, increasing revenue and underwriting the true social changes that were necessary for the Western Hemisphere to move out of the Third World. Unfortunately, this economic goal ignored both the history of the region and the surging population growth which the 1960's brought to the area. During the 1950's, the average growth rate in Latin America was just over one percent, approximately half of what Kennedy officials

¹²⁶ Stephen G. Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World: John F. Kennedy Confronts Communist Revolution in Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 9.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, 10.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 148.

believed was possible with the help of the Alliance.¹²⁹ This trend continued into the 1960's with growth rates remaining below two percent between 1961 and 1967, even for Alliance for Progress countries.¹³⁰ To compound this low rate of progress, the overall population of Latin America grew more than any other region in the world, averaging just under three percent per year. Kennedy and his officials acknowledged the surge in population but did not address it, believing that foreign aid provided by the Alliance would negate any ill effects.¹³¹

For its part, Kennedy's administration dedicated more resources than ever to the region. U.S. aid to Latin American countries doubled under Kennedy, totaling eighteen percent of U.S. foreign aid, in contrast to Eisenhower's nine percent.¹³² However, despite this new push for economic and social progress, the old anti-communist tendencies remained alive and well within the President's strategies. While Kennedy and his diplomats publically denounced military dictatorships like the Dominican Republic and Haiti, they also were harshly critical of democratically elected leaders who refused to explicitly follow Washington's lead on Communism.

The administration's actions towards Argentina are an excellent example of this juxtaposition of interests. The Argentine President, Arturo Frondizi, was a democratically elected leader whose ideals should have been an excellent fit for the U.S. goals and the Alliance for Progress.¹³³ One area where he publically disagreed with U.S. policy, however, was on relations with Cuba and the Soviet Union. Over the course of 1961 and early 1962, Frondzini maintained various diplomatic and trade oriented dialogues with these countries, including meeting with Che Guevara. The most damning act in Kennedy's opinion though, was the Argentine's decision to

¹²⁹ Ibid, 31.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 149.

¹³¹ Ibid, 163.

¹³² Ibid, 154.

¹³³ Ibid, 56.

abstain from a 1962 Organization of American States (OAS) vote on excluding Cuba. Secretary of State Dean Rusk noted after the vote that the Argentines had, “let us down” by choosing to withhold their vote.¹³⁴ The administration’s souring attitude toward Frondzini culminated on March 29, 1962, when it sat idly as Frondizi was forcibly removed from office by a group of military officers in a coup d’état. Despite U.S. policy against military coups, the new military leaders quickly took a firm stance against Communism and the State Department quietly resumed relations three weeks later, continuing to grant economic aid, totaling one hundred and sixty million dollars that year.¹³⁵

Clearly, the primary focus of Latin American policy in the Kennedy White House was confronting Fidel Castro’s influence in the region and preventing any other countries falling to a Communist revolution. The level of effort and drive with which Kennedy and his advisors acted on the issue reflected a deep seated passion for resolving the threat which they believed Cuba represented. This fixation on Castro began during JFK’s campaign for President, featuring prominently in his criticism of Eisenhower’s policy and his fiery anti-communist rhetoric.¹³⁶ Following the Bay of Pigs fiasco, the President intensified his condemnation of the Cuban state, even raising the possibility of unilateral intervention to a group of reporters the day after the catastrophe. Kennedy emphasized that while an invasion may presently be contrary to the United States’ obligations, “let the record show that our restraint is not inexhaustible.”¹³⁷ He also added, “If the nations of this hemisphere should fail to meet their commitments against outside

¹³⁴ Ibid, 60.

¹³⁵ Ibid, Page 62

¹³⁶ John F. Kennedy: "Speech of Senator John F. Kennedy, American Legion Convention, Miami Beach, FL",
October 18, 1960

¹³⁷ John F. Kennedy “Address by the President Before the American Society of Newspaper Editors, Washington, April 20, 1961” *American Foreign Policy* (1961), 300.

Communist penetration, then...this government will not hesitate in meeting its primary obligations, which are to the security of our nation.”¹³⁸

While Kennedy avoided going farther than this in his public discussions of a Cuban invasion, in the secrecy of closed government meetings his restraint was not as evident. Evidence of this is clear in an April, 1961 top secret NSC document titled, “Cuba and Communism in the Hemisphere.” The publication begins by evaluating the nature of Cuba’s threat to the U.S. and discussing various vulnerabilities which the administration could exploit, concluding after a healthy discussion that, “there is no sure way of overthrowing Castro short of U.S. military intervention.”¹³⁹ With this idea established, the policy paper outlines the risks and costs associated with an armed intervention, eventually deciding that, “the cost of eliminating Castro by military intervention would be substantial at the present time and under present circumstances...It is our judgement that these costs outweigh the advantages of intervention.”¹⁴⁰ So, although Kennedy and his advisors were taking considerable criticism for the Bay of Pigs, the NSC debated the idea of armed intervention only a few days later, deciding that circumstances did not favor this option. The final recommendation of the document is for the U.S. to first, accelerate efforts to use Cuban exiles, and second, move forward with efforts to quarantine and weaken the Castro regime, which included using the Alliance for Progress and the OAS against the leader.¹⁴¹

The most startling part of the NSC document is its timing, especially in relation to the failed effort in the Bay of Pigs. Although Kennedy’s policy toward Cuba remained static for the remainder of 1961, most likely due to the escalation of tensions in Berlin and the decision by the

¹³⁸ Ibid, 299.

¹³⁹ United States National Security Council. “Cuba and Communism in the Hemisphere” Washington D.C.: United States National Security Council (1961), 8.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 15.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 18.

NSC to focus on subversion, the prospect of a Cuban invasion remained a possibility, especially as Flexible Response's conventional build-up took shape. This is highlighted in a top secret memorandum sent by the JCS's Caribbean Survey Group to the Chief of Operations, Cuba Project on February 19, 1962. The subject of the memo is a series of proposed Cover and Deception exercises to be conducted off the coast of Cuba during the spring of 1962. While most of the document is routine military orders dictating the timing of the different movements, there are several sections where the desired results of each exercise is discussed, revealing a chilling and dangerous game which the Kennedy administration had undertaken. Overall, the memo concludes, the exercise plans and forces should be used to create the conditions for a hostile Cuban reaction and then, "lure or provoke Castro...into an overt hostile reaction against the United States...which would in turn create the justification for the U.S. to not only retaliate but destroy Castro with speed, force and determination."¹⁴² The implications of this goal are startling, because by this time Soviet advisors were already present on Cuban soil, raising the possibility of an accidental confrontation between two superpowers.

The world would get the superpower confrontation it feared later in 1962, representing not only a serious test for Kennedy and his advisors but the first real test of Flexible Response. JFK's containment strategy, which was characterized by an emphasis on addressing the entire conflict spectrum, was the result of a collaboration between the President and several of his trusted advisors, in contrast to Eisenhower's staff developed New Look. Both policies reflected its respective president's personal convictions, and approached the management and application of military force from hugely dissimilar perspectives. Overall, the most important distinction between the New Look and Flexible Response was Kennedy's willingness to maintain and field

¹⁴² United States Department of Defense Caribbean Survey Group. "Memorandum for the Chief of Operations, Cuba Project" (Washington D.C.: United States Department of Defense, 1962), 8.

conventional forces against Communist aggression, resulting in a rapid military buildup and the increased possibility that Soviet and American forces may inadvertently come into confrontation with one another. This idea will be important in the next chapter, as the actions and decision making of the Soviet Union is examined.

Chapter III Cuba, Khrushchev and the Missiles of October

The third area which this study must consider in order to determine Flexible Response's effect on the Cuban Missile Crisis is the circumstances surrounding Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev's decision to deploy the missiles to Cuba. Historiographically, the Soviet leader's gambit has been attributed to a wide collection of motivations. The two primary reasons for this trend was the limited number of Soviet sources available to historians before the end of the Cold War and Khrushchev's inconsistencies in his own recollection of the event.¹⁴³ The most common narrative associated with Khrushchev is that he intended for the missiles to bring parity to the Cold War missile race, allowing his lagging ICBM production to catch up while optimizing the intermediate range weapons which had already been developed.¹⁴⁴ The problem with this interpretation is that it runs contrary to the recollections of other Soviet leaders, like Anastas Mikoyan, who was one of Khrushchev's closet advisors. These men recall that Khrushchev was only thinking about Cuba's defense against an American invasion which they feared could come any day.¹⁴⁵ While the reality of the decision may never be known, the truth lies somewhere between the two narratives, and may be best understood by first examining Khrushchev and his policies.

When Khrushchev finally achieved unrivaled rule over the Soviet Union in July, 1957, he initiated his own political shift which shaped Soviet politics until he was forced from rule in 1964. Having endured the power struggle which resulted from Joseph Stalin's death in 1953, Khrushchev set out to revitalize the Communist Party which had become a "cult of personality"

¹⁴³ Norman Friedman, *The Fifty Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2000), 275.

¹⁴⁴ R.H. Baker, "Understanding Soviet Foreign Policy" *The RUSI Journal* 123:1 (1978), 51.

¹⁴⁵ Sergo Mikoyan, Svetlana Savranskaya, ed. *The Soviet Cuban Missile Crisis: Castro, Mikoyan, Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Missiles of November* (Chicago: Stanford University Press, 2012), 91.

under Stalin.¹⁴⁶ One of the most important priorities for the Soviet leader to this end was to distance himself and the Communist Party from Stalin's brutal legacy. With efforts beginning before his ultimate ascendance to power, Khrushchev set about this two ways. First, he sought renewed diplomatic partnerships with leftist countries like Yugoslavia, ending the self-imposed diplomatic isolation which resulted from Stalin's paranoia.¹⁴⁷ Second, Khrushchev attacked Stalinism for the damage which he believed it had wrought on Soviet society and the Communist Party. His most notable act towards this goal was his 1956 "Secret Speech" where he accused Stalin of betraying the revolution. While this speech was in many ways a political stunt, exposing the remaining Stalinists present in the government, it was an important beginning, allowing Khrushchev to frame his own ideas as a return to Lenin's Communist model.¹⁴⁸

For Khrushchev, who had spent almost his whole life in the Communist Party and believed in the socialist economic model, the final victory for Communism would come through an economically viable Soviet state and the continuing revolutionary struggle "by other means" around the world.¹⁴⁹ In many ways Khrushchev's ideas resembled Eisenhower's underlying motivations for the New Look, most likely due to the appreciation both leaders had for the terrifying power of atomic weapons. Khrushchev often expressed his opinion that the "unacceptable damage" accompanying a Soviet retaliation guaranteed that Eisenhower would not launch a first strike, and his visit to the U.S. in 1959 only strengthened this conviction.¹⁵⁰ The reality of Khrushchev's character was that he was a romantic, preferring to reject the cynical view of Stalinism where war would be the inevitable outcome of the clash between Capitalism

¹⁴⁶ Norman Friedman, *The Fifty Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2000), 190.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 189.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 190.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 214.

¹⁵⁰ Sergo Mikoyan, Svetlana Savranskaya, ed. *The Soviet Cuban Missile Crisis: Castro, Mikoyan, Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Missiles of November* (Chicago: Stanford University Press, 2012), 100.

and Communism. A good example of this attitude are remarks he made before his U.S. visit, emphasizing his wish, “to pass into history as a man who secured a long term détente in the cold war, a lengthy period of peace for the development of his people’s economy and well-being.”¹⁵¹ Ultimately, Khrushchev believed a long period of economic development was exactly what the Soviet system would need to overcome capitalism. Like Eisenhower, he recognized that economics was the newest weapon in the Cold War arsenal, and given the time, the Communist system would bring about the end of capitalism.¹⁵²

However, in order for his new Cold War “thaw” to work, Khrushchev would have to shed much of the waste which was present in the Soviet economy. As a starting point, the Soviet leader targeted the military, with the idea that the massive conventional forces of the Soviet Union could be reduced, allowing for a dividend toward raising Soviet economic potential.¹⁵³ However, the decrease he proposed would not be unilateral. Beginning in 1955, Khrushchev shifted a significant portion of the Soviet Union’s military industry toward developing missile technology.¹⁵⁴ As a result of this new emphasis, the Soviet Union would effectively lead the world in missiles, grabbing the rights to the first ICBM, satellite, and man in space. The system which Khrushchev developed attempted to substitute nuclear weapons for conventional capability, with the same long term benefit the New Look stressed: over time a nuclear missile would cost far less than a division of troops. This concept was important for the Soviets,

¹⁵¹ Viorela Dana Papuc, “A Thawing in the Cold War? Examining Nikita Khrushchev’s Visit to the USA, 15-27 September 1959” *FJHP Vol 25* (2008), 73.

¹⁵² Norman Friedman, *The Fifty Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press. 2000), 213.

¹⁵³ Nikita Khrushchev, “Khrushchev Memorandum to CC CPSU Presidium” History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, The Wilson Center (1959), 3.

¹⁵⁴ Norman Friedman, *The Fifty Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press. 2000), 213.

primarily due to the 5.7 million troops they accounted for in 1955, by far the largest military force in the world.¹⁵⁵

With this strategy in mind, Khrushchev began making substantial cuts to Soviet conventional forces. By 1961, the total number of Soviet troops was nearly cut in half, with approximately 2.7 million men cut from the military.¹⁵⁶ While this cutback appears devastating, especially when compared to Eisenhower's own reductions of only a few hundred thousand troops, Khrushchev firmly believed that Soviet security had in fact improved. He expresses this conviction clearly in a 1959 memorandum to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union: "What country or group of countries in Europe would dare to attack us, when we can virtually erase these countries from the face of the Earth by our atomic and hydrogen weapons and by launching our rockets to every part of the globe?"¹⁵⁷

Interestingly, Khrushchev's use of hyperbole is reminiscent of John Foster Dulles' own colorful rhetoric, from which the concepts of Massive Retaliation and Brinkmanship were born. While these two men were certainly not on friendly terms, the Soviet leader would later admit his appreciation for how Dulles and Eisenhower maintained stability in the U.S. conduct of the Cold War. Despite the exchanges of fiery rhetoric which often characterized this period, Khrushchev believed the risks for escalation were relatively low, thanks in part to Dulles' ability to, "reach the brink, as he put it himself, but he would never leap over the brink, and still retained his credibility."¹⁵⁸ So, although Khrushchev and Eisenhower's governments remained hostile to one another throughout the 1950's, their parallel goals and ideas regarding the use of strategic

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 211.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 211.

¹⁵⁷ Nikita Khrushchev, "Khrushchev Memorandum to CC CPSU Presidium" History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, The Wilson Center (1959), 2.

¹⁵⁸ Cold War International History Project. "Working Paper No. 6: Khrushchev and the Berlin Crisis (1958-1962)" (Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars, 1993), 26.

and conventional forces actually introduced a certain degree of stability to the Cold War. The importance of this concept would only be obvious after Kennedy became President, and the gulf which was present between the two world leaders became clear.

Initially, for Khrushchev and his strategies, Kennedy was in many ways “his candidate” in the 1960 U.S. Presidential election.¹⁵⁹ This was due primarily to the Soviet leader’s intense dislike for Republican Richard Nixon but also because of a series of favorable profiles developed about Kennedy by the Soviet embassy in Washington D.C. Khrushchev hoped that the possibility existed that Kennedy would become another Franklin Roosevelt with regards to foreign policy. In particular, FDR’s ability to bargain effectively was desired, raising the possibility of an easy resolution of the ongoing Berlin Crisis in Europe.¹⁶⁰ Unfortunately, the combination of the Bay of Pigs Invasion and the June, 1961 Vienna Summit, shattered Khrushchev’s expectations and left behind a lingering fear that Kennedy would be worse than Eisenhower in many ways. While Khrushchev acknowledged that the Bay of Pigs fiasco was primarily a product of the previous administration, Kennedy’s conduct made him appear weak to the Soviet leadership. His inability to cancel an operation he had misgivings for and his lack of resolve to bring it to a successful conclusion lead the Soviets to question his ability to govern.¹⁶¹

To Khrushchev this was an significant shortcoming, because instead of an American President who he could trust to maintain control over his foreign policy, Kennedy appeared to be a young man “in short pants” who was vulnerable to the massive military-industrial forces which Eisenhower had kept at bay throughout his presidency.¹⁶² Flexible Response’s new emphasis on conventional force only served to strengthen these worries because it deviated from the

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 21.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 21.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 23.

¹⁶² Ibid, 23.

established system which both countries had utilized to protect them from uncontrollable escalation. With the United States' renewed conventional tools, especially during the buildup around the Berlin Crisis, the possibility for an accidental or spontaneous conflict became too great for Khrushchev, potentially leading to his decision to settle for a wall between the two Berlins.¹⁶³ The settlement of the Berlin situation still left a great deal of uncertainty between the two leaders, especially surrounding Cuba and its growing importance in Khrushchev's plans for the expansion of Communism.

When Fidel Castro seized power from Fulgencio Batista in January, 1959, Khrushchev and the Communist leadership initially distrusted the revolutionary because he was not a member of the Cuban Communist Party.¹⁶⁴ However, with time this attitude would change, especially as Castro's rhetoric began to shift progressively to the left, thanks to Marxist influences like his brother Raul and close friend Che Guevara.¹⁶⁵ For Castro, Communism and the Soviet Union represented a new political and economic system for Latin America, one that would emphasize social justice over imperialistic gains. For the Soviets, Castro's revolution represented an opportunity to showcase to the Third World the benefits of Soviet-brand socialism, especially as the continued Communist revolution was increasingly dependent on the success of its influence in the Third World.¹⁶⁶ Primarily due to Khrushchev's new emphasis away from open confrontation and a "peaceful competition" between the superpowers, Communist China's Mao Zedong became progressively more hostile toward Soviet leadership of the global Communist movement. In Mao's opinion, Khrushchev's new policies were committing treason against the

¹⁶³ Ibid, 26.

¹⁶⁴ Norman Friedman, *The Fifty Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press. 2000), 213.

¹⁶⁵ Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2007), 171.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 71.

revolution, and the Soviet Union's new friendships with non-aligned countries like India threatened China's own regional power.¹⁶⁷

As Soviet leaders realized they would be unable to salvage relations with the Chinese, it became important for the Soviet Union to find a new client state who would demonstrate the successes of socialism, and Cuba represented this potential. In Castro Khrushchev found not only a willing participant but a country that was only ninety miles south of the United States, proving that socialism could threaten the capitalist dominance of the Western Hemisphere and demonstrating, "another sign of its triumphant march around the planet."¹⁶⁸ There was, however, a risk associated with the new Cuban venture, which became increasingly clear following the Bay of Pigs Invasion. If Cuba were to fail under U.S. economic or military pressure, Khrushchev's credibility within the Third World would be threatened, potentially allowing Mao and the Chinese to usurp Soviet hegemony over the Communist narrative. According to Anastas Mikoyan's recollection, Khrushchev was consumed with this idea in the spring of 1962, shortly before he proposed the Cuban missiles to the Soviet Central Committee.¹⁶⁹

Now that the Soviet position regarding Kennedy and Cuba has been established, it is important to focus next on the validity of the threat which Khrushchev perceived was against the Cuban state. As has already been previously discussed, the precedent set by Kennedy in the execution and aftermath of the Bay of Pigs left the Soviet leadership with a great deal of doubt toward any promises made by Kennedy or his advisors with respect to Cuba. This idea was only reinforced by a U.S. economic policy which remained hostile toward the island state throughout the early 1960's, causing a great deal of hardship for the Cuban people. In a 1962 meeting with

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 69.

¹⁶⁸ Sergo Mikoyan, Svetlana Savranskaya, ed. *The Soviet Cuban Missile Crisis: Castro, Mikoyan, Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Missiles of November* (Chicago: Stanford University Press, 2012), 95.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 91.

Shen Jian, the Chinese Ambassador to Cuba, Che Guevara explained the impact of the U.S. sanctions and embargo: “The Soviet Union has given lots of aid. We could cope with some basic problems by ourselves, but the overall situation is far from good.”¹⁷⁰ Paradoxically, instead of turning the Cubans away from their revolutionary ways, the U.S. policies only served to drive Castro further into the grip of Khrushchev and his Communist revolution. The real effect of these economic sanctions was the complete opposite of what the policy makers in Washington D.C. intended. To the Soviets, this illogical state of relations merely set the stage for Kennedy’s puzzling doublespeak with regards to the United States’ Cuban invasion plans.

In the previous chapter, the Kennedy administration’s outlook on a Cuban invasion was examined, demonstrating that the proposal was a high priority for the President and his advisors. Although agencies like the CIA and DoD were still secretly working on plans for the campaign, officially, Kennedy’s administration vehemently denied any intent to invade Cuba. The problem with this method of operation was that the Soviet Union also had an intelligence apparatus in place in the U.S. and Latin America, and these entities were very consistently sending reports to Moscow which contradicted the official U.S. narrative. Beginning six months prior to the May, 1962 Central Committee approval for the Cuban Missiles, a startling trend appears in the Soviet perspective which substantiates a great deal of Khrushchev’s worries.

The first dispatch from this six month period came from Guatemala, dated November 1, 1961. It contained an extensive report summarizing intelligence from the same source who identified the preparations for the Bay of Pigs. The Soviet source details what was believed to be training camps for Anti-Castro forces in anticipation for another invasion which they predict to be more violent than the April, 1961 effort. Special emphasis is placed on detailing the U.S.

¹⁷⁰ Zhang Qian, trans. “Memorandum of the Conversation between China’s Ambassador to Cuba Shen Jian and Cuban Finance Minister Ernesto “Che” Guevara, Havana” History and Public Policy Program Archive, The Wilson Center (1962), 2.

involvement in these camps, to include weapons, training and the presence of State Department officials in the vicinity of the camps.¹⁷¹ The next communique was a message sent to the Soviet Ministers of Defense and Foreign Affairs on February 21, 1962, identifying data received from a Soviet agent which suggested that the U.S. military was preparing a strategy which would provoke the Cuban government into using force, thus justifying U.S. action to remove the Cuban government.¹⁷² The most interesting detail of this message was that it came two days after the U.S. JCS approved the exercise plans which were detailed in Chapter 2, proving that although these decisions were “Top Secret”, the Soviet leadership was still readily informed, exposing Kennedy to suspicion.

Kennedy himself would be the subject of the next Soviet report, dated March 12, 1962. Alexei Adzhubei, Khrushchev’s son-in-law and editor of a major Soviet newspaper, made an important visit to Washington D.C. and met with Kennedy over breakfast in the White House. In Adzhubei’s report to Soviet leaders, he details an exchange between him and the President where Cuba is the central theme. During this conversation, Kennedy assures the Russian twice that the U.S. was not planning an invasion of Cuba. When Adzhubei attempts to challenge these remarks, citing the Bay of Pigs landings, Kennedy became forceful, saying, “Once I summoned Allen Dulles and rebuked him. I said to him: ‘learn from the Russians. When they had a tough situation in Hungary, they put an end to the conflict in just three days...and you, Dulles, couldn’t do a thing.’”¹⁷³ Because of Kennedy’s use of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution as an example, any Soviet leader reading this exchange would find his words quite confusing. The problem with this

¹⁷¹ Tanya Harmer, trans. “Information Memorandum of the Anti-Castro Cuban Émigré Forces (Mexico)” History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, The Wilson Center (1961)

¹⁷² “Report to the Soviet Minister of Defense and Minister of Foreign Affairs” History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, The Wilson Center (1962)

¹⁷³ Alexei Adzhubei, trans. Adam Mayle, “Alexei Adzhubei’s Account of His Visit to Washington to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union” History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, The Wilson Center, (1962), 4.

analogy is that the Soviet Army invaded Hungary in response to the revolution, a confusing detail when put in the context of a supposed argument why the U.S. would not invade Cuba. The Soviet leadership were left with two options of how to interpret Kennedy's comments. First, they could have concluded that he misspoke or used the wrong example unintentionally, however, this would be hard to believe given the President's talent for speaking well. The second conclusion they could have made was that Kennedy used the example intentionally, either as a form of thinly veiled threat or justification for U.S. action toward Cuba. Whatever Kennedy's real intent, given the U.S. administration's penchant for lies in this area and the intelligence from the previous months, at this point Khrushchev's apprehension with regards to Cuba had to be high.

Only five days after Adzhubei report reached the Central Committee, another troubling message circulated which should have removed any remaining doubts the Soviet leaders retained about Kennedy's promises. Although a significant portion of the report was later redacted, the remaining paragraphs illustrate a situation which, from the Soviet agent's perspective, was steadily moving closer to the U.S. invasion of Cuba. The first line of the statement sets this tone, plainly stating, "The USA has completed preparations for an invasion of Cuba."¹⁷⁴ Although the author admits that the invasion date had yet to be decided on by Kennedy officials, the details included support their opening statement. Specifically, the invasion was to be composed of Cuban counter-revolutionists traveling from Guatemala and Panama, with the support of U.S. forces, under a manufactured pretext claiming the, "appearance of military planes with Cuban Markings over the territory of one of the Central American countries."¹⁷⁵ It is hard to tell if the Soviet source was referring to the upcoming U.S. military exercise which has already been discussed or another scheme which the CIA may have been coordinating. Regardless of who this

¹⁷⁴ "Intelligence Report on US Plan to Attack Cuba" History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, The Wilson Center (1962)

¹⁷⁵ Ibid

latest alarming report denoted, its proximity to Khrushchev's travels to Bulgaria in May, 1962 are significant because it was during this visit that the Soviet leader allegedly had the first idea for a Cuban missile base.

According to Khrushchev's memoirs, the initial idea struck him as he was looking across the Black Sea and one of his aides mentioned the U.S. Jupiter missiles which were emplaced there.¹⁷⁶ As the notion developed in his mind, he supposedly invoked a Russian folk saying, telling the group he was with, "Why don't we throw a hedgehog into Uncle Sam's pants?"¹⁷⁷ Following his return to Moscow, Khrushchev began discussing the idea with all the highest ranking Soviet ministers, culminating in a series of Central Committee meetings where the subject was discussed and ultimately approved on May 24, 1962.¹⁷⁸ Unfortunately, it is impossible to conclude without a doubt what Khrushchev's motivation was regarding his idea and support for the decision. This is primarily due to Khrushchev's own inconsistent recollection regarding the matter after the crisis and in his memoirs published over ten years later. The predominant theory, which this study seeks to contest, draws from Khrushchev's memoirs, particularly his statement that: "our missiles would have equalized what the West likes to call 'the balance of power.'"¹⁷⁹ Fundamentally, this theory asserts that Khrushchev's made his decision because the Cuban missiles represented a chance to close the developing gap in missile capability which the U.S. held over the Soviet Union.

While there were several Soviet officials, particularly in the military, who supported this rational for the deployment, Sergo Mikoyan sheds a great deal of light on origin of this idea,

¹⁷⁶ Norman Friedman, *The Fifty Year War: Conflict and Strategy in the Cold War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2000), 275.

¹⁷⁷ Sergo Mikoyan, Svetlana Savranskaya, ed. *The Soviet Cuban Missile Crisis: Castro, Mikoyan, Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Missiles of November* (Chicago: Stanford University Press, 2012), 89.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 98.

¹⁷⁹ Strobe Talbott, ed and trans. *Khrushchev Remembers* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1970), 492.

emphasizing that Khrushchev only adopted the concept later. Based on the testament of his father, Anastas Mikoyan, Sergio highlights that during the Central Committee discussions, the minister of defense, Rodion Malinovsky, supported Khrushchev's idea to such a degree that the elder Mikoyan viewed him as, "a total flatterer."¹⁸⁰ Malinovsky's support for Khrushchev may have been due to his realization that the placement of missiles in Cuba would have automatically helped to rectify the significant strategic disadvantage which the Soviet Army had in the Cold War nuclear standoff. Soviet General Anatoly Gribkov would later recount Malinovsky's argument for the missiles which compared the ten minute flight time of the U.S. missiles in Turkey against the twenty five minute time of current Soviet ICBMs.¹⁸¹ The Soviet military leadership would continue to articulate this reasoning for the remainder of the venture and afterwards. This mode of thinking reflects a calculus which Khrushchev at the time believed was irrelevant, primarily due to his experience with Eisenhower's style of deterrence.¹⁸²

The basis for a superior theory regarding what motivated Khrushchev to secretly deploy forty nuclear missiles and over forty four thousand Soviet troops and technicians to the island of Cuba has already been established in this chapter. The remaining element can most effectively be captured in Khrushchev's own words. Following the Cuban Missile Crisis, there was a great deal of negotiation between Castro and Anastas Mikoyan regarding which particular weapons had to be withdrawn in order to satisfy the U.S.-Soviet agreement. In the midst of these deliberations, Khrushchev wrote to Mikoyan, "We assumed a big risk, and we knew that we were assuming a

¹⁸⁰ Sergio Mikoyan, Svetlana Savranskaya, ed. *The Soviet Cuban Missile Crisis: Castro, Mikoyan, Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Missiles of November* (Chicago: Stanford University Press, 2012), 92.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, 93.

¹⁸² *Ibid*, 100.

big risk because a real danger of thermonuclear war emerged at the tensest moment...Everything has been done for the sake of Cuba, not for our sake.”¹⁸³

Khrushchev’s original goal for the missiles was simply to defend the new Communist nation from a U.S. invasion that appeared imminent. He did this for several reasons. First, because of its proximity to the U.S. and the mounting pressure from the ongoing Sino-Soviet split, Cuba held a significant place in the Soviet Union’s hopes for the continuing Communist revolution. Second, Kennedy’s inexperience and risk averse nature made Khrushchev much less confident in the President’s ability to maintain control over his forces in a tense nuclear situation. Finally, the conventional build up initiated by Flexible Response increased the likelihood of an uncontrollable escalation triggered by a limited engagement by making it easier for the U.S. to engage in a non-nuclear fashion. Additionally, for Cuba specifically, more conventional troops also meant that U.S. forces could be committed to a full invasion without compromising NATO’s defense of Europe and the increased emphasis on COIN could potentially make them more effective against Castro’s revolutionary forces.

¹⁸³ Ibid, 96.

Conclusion

On the evening of October 22, 1962, U.S. President John F. Kennedy exposed the Soviet Union's deployment of offensive weapons to Cuba in a televised speech broadcast around the world. His words rang with the attitude and determination that had publicly characterized his administration since its beginnings twenty-two months earlier. To conclude his speech, JFK echoed a sentiment which would not have been out of place in one of Truman or Eisenhower's speeches, "Our goal is not the victory of might, but the vindication of right, not peace at the expense of freedom, but both peace and freedom, here in this hemisphere, and we hope, around the world."¹⁸⁴ In that moment, in front of not only the American people but much of the world, it was important for Kennedy to adopt the classic Cold War rhetorical weapons of peace and freedom because of the catastrophic risks associated with the steps against Cuba he had just outlined. However, the message he conveyed, particularly its strong ties to his predecessors, was not indicative of the style and actions which his administration had labored for throughout its tenure.

In reality, Kennedy and his advisors had taken office compelled by a "generational imperative" to reform the United States' conduct of the Cold War, particularly its strategy to contain the spread of Communism.¹⁸⁵ This strategy, known as Flexible Response, sought to address the Soviet Union through a combination of increased nuclear and conventional capabilities, carefully controlled by the President and financed through a deliberate growth of the U.S. economy. Through a careful analysis of both Eisenhower's New Look and Flexible Response, this study has successfully demonstrated that Kennedy's new policies were a definite

¹⁸⁴ John F. Kennedy, "Radio and Television Report to the American People on the Soviet Arms Buildup in Cuba, October 22, 1962" John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum (1962) <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/sUVMCh-sB0moLfrBcaHaSg.aspx> (Accessed October 21, 2015)

¹⁸⁵ John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 197.

shift from their predecessors. In particular, the United States' increase in conventional strength and tactics increased the possibility of a conventional confrontation between the Superpowers, upsetting the careful balance which Eisenhower and the Soviet Chairman, Nikita Khrushchev, had maintained.

With the help of Soviet leaders' recollections and declassified Soviet correspondence, it has been established that from the Soviet perspective, Cuba faced a clear and present danger of invasion by U.S. forces, threatening a significant element of Khrushchev's plans for continuing the Communist revolution. In response to this threat, the Soviet leader conceived of the deployment of Soviet troops, missiles and bombers to the island state in order to secure it against any U.S. intimidation. Ultimately, the shift initiated by Kennedy and his policy of Flexible Response, stimulated the Soviet leader's underlying motivations and fears, leading to the Cuban Missile Crisis. After nearly a week of tense interaction, the two countries were able to resolve the situation without the use of nuclear weapons, establishing a legacy which still characterizes both Kennedy and Khrushchev today.

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