11-2016

Consequence, Compromise, and Combination: The American Decision to Blockade Cuba during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962

Wilson Alexander
Taylor University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/aujh>

Part of the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Alexander, Wilson (2016) "Consequence, Compromise, and Combination: The American Decision to Blockade Cuba during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962," *Armstrong Undergraduate Journal of History*. Vol. 6 : Iss. 2 , Article 4.

DOI: 10.20429/aujh.2016.060204

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/aujh/vol6/iss2/4>

This article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. It has been accepted for inclusion in Armstrong Undergraduate Journal of History by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu.

Consequence, Compromise, and Combination:

The American Decision to Blockade Cuba during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962

Wilson Alexander

Taylor University

(Upland, Indiana)

The Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 stands out as one of the most tension-fraught periods in American history. The action of the Soviet Union, deploying offensive weapons to the island nation of Cuba, shocked the United States¹ and put the Kennedy administration to the test. As Graham Allison and Phillip Zelikow put it, “In retrospect, this crisis proved a major watershed moment in the Cold War. Having peered over the edge of the nuclear precipice, both nations edged backward toward détente. Never again was the risk of war between them as great as it was during the last two weeks of October 1962.”² The United States decided to respond to the Soviet threat in Cuba with a blockade of the island, and ordered that the missiles be removed. This decision by the United States was the outcome of consequence analysis and the combining and compromising of available options.³

¹ For a narrative of the crisis, see Robert F Kennedy, *Thirteen Days: a Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1969).

² Graham T Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: Longman, 1999), 77.

³ This decision process befits the Rational Actor and Government Politics models of government behavior, discussed by Allison and Zelikow in *Essence of Decision*, 18, 294, 295. Accordingly, the Rational Actor model will focus on a group’s (in the case of this paper, the United States’) goals, available choices, outcomes of those choices, and eventual decision (18). The Governmental Politics model will focus on the decision as the result of “bargaining along regularized channels among individual members of the government.” (295). This paper will devote the most focus to the perceived outcomes or consequences of various actions and how that influenced the decision making process.

The story of the Cuban Missile Crisis began with the revolution in Cuba. Fulgencio Batista ruled 1950s Cuba and, while the capital city of Havana was a destination site for tourists, most of the island lived in poverty. Fidel Castro, an exiled Cuban, sought to change the situation and, along with Che Guevara, a man he met in exile, returned to the island of Cuba and began a revolution. By 1959 Castro and Guevara had reached Havana, and Batista had left the country; Castro was now in charge. As relations with the United States began to deteriorate, Castro reached out to the Soviet Union for help. In the context of a poor Cuba-US relationship and increasing Cuba-USSR ties, the Soviet Union began to send weapons to Cuba.⁵

The United States' discovery of the missiles in Cuba began in mid-summer 1962, when the CIA discovered an increased Soviet presence in Cuba. CIA director John McCone then postulated that the Soviet Union was trying to tip the international nuclear balance of power in its favor. He knew that the USSR had fewer intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) than intermediate range ballistic missiles (IRBMs) and medium range ballistic missiles (MRBMs). The ICBMs could reach the US from the USSR, but the IRBMs and MRBMs could not. McCone reasoned that Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev was moving some of his shorter-range nuclear missiles to the island of Cuba where they could better threaten the United States. However, McCone was unable to win support for his theory in either the White House or the CIA. The situation changed when pictures from an October 14, 1962 U-2 flight showed the presence of MRBMs in Cuba, thus beginning the Cuban Missile Crisis.⁶

⁵ Valerie Hansen and Kenneth Robert Curtis, *Voyages in World History* (Boston, MA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2010), 880 and 881.

⁶ Linda K. Miller and Mary McAuliffe, "The Cuban Missile Crisis," *OAH Magazine of History* 8, no. 2 (January 1, 1994): 25, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25162944> (accessed April 18, 2013).

President John F. Kennedy and his advisors were presented with a daunting challenge on the morning of October 16, 1962.⁷ They had to determine what should be done about the Soviet offensive missiles on America's doorstep. In the days that followed, this group of men traded ideas and suggestions for what the United States should do in response to the Soviet actions. Members of the group had ideas, and a decision was made as each man, and the group as a whole, weighed the consequences of each option. For JFK and virtually all of his advisors, non-action was never an option.⁸ The missiles had to be removed; this was the goal of all of the discussions and suggestions that followed. The decision that US action was necessary came because the President's advisors thought that non-action would hurt world opinion of America, would be bad for its alliances, and would weaken its position if the United States was challenged over Berlin.⁹ The type of action to be taken came down to two alternatives: military action (mainly in the form of an air strike) and non-military action (mainly in the form a blockade). Lines were drawn between, and within, these two camps and were influenced by what their respective proponents perceived the consequences would be. Those in the air strike camp shared some views of the consequences; however, they differed on other issues. One point of agreement amongst those arguing for an air strike was on the response of the Soviet Union to such an act. They did not think it would be adverse enough to avoid military action. General Maxwell Taylor and the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not think the Soviets would retaliate, at least not with nuclear weapons.¹⁰ Former Secretary of State Dean Acheson thought that Soviet retaliation would come, but he supported a strike against only the missiles thinking this would decrease the chance of a

⁷ Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, 1.

⁸ Ibid., 11; May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes*, 172.

⁹ May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes*, 172.

¹⁰ Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, 14; May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes*, 78.

major Soviet counter-move.¹¹ Another advantage to the military action plan was that it, unlike a blockade, would remove the missiles in Cuba. This was espoused by McGeorge Bundy, the President's national security affairs advisor.¹² He argued that a blockade would not remove the missiles, its effects would not be felt right away, and the United States' might be pressured to enter into negotiations. Secretary of the Treasury Douglass Dillon, and John McCone supported his suggestion.¹³ The President himself even indicated on the first few days that at least an air strike on the missile sites would be necessary.¹⁴

Division existed, however, even in the air strike group as to the size of the strike and whether it should be announced or unannounced. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, McGeorge Bundy, Douglass Dillon, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, and John McCone all agreed that any strike should not have any advance warning.¹⁵ Reasons for this thinking stemmed from fear that, if a strike were announced ahead of time, the USSR would ready their missiles and strike back if attacked (McNamara). They could say that if attacked, they retaliate (Dillon). Still others argued that a surprise attack would ensure that the missiles were not hidden (Joint Chiefs of Staff), and yet another (McGeorge Bundy) was concerned that, if consulted, the United States allies they would be resistant to an air strike because they have lived under the threat of Soviet missiles for years.¹⁶ Dean Rusk disagreed, however, stating that US

¹¹ United States Department of State et al., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume XI of Cuban Missile Crisis and Aftermath* (Washington D.C.: Government print office, 1996), 97, 98; May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes*, 171, 172.

¹² Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, 8.

¹³ United States Department of State et al., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963. Volume XI, Cuban Missile Crisis and Aftermath*, 118. Discerning the stances of both men before the meeting in which the actual decision was made is rather difficult because at separate times, both indicated a preference towards a blockade. May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes*, 121; United States Department of State et al., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963. Volume XI, Cuban Missile Crisis and Aftermath*, 104.

¹⁴ United States Department of State et al., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, 43.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 64, 35, 38, 39; May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes*, 120.

¹⁶ United States Department of State et al., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, 39, 35.

allies should be informed prior to an attack, but the USSR, the OAS, and NATO should be told as the strike was taking place. Rusk thought the opinion of the world would be on the United States' side, as would a good number of US allies.¹⁷ Chip Bohlen, a Soviet expert, and previous ambassador to the USSR, was wary of an unannounced strike even though he supported non-military courses of action,¹⁸ while Dean Acheson thought the United States should alert allies, but not consult anyone.¹⁹ Consequence-fueled disagreements also arose over the nature of the attack. McNamara and the Joint Chiefs of Staff were in favor of a strike against the missile sites and all other offensive weapons (primarily planes), while Dean Acheson, Bundy, Rusk, and McCone supported a smaller strike against the missile sites.²⁰ General Taylor argued that the Soviets could still attack the US if only the MRBM sites were taken out, but Bundy pointed out that a surgical strike would be advantageous because it would eliminate the missiles that were the cause of the entire problem.²¹ Those who advocated an air strike also thought that a blockade would be too little too late because it would not solve the problem of the existing missiles.²²

The other choice before Kennedy and his advisors was non-military action. Most of the people who advocated non-military action did so because they feared the negative results that a strike on Cuba would bring. The fear of a Soviet response leading to general (and probably nuclear) war was a major reason several people involved in the decision-making process advocated taking non-military action. This was a reason why Ambassador to the United Nations, Adlai Stevenson, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, and Robert Kennedy, the president's

¹⁷ Ibid., 98.

¹⁸ May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes*, 46; United States Department of State et al., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, 96.

¹⁹ United States Department of State et al., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963. Volume XI, Cuban Missile Crisis and Aftermath*, 97, 98. Acheson did not, however, state when these alerts should be made.

²⁰ Ibid., 69; Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*, 117.

²¹ United States Department of State et al., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, 69, 39, 40.

²² Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, 12. This point is expressed by General Taylor United States Department of State et al., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, 132.

brother and Attorney General, came to support the blockade plan.²³ McNamara also stated that he thought an air strike against all the missiles in Cuba was impractical.²⁴ However, the bigger argument against military action (in particular a surprise attack) was that it was too reminiscent of Pearl Harbor. George Ball, Under Secretary of State stated this concern, as did Robert Kennedy and McNamara.²⁵ The morality of an air strike was the most discussed matter of the first five days of the crisis according to Robert Kennedy.²⁶ In addition, RFK touted a blockade's flexibility and "fewer liabilities...."²⁷ Other arguments against an air strike were that the United States' relationship with its allies would be hurt if the US acted without telling them²⁸ and that a blockade would force Khrushchev to make the next move, be it escalation of the situation, negotiation of the issues, or removal of the missiles.²⁹

As the time for a decision drew near, peoples' opinions began to change regarding the type action that the United States should take, and this was driven by what the perceived consequences would be. Secretary of State Dean Rusk, who had been a member of the air strike faction, came to support a blockade, thinking that starting with an air strike would cause great a risk of escalation, and that an attack without consultation was immoral.³⁰ He also advocated a

²³ May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes*, 198, 199; United States Department of State et al., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, 133, 140.

²⁴ United States Department of State et al., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, 35, 36.

²⁵ Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, 8; United States Department of State et al., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, 90, 140, 129. This was the biggest issue for RFK. He stated that "America's traditions and history would not permit such a course of action [a surprise air strike]... This, I said, could not be undertaken by the U.S. if we were to maintain our moral position at home and around the globe. Our struggle against Communism throughout the world was far more than physical survival-it had as its essence our heritage and our ideals, and these we must not destroy." Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, 16, 17. George Ball's title can be found in *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁶ Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, 17.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁸ George Ball, Robert McNamara, Chip Bohlen, and Adlai Stevenson used this argument. United States Department of State et al., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, 94, 96, 129, 101. It was also advocated by Robert Lovett May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes*, 172.

²⁹ Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*, 120.

³⁰ United States Department of State et al., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, 107, 133.

blockade because it provided a “pause” so that further action could be decided.³¹ CIA Director McCone and Secretary Dillon stated that an air strike could come as a consequence to Soviet refusal to remove the missiles after a blockade was implemented and an ultimatum issued.³² As the decision-making process continued, the group appeared to unite behind a blockade.³³ However, several differences of opinion emerged as to what should follow such a blockade. Some thought that the United States should attempt to negotiate removal of the missiles.³⁴ McNamara thought an ultimatum was too risky and that the United States would have to make some concessions in order to get the missiles removed, and Adlai Stevenson believed the United States should suggest a summit meeting to negotiate missile removal because they would end up in one anyway.³⁵ McCone stated that he was opposed to any attempts to negotiate missile removal, thinking they would hurt relations with allies in the Western Hemisphere; Dillon joined him in his opposition to negotiations.³⁶

As seen, the options that were suggested by Kennedy’s advisors were influenced by what the perceived consequences to certain courses of action would be. However, the primary decision maker in this situation was the President himself, and his decision was the one that mattered most. As Robert Kennedy said, “it was now up to one single man. No committee was going to make this decision.”³⁷ On October 20, 1962 President John F. Kennedy decided to go with the blockade-ultimatum option, with a possible air strike coming later, if necessary.³⁸ The main

³¹ May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes*, 190.

³² John McCone, Douglass Dillon, and Robert Kennedy favored this idea Ibid., 196, 197. It also should be noted that ascertaining exactly how consequence analysis influenced the switch by John McCone and Douglas Dillon is rather difficult given the ambiguity of the sources used in this paper on the issue.

³³ Ibid., 171.

³⁴ Ibid., 191.

³⁵ United States Department of State et al., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, 128, 148.

³⁶ May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes*, 196, 197.

³⁷ Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, 25.

³⁸ United States Department of State et al., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, 137, 138.

reasons he decided on this course of action were the decreased risk of escalation leading to nuclear war, the fact that the United States would be sacrificing the moral high ground that it held during the Cold War if a surprise air strike were done, and the belief that even with an air strike, some missiles could still remain in Cuba. While admitting that both a blockade and an air strike by the United States would provoke a Soviet Response, JFK thought the blockade would provide the least dangerous response.³⁹ JFK also did not share the opinion of the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the USSR would not respond to a US attack, and stated in his October 19 meeting with them that he wanted to avoid escalation to nuclear war.⁴⁰ The President himself said, “Now, the question really is to what action we take which lessens the chances of a nuclear exchange, which obviously is the prime failure – that’s obvious to us....”⁴¹ Another issue that factored into the President’s decision was the perceived immorality of an attack, as his brother Robert comments, “The strongest argument against the all-out military attack, and the one no one could answer to his satisfaction, was that a surprise attack would erode if not destroy the moral position of the United States throughout the world.”⁴² The last reason that caused President Kennedy to swing in favor of a blockade was that an air strike could not even guarantee complete removal of the missiles.⁴³ The President chose the blockade-ultimatum route rather than the blockade-negotiate route saying that the United States should not begin with negotiations, but that they could come in the future.⁴⁴ However, he rejected any thought of giving up the US military bases at Guantanamo because it would convey a sense of fear and panic by the United States to the rest of

³⁹ Ibid., 133; May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes*, 186.

⁴⁰ Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, 14; May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes*, 136.

⁴¹ May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes*, 145.

⁴² Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, 27. Kennedy later stated that “an air strike had all the disadvantages of Pearl Harbor.” United States Department of State et al., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, 156.

⁴³ United States Department of State et al., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, 156.

⁴⁴ Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, 14; United States Department of State et al., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, 134.

the world.⁴⁵ Kennedy chose the alternative that, according to him, produced the best consequences, while at the same time he give himself room for further action should the situation change.

Besides considering how the perceived consequences of various actions influenced the decision makers in America's government during the Cuban Missile Crisis, the United States' decision to blockade (or "quarantine," a term proposed by Legal Adviser Leon Meeker instead of "blockade"⁴⁶) Cuba can also be viewed and understood through the lens of the combination of various options available to the President's advisors before they made their recommendation to JFK.⁴⁷ The deliberations on the US response to the Soviet threat in Cuba began with multiple advisors calling for different courses of action, but by the time the blockade was chosen, most of them were behind it.⁴⁸ How this happened is a classic example of combination and compromise in government decision-making. The Joint Chiefs of Staff led by General Maxwell Taylor called for an air strike that would take out all of the offensive threats in Cuba and McCone was with them.⁴⁹ Dean Acheson supported a surprise strike against only the missile sites, and McGeorge Bundy shared this opinion.⁵⁰ Although, he claimed that the President requested that he make sure the air strike option stay available.⁵¹ Dean Rusk was also of this opinion, calling for a limited strike after one week, and that the US inform a few allies ahead of time, but not tell Khrushchev or NATO until the strike was happening.⁵² Those in the blockade camp early on were Robert

⁴⁵ United States Department of State et al., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, 134, 148.

⁴⁶ May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes*, 171.

⁴⁷ The discussion of the Governmental Politics Model view of the crisis in the paper is adopted from Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*, 338–347.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 346.

⁴⁹ May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes*, 78; United States Department of State et al., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, 99.

⁵⁰ Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*, 341, 342.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, note 48, p. 371.

⁵² United States Department of State et al., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, 98.

McNamara, who thought a large-scale airstrike (one against the Soviet planes brought in as well as the missiles), was the only one that could be carried out, and should not be considered.⁵³

McNamara was the first one to suggest the idea of a blockade, on Tuesday the 16th, and by the next day was its most vehement supporter in the group.⁵⁴ Robert Kennedy soon shared this opinion and with him were USSR advisor Llewellyn Thompson and Under Secretary of State George Ball.⁵⁵ Still, Adlai Stevenson and Chip Bohlen urged against military action (or at least military action not preceded by diplomatic action), advocating diplomacy and contact with other nations, particularly the USSR before action was taken.⁵⁶ October 18 was an important day in the decision making process. Positions were hardened on this day and at the end of an 11:00 am meeting the president suggested that the group break up into two groups, one examining the blockade course of action, and the other, an air strike.⁵⁷ The options had been whittled down to two choices. That evening, JFK sought the advice of Robert Lovett (a former Secretary of Defense) who indicated that he was in favor of a blockade. That night, a smaller group of Kennedy's advisors began to lean towards a blockade;⁵⁸ the President noted this turn of events when he said, near midnight, "During the course of the day, opinions had obviously switched from the advantages of a first strike on the missile sites and on Cuban aviation to a blockade.... The consensus was that we should go ahead with the blockade beginning on Sunday night."⁵⁹

⁵³ Ibid., 36.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 88; Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, 12.

⁵⁵ Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, 15; United States Department of State et al., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, 99; May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes*, 121.

⁵⁶ May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes*, 77, 130; United States Department of State et al., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, 102, 98.

⁵⁷ United States Department of State et al., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, 109.

⁵⁸ May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes*, 170, 171. Robert Kennedy says this was the consensus of most of the group as well Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, 21.

⁵⁹ May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes*, 172.

The next day, President Kennedy met with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and they presented him with a three-pronged plan of action. First, they suggested a surprise air strike on all missiles as well as weapons that could be used against the US or any other nation. Surveillance of the island and the implementation of a blockade would follow. President Kennedy seemed dissatisfied with this plan (further showing the growing momentum for a blockade) saying that the blockade decreased the chance of escalation to the point of war. After this, Kennedy left for a campaign trip and urged his brother and Presidential Council Ted Sorenson to unite the group.⁶⁰ This began a day of crucial meetings, one in particular which would heavily influence the opinion of the group and, in turn, the President. In the course of one meeting the group split into two groups to work out what the blockade and air strike alternatives would look like. U. Alexis Johnson, the Deputy Under Secretary of State was in charge of the blockade route and was joined by Leon Meeker, Paul Nitze (Assistant Secretary of Defense), Edward Martin (Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America), Roswell Gilpatric (Deputy Secretary of Defense), and Llewellyn Thompson.⁶¹ The air strike group was headed by McGeorge Bundy, and had Douglass Dillon, Dean Acheson, and General Taylor. McCone was asked to join this group, but thought that he should refrain because of his position on the Intelligence Board.⁶² The groups met and then came back together and critiqued each other's plan. While this was taking place, a seismic event occurred in the decision making process.⁶³ Both Secretaries Dillon and McNamara suggested that an air strike could come sometime after the blockade, and Robert Kennedy began to argue for a blockade as an initial action with others following, thinking that this was the obvious course of action.⁶⁴ The

⁶⁰ Ibid., 174, 186, 188. Sorenson's title is given in Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, 8.

⁶¹ United States Department of State et al., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, 119, 120. The official's titles are given in Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, 8.

⁶² United States Department of State et al., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, 120.

⁶³ Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, 23.

⁶⁴ May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes*, 190; United States Department of State et al., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, 121, 122.

meeting adjourned with the seeds of compromise firmly planted in the minds of the advisors, seeds that would soon bear the fruit of changed minds in the meetings to come. The president returned the next day for the meeting that would decide the course the US would take in response to the Soviet threat.⁶⁵

The fate of humanity hung in the balance as the National Security Council met on the 20th of October 1962.⁶⁶ This meeting showed the changes of opinion that occurred since the previous one. At the outset, only General Taylor, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and McGeorge Bundy favored beginning the US response with an air strike. All others supported a blockade of Cuba first, but disagreements existed as to what should be done after that. The three post-blockade responses that were considered were a blockade with a subsequent ultimatum to Khrushchev to remove the missiles, potentially followed by an air strike if this demand was not met (supported by Robert Kennedy, Douglass Dillon, and John McCone), a blockade to suspend any Russian action and then make a decision (favored by Dean Rusk), and lastly, a blockade after which the United States would negotiate removal of the missiles (favored by Robert McNamara, Adlai Stevenson, and Ted Sorensen).⁶⁷ The impact of the suggestion to merge the blockade and air strike routes can be seen in that both Dillon and McCone, who the previous day had supported the air strike, had changed positions to favor beginning US action with a blockade. Evidence of the compromise was further seen when McCone stated that he was opposed to an air strike, but also did not think the blockade was sufficient to meet the challenge. Also, both McCone and Dillon suggested that a time period of seventy-two hours be given to the Russians to remove the missiles, and an air strike be conducted if they did not comply.⁶⁸ McNamara stated that a

⁶⁵ May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes*, 190.

⁶⁶ United States Department of State et al., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, 126.

⁶⁷ May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes*, 191.

⁶⁸ United States Department of State et al., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, 132.

negotiation should follow the blockade while Adlai Stevenson pressed that the United States offer to make concessions around the world.⁶⁹ Kennedy, however vetoed any US concessions, or suggested negotiations at the beginning, and had made his decision in favor of a blockade, coupled with an ultimatum and possibly an air strike.⁷⁰ Later, he confirmed to John McCone that he had chosen the blockade-ultimatum position advocated by McCone.⁷¹ The next day, this decision was solidified in several choices the president made with regard to his speech to the nation; however, he remained somewhat aloof as to exactly what would come after the missile-removal demand.⁷²

The effects that consequence analysis and compromise between and combination of available options is very evident in President Kennedy's address to the nation on October 22, 1962, detailing the Cuban Missile Crisis and the United State's response.⁷³ Kennedy reiterates his view that escalation to nuclear war and the moral problems with a surprise attack on Cuba are the two main consequences he wished to avoid. He flatly stated America's opposition to war, adding, "We have no wish to war with the Soviet Union..." Kennedy also asserted his belief that the course of action chosen by the United States was consistent with the character of the United States.⁷⁴ In addition, Kennedy spoke of the superior moral character of the United States, especially when compared to the Soviet Union.⁷⁵ The compromises and combinations of options

⁶⁹ May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes*, 193; United States Department of State et al., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, 134.

⁷⁰ May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes*, 202.

⁷¹ United States Department of State et al., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, 137.

⁷² Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*, 345.

⁷³ John F. Kennedy, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, John F. Kennedy, 1962, January 1 to December 31, 1962* (Washington, DC: USGPO, 1963), 806–809.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 807, 808, 809.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 806–809. Kennedy portrayed the Soviets as liars (806, 807), he stated the America had never transported missiles "under a cloak of secrecy and deception" as the Soviets did, nor is America, unlike the USSR, domineering, and forcing its system of government on other nations, and the US is "a peaceful and powerful nation..." (809), he points out the United States quarantine will be more humane than the Soviet's 1948 blockade of Berlin (807, 808).

that resulted in the decision made by the President are apparent in his speech, too. In particular, he had decided to side with McCone and Dillon by leaving room for an air strike or any other action in case it was necessary.⁷⁶ He stated that the current action “may only be the beginning,” and that the army was being readied for any action.⁷⁸ Furthermore, JFK says he was unsure of how the situation will turn out, and multiple times he said that the United States would meet Soviet action with a necessary response.⁷⁹ The compromise is further seen in the fact that an ultimatum (further showing his choice of the blockade-ultimatum track⁸⁰) was issued to Khrushchev, with promised action if the order was not heeded,⁸¹ and in the calls for diplomatic action (something suggested by Chip Bohlen⁸²) in the OAS and the UN.⁸³ Also worth noting is that president Kennedy did not invite Khrushchev to a summit, but invited him to end the arms race. This is yet another example of a rejection of the blockade-negotiate plan.⁸⁴

In conclusion, the American decision to blockade the island of Cuba in response to the Soviet deployment of missiles to that island during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 was the result of consequence analysis on the part of the decision makers, as well as the compromising

Lastly he contrasts the USSR as makers of a “clandestine, reckless, and provocative threat to world peace....” and the US as a nation that has “in the past made strenuous efforts to limit the spread of nuclear weapons.” (808).

⁷⁶ May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes*, 202.

⁷⁸ Kennedy, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, John F. Kennedy, 1962, January 1 to December 31, 1962*, 807, 808.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 808, 809.

⁸⁰ May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes*, 202.

⁸¹ Kennedy, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, John F. Kennedy, 1962, January 1 to December 31, 1962*, 808, 809.

⁸² United States Department of State et al., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963. Volume XI, Cuban Missile Crisis and Aftermath*, 96, 99.

⁸³ Kennedy, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, John F. Kennedy, 1962, January 1 to December 31, 1962*, 808.

⁸⁴ Robert Kennedy elaborates on the pressure the advisors were feeling, and their disagreements during the morning meeting on October 19. Ibid.

⁸⁶ Robert Kennedy elaborates on the pressure the advisors were feeling, and their disagreements during the morning meeting on October 19. Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, 21, 22.

and combining of available options. This can be seen in the views of President Kennedy's advisors as well as in his own thinking about the issue and is plainly stated in his climactic address to the nation in response to the crisis. The lens of time can sometimes cloud our perceptions of the past, giving the appearance that, because a situation was resolved peacefully, the danger of that situation was somehow minimal, and the appropriate course of action was obvious. However, the Cuban Missile Crisis was anything but safe and the United States' response anything but clear. The peaceful end to the crisis was not the result of the inevitable triumph of rationality, but of a long, tenuous interchange between American leaders, and their counterparts in the Soviet Union, a process that began with the American decision to impose a blockade.

About the author

Wilson Alexander is an undergraduate student at Taylor University, where, in addition to school, he is a member of the football team and actively involved in the community. Two of his main academic interests are history and International Relations, and he hopes to do research and write for a think tank or a university after graduation.