

Khrushchev's Decision Making during the Cuban Missile Crisis

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"Khrushchev's Decision Making during the Cuban Missile Crisis" analyzes the Cold War characterizations of Khrushchev's decision making during the Cuban Missile Crisis versus post Cold War characterizations. In doing so, the essay finds that Cold War scholars described Khrushchev's decision making as calculated, reasonable, and justifiable but post Cold War scholars described his decisions as risky. Such differing assessments are likely due to the significantly greater material available to post Cold War scholars; a number of U.S., Soviet and Eastern European sources have been declassified. The USSR side of the Cuban Missile Crisis has continually been neglected and these sources have helped shine a light on this side.

The Cuban Missile Crisis occurred in October of 1962 and was the closest that the world came to experiencing its first nuclear weapons exchange. To the alarm of U.S. President John F. Kennedy and his fellow American citizens, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev had his nation's military deploy nuclear tipped missiles to Cuba. After a U.S. imposed naval blockade of Cuba and negotiations between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the U.S., the crisis ended. It was a peaceful settlement that primarily involved the removal of missiles from Cuban soil, the removal of U.S. missiles from Turkey, and a U.S. non-invasion pledge of Cuba.

After the events of the Cuban Missile Crisis, scholars began to publish their assessments of Secretary Khrushchev's decision-making ability. His decisions have been continually debated, especially whether he made a sound decision to deploy the missiles in the first place. Generally, historians writing from the 1960s to the 1980s appear to believe that the USSR's move in placing missiles on Cuban soil was relatively calculated, reasonable, and justifiable. Further highlighting this belief of caution, scholars also believed that the Soviet Union's assessment was that such a deployment would not result in a strong reaction from the United States. Moreover, they tended to see Khrushchev's decision as a means to provide the USSR with a strategic military advantage and to maintain the status quo of other nations not having nuclear weapons.¹

However, the assessment of Khrushchev's decision-making drastically changes following the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s. Scholars began to show that the Soviet Union's deployment decision was risky, especially since there is recently unearthed evidence to suggest that the Soviets believed that it would prompt a strong American reaction. Further lending credence to this idea is that Secretary Khrushchev may have been emotional in defending Cuba, especially since he suffered humiliation by having the U.S. place missiles in Turkey, directly pointed at the Soviet Union.

¹ At this point, it is important to point out that not all authors are particularly clear in distinguishing between the USSR and Secretary Khrushchev. Unless the author pointed out otherwise and with Secretary Khrushchev being a clear and undisputed leader of the Soviet Union, the USSR and the Secretary's decision-making are seen as synonymous within this paper.

Although it is still challenging for historians to accurately assess Khrushchev's decision making, the wealth of previously declassified sources from primarily the United States, the Soviet Union, and Eastern Europe since the end of the Cold War allows for a deeper analysis of the significant discrepancies of the scholarship produced between the 1960s and 1980s and the scholarship that has surfaced since the early 1990s. This, in turn greatly adds to the historiography of the Soviet side of the Cuban Missile Crisis, which has been eclipsed by the predominate historiography of the American side. The available evidence shows that Khrushchev's decision to place nuclear missiles on Cuba in 1962 was a much riskier and emotional move than previously understood by historians of the Cold War.

From the 1960s to 1980s, many scholarly articles indicate that Secretary Khrushchev's decision to deploy nuclear missiles was not a particularly radical move. One author implies that the missile's presence in Cuba was a natural non-aggressive military decision from the Soviet Union's perspective; after all, USSR missile placement in Europe already threatened Western European nations (including American allied nations) with little resistance. Moreover, the same was true vice versa; American weapons throughout Europe threatened the USSR. There seemed to be little reason for Secretary Khrushchev's decision for USSR missile placement in Cuba, which threatened the United States, to be any different.² This was further supported by then National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy who believed that Khrushchev might have decided to deploy missiles to Cuba to counterbalance the US weapons in Europe.³

Further reinforcing the belief that the Soviet Union acted cautiously was the USSR's belief, prior to the crisis, that the United States would also see the deployment as a moderate move and unworthy of reaction. From the Soviet Union's perspective, they believed that the United States would not interfere based on a lack of American actions during and after the disastrous U.S. sponsored Bay of Pigs invasion. During the failed Bay of Pigs invasion, the Soviet Union saw the United States as reluctant to commit its own forces; most crucially, during the invasion, the United States did not provide air support as originally planned. Even after the failed invasion, the United States did not interfere with USSR military assistance to Cuba.⁴ Even though military assistance was relatively substantial; one author writes, "large shipments of tanks and artillery accompanied by several thousand technicians and military adviser" were sent to Cuba.⁵ In the eyes of the Soviet Union, they saw the United States as continuing this cycle of non-involvement with Cuba when

²William R Kintner, "The Projected European Union and American Military Responsibilities," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 348 (July 1963), accessed July 24, 2016, doi:10.2307/1035512, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1035512>.

³ Leopoldo Nuti, "Italy and the Cuban Missile Crisis," in James G. Hershberg and Christian F. Ostermann, eds. "The Global Cuban Missile Crisis at 50: New Evidence from Behind the Iron, Bamboo, and Sugercane Curtains, and Beyond," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, No. 17/18, Fall 2012, Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars, 661.

⁴Arnold L. Horelick, "The Cuban Missile Crisis: An Analysis of Soviet Calculations and Behavior," *World Politics* 16, no. 03 (April 1964), doi:10.2307/2009577.

⁵Robert A Pollard, "The Cuban Missile Crisis: Legacies and Lessons," *The Wilson Quarterly* (1976-) 6, no. 4 (1982), 149.

the USSR would deploy their nuclear missiles to the island. In sum, the USSR partly made their decision to deploy nuclear missiles based on seemingly sound history of U.S.-Cuban relations.⁶

Scholars also believed that time was on the Soviet side. For any reaction to be made by the Americans, a multitude of events would have to occur, and, by then, nuclear missiles would be firmly employed. American decision-making, especially on such a significant matter, and actual implementation of such decisions would take time. As argued by researchers, this may have been enough time for American citizens and its government to become used to the idea of a nuclear-armed Cuba.⁷ It was immaterial whether Secretary Khrushchev knowingly committed a radical or non-radical decision to deploy missiles to Cuba, since the United States would simply be too slow in reacting.

Authors of the 1960s to 1980s also generally seemed to believe that the Soviet Union placed its nuclear missiles on Cuban soil because of the advantages that it brought to the USSR. One author writes that the Soviet Union decided to place nuclear missiles on Cuban soil because it provided them with an advantage in nuclear parity that they needed. The missile placement onto Cuba provided a quick and relatively inexpensive way to strategically benefit the Soviets; instead of developing new and/or building additional missiles, a relatively simple placement of missiles in Cuba greatly enhanced the striking reach of the USSR.⁸ This was pointed out by the French leadership who wrote, “that the direct Soviet threat against the United States has become seriously more acute with the installation in Cuba.”⁹ However, the missiles in Cuba would not have provided a *significant* strategic benefit. Instead it provided a, “quick fix.”¹⁰ The missiles in Cuba were vulnerable to attack and Soviet Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) technology was significantly lower than that of the Americans.¹¹ This reinforces the idea that Secretary Khrushchev was acting relatively cautiously; if it was a significant strategic benefit, the move could be more readily classified as radical or risky as radical moves typically enjoy significantly higher rewards.

Another set of advantages for a deployment of missiles to Cuba would have included areas of Soviet foreign policy, especially as it pertained to China at a time of strained Sino-Soviet relations. One scholar points out that the Soviets hoped that their success in Cuba would cause the Chinese to trust the Kremlin in its nuclear defense and not develop nuclear missiles of their own. This would boost the USSR’s sense of security since China, a bordering nation to Russia, would not one day threaten the USSR with nuclear weapons. Alternatively, the Soviets may have hoped that their missiles being stationed in Cuba would have resulted in a Western and USSR signed peace treaty denying Western Germany to develop nuclear missiles of their own in return for removal of USSR missiles from Cuba. Again, in the same described manner as China, this would boost the USSR’s sense of security. The author writes that neither of these situations, China or

⁶ Horelick, “The Cuban Missile Crisis: An Analysis of Soviet Calculations and Behavior” 380.

⁷ Horelick, “The Cuban Missile Crisis: An Analysis of Soviet Calculations and Behavior” 383.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Garrett J. Martin, “French Documents on the Cuban Missile Crisis,” in Hershberg and Ostermann, eds. “The Global Cuban Missile Crisis at 50,” 751.

¹⁰ Pollard, “The Cuban Missile Crisis: Legacies and Lessons,” 155.

¹¹ Ibid.

West Germany, would have, “tilt(ed) the real balance of military power.”¹² At that point, neither China nor West Germany had nuclear weapons, so deploying nuclear weapons to Cuba was merely a matter of maintaining the status quo in these regions. This basic rationality of maintaining the status quo reinforces the idea that Secretary Khrushchev was acting in moderation.

Despite Secretary Khrushchev having to eventually dismantle and move the nuclear missiles out of Cuba, authors have pointed out that the result was favorable for the Soviet Union (and the United States). Secretary Khrushchev also allegedly “regarded the Cuban Missile Crisis aftermath as a positive turning point in the Cold War.”¹³ In an even larger context, “The 1963 Hotline Agreement, the Limited Test Ban Treaty, and a peaceful stabilization of the situation in Berlin”¹⁴ as well as a decrease in disputes between the two nations were argued as beneficial to easing tensions following the Cuban Missile Crisis. However, these gains are rather moderate in nature, and these gains could be attributed to other reasons besides the ending of the Cuban Missile Crisis. In a roundabout fashion, this partially falls in line with the USSR acting cautiously. If the Soviet Union had acted radically, it stands to reason that they would have had significant potential gains and/or significant potential losses. On the other hand, if the Soviet Union had acted reasonably, they would have had moderate gains and/or moderate potential losses. The Soviet Union lost their missiles in Cuba (a moderate loss as it simply maintained the status quo of Cuba being non-nuclear) and gained moderate results in lowering Cold War tensions.

Finally, other scholars point out that Secretary Khrushchev had won moderately favorable results. Specifically, those scholars argue that fear caused the USSR to back out of its decision to deploy missiles in Cuba. If nuclear war did occur as a result of the crisis (a seemingly strong possibility at the height of the crisis), the USSR could potentially lose many of its oppressed satellite USSR member nations; USSR satellite nations were generally not willingly part of the USSR and may have seen nuclear war as a chance to break away from the USSR.¹⁵ Therefore, the USSR’s slightly favorable results, in this context, were a continuation of being able to keep their member states together (or, rather, a maintenance of the status quo).

The view of Secretary Khrushchev and/or the USSR acting justifiably, reasonably, and in a calculated manner starts to change with the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s when historians began to have access to previously declassified archival materials from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. One author argues that Khrushchev did not make a cautious move at all, and, in fact, he argues quite the opposite. In direct contrast to previous authors, he argues that the potential benefits of having missiles deployed in Cuba were very high, and the risks were also qualified as being very high. Moreover, the chances of war with the U.S. or having to remove the missiles under American pressure were deemed higher than the potential benefits. The Soviet Union knew the risks were high for a missile deployment and believed that there was a tremendous

¹²Pollard, “The Cuban Missile Crisis: Legacies and Lessons,” 156

¹³D. A. Welch, “Crisis Decision Making Reconsidered,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 33, no. 3 (September 1, 1989), doi:10.1177/0022002789033003003. 440

¹⁴Welch, “Crisis Decision Making Reconsidered,” 440

¹⁵Kintner, “The Projected European Union and American Military Responsibilities,” (accessed 24 July 2016)

danger that the Americans would both discover the missiles as well as react aggressively to such a discovery.¹⁶

As opposed to previous discussion that centered around time being on the side of the USSR due to the American decision-making process, one scholar has pointed to the length of time for nuclear weapons setup as a hindrance to the Soviet efforts. The missiles did stand a strong chance of being discovered by the Americans, due to the time/effort required for transporting and setting up such a large-scale nuclear missile deployment along with its associated equipment. Secretary Khrushchev himself even believed that such a large-scale operation would be detected by Americans and was informed as such by several advisors. It was only due to the pressures from the Soviet Ministry of Defense that the operation proceeded as planned.¹⁷ In this context, Khrushchev's decision to move nuclear weapons to Cuba was a risky gamble, especially due to his fears of detection. Evidence of Khrushchev's doubts was likely unavailable and/or classified so it is unlikely that scholars writing between the 1960s and the 1980s could account for this in their assessments.

Moreover, evidence suggests that many in the Soviet leadership, including Khrushchev, believed that President Kennedy would aggressively react to the presence of nuclear missiles in Cuba. American officials informed Soviet leaders via private and public channels that a crisis would develop if the USSR placed nuclear missiles on Cuban soil. Therefore, the available evidence suggests that Khrushchev was acting relatively recklessly; he was not only making a gamble but it was a gamble that he knew he might lose.¹⁸ Such highly classified information regarding public and private channels between the United States and the Soviet Union was likely unknown to scholars writing between the 1960s and the 1980s.

The view of the Soviet need to gain an advantage in nuclear parity is also presented in a different light by historians writing since the end of the Cold War. Unlike the authors before them, those historians use a broader context; they explain why the Soviet Union *needed* the advantages, focusing primarily on the USSR losses. These losses include, but are not limited to, the largest United States military buildup during peacetime and the belief that the United States would attack Cuba. Further adding to these losses was the suffered humiliation from President Kennedy's administration at the proclamation that the long-believed missile gap between the USSR and the United States (with the USSR having the advantage) was a myth.¹⁹ The USSR not only underwent this humiliating statement but it was also true; American satellites could determine that they had four times the number of land-based ICBMs, in comparison to the Soviets. One author writes that Khrushchev "knew that the United States had strategic nuclear superiority and was beginning to act accordingly."²⁰ The available evidence shows that Secretary Khrushchev did receive

¹⁶Mark L. Haas, "Prospect Theory and the Cuban Missile Crisis," *International Studies Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (June 2001), doi:10.1111/0020-8833.00190.

¹⁷Haas, "Prospect Theory and the Cuban Missile Crisis," 255.

¹⁸Haas, "Prospect Theory and the Cuban Missile Crisis" 256.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 253.

²⁰Richard M. Pious, "The Cuban Missile Crisis and the Limits of Crisis Management," *Political Science Quarterly* 116, no. 1 (March 2001), doi:10.2307/2657821, 85.

information that this superiority was temporary but also that the Pentagon leadership wanted to conduct a preventative war against the Soviet Union while they had this advantage.²¹ Secretary Khrushchev even believed that the United States had the upper hand domestically. He stated, “the United States had the highest standard of life and the most efficient means of production in the world.”²² In other words, all these losses seemed to indicate that the United States possessed the upper hand in the Cold War. This is why Secretary Khrushchev had to do something to preserve the USSR and cut back on its losses. In this vein, Secretary Khrushchev certainly had “strong incentives to try to change the status quo.”²³

Another reason why the status quo needed to be changed, from the Soviet Union’s perspective, was the issue of Turkey. The Americans had stationed missiles in Turkey, which had enough range to directly threaten several Soviet Union cities. The missiles became operational in April of 1962 and, likely not coincidentally, this was the same time that Secretary Khrushchev decided on deploying USSR missiles in Cuba. On one occasion, Secretary Khrushchev even went so far as declaring Turkey as an American puppet; this highlights his views of the United States having unfair strategic benefits well beyond its own territorial limits.²⁴ Not only did Khrushchev perceive the stationing of missiles in Turkey as an unfair situation, but he was humiliated by the missiles being able to directly threaten the USSR.²⁵

Moreover, the available evidence shows that Khrushchev felt an emotional commitment to Cuba primarily brought about by Castro’s revolutionary fervor that reminded him of his early days during the Russian Revolution of 1917. Unlike others in the Soviet leadership who saw Soviet-Cuban relations as a lost cause, Khrushchev was adamant about supporting Castro’s government and even encouraged other Soviet bloc nations like Czechoslovakia to provide military aid to Cuba.²⁶ This helps to support the argument that Secretary Khrushchev did not act in a cautious or calculated manner and may have acted more out of emotion and affinity for a new communist regime in Latin America. It may also explain why influential Che Guevara, Cuba’s Minister of Industry and President of the National Bank, characterized the Soviet proposal to deploy weapons on Cuban soil as “radical.”²⁷ This last statement was only revealed by the recent disclosure of

²¹Aleksandr Fursenko, Timothy J. Naftali, and R Fursenko, *One Hell of a Gamble: Khrushchev, Castro, Kennedy and the Cuban Missile Crisis, 1958-1964* (London: Pimlico, 1999).

²² *Ibid.*, 22.

²³Haas, “Prospect Theory and the Cuban Missile Crisis,” 246.

²⁴Pious, “The Cuban Missile Crisis and the Limits of Crisis Management,” 87.

²⁵Sergo Mikoyan, *The Soviet Cuban Missile Crisis: Castro, Mikoyan, Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Missiles of November*, ed. Svetlana Savranskaya (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012).

²⁶ “Czechoslovakia-Cuba Relations and the Cuban Missile Crisis, 1959-1962: Evidence from the Prague Archives” (Documents provided by Oldich Tuma, translated by Linda Mastalir, and introduced by James G. Hershberg), in Hershberg and Ostermann, eds. “The Global Cuban Missile Crisis at 50,” 393

²⁷ Memorandum of Conversation between Ernesto “Che” Guevara and Chinese Ambassador Shen Jian, Havana, 1 December 1962, in Hershberg and Ostermann, “The Global Cuban Missile Crisis at 50,” 104; Jennifer B. Petersen, “Che Guevara”, *History Reference Center*, 2005

Chinese foreign ministry materials.²⁸ The fact that such important quotations come from Chinese sources indicates that scholars of today have greater access to materials unknown to scholars of the past. Moreover, this reveals that, in addition to American, Soviet, and Cuban sources, scholars can now draw from the wide range of archival materials that help historians analyze Khrushchev's decision making related to the Cuban Missile Crisis.

As mentioned above, a successful deployment of Soviet nuclear missiles to Cuba could change the worsening position of the USSR to its benefit in the Cold War competition with the United States.²⁹ A deployment of missiles would aid in a worldwide buildup of the USSR's own forces, which would address its concern of the American military buildup and the missile gap. Plus, the USSR's concern of an invasion of Cuba could be thwarted by a nuclear deterrent. Thirdly, the Soviet concern of an attack on its soil could be mitigated by having a nuclear deterrent so close to the United States homeland. Moreover, it is possible that a nuclear presence in Cuba could present enough of a victory to distract Soviet citizens from their low standards of living. Finally, just as nuclear missiles stationed in Turkey would threaten USSR cities, it would be a balance to have nuclear missiles stationed in Cuba threatening American cities. A reasonable move would not alleviate these concerns; radical action was needed.

Perhaps most radical of the USSR's decisions was the amount of authority that the local Soviet commander had in Cuba. He was authorized to launch nuclear missiles at the United States *without* additional authorizations or codes from Moscow. Considering that such a launch would likely ignite into a full-blown nuclear conflict between the USSR and the United States, a more cautious move would certainly have not provided the local commander such authority.³⁰

Robert McNamara, who served as the Secretary of Defense during the Cuban Missile Crisis, further reinforced the view that Soviet Union's move in deployment of nuclear missiles was indeed a radical one. In his writings after the Cold War, he argued that humans are too fallible and nuclear weapons are too dangerous for a hair trigger alert policy to be in place.³¹ Considering that a singular individual from the Soviet Union, the local commander in Cuba, had such a power as mentioned above, strongly suggests that the USSR acted rashly.

There is even evidence to suggest that Secretary Khrushchev acted rashly *during* the crisis. With the knowledge that President Kennedy was soon to address the United States public detailing the missile presence in Cuba, Secretary Khrushchev met with the presidium (with the Cold War secrecy, content of such meetings was unlikely to be available to scholars writing in the 1960s to 1980s). The now available evidence shows that he provided three options: announce the extension of the Soviet nuclear defense umbrella over Cuba, provide the Cubans with the authority to use

²⁸ "Sino-Cuban Relations and the Cuban Missile Crisis, 1960-62: New Chinese Evidence" (Documents provided by Shen Zhihua and Sergey Radchenko, translated by Zhang Qian, and introduced by James G. Hershberg and Sergey Radchenko), in Hershberg and Ostermann, eds. "The Global Cuban Missile Crisis at 50," 104.

²⁹ Haas, "Prospect Theory and the Cuban Missile Crisis" 254.

³⁰ Graham Allison, "The Cuban Missile Crisis at 50: Lessons for U.S. Foreign Policy Today," *Foreign Affairs* 91, no. 4 (July 2012), accessed August 3, 2016, doi:10.2307/23218035, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23218035>.

³¹ Robert S McNamara, "Apocalypse Soon," *Foreign Policy*, no. 148 (January 20, 2005), accessed August 4, 2016, doi:10.2307/30048011, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30048011>.

Soviet weaponry on the island for defense, or allow Soviet troops stationed at Cuba to be granted the authority to defend themselves with short-range nuclear weapons. All three of these options express very little hope for diplomatic measures to take effect, as all options could have easily escalated into nuclear warfare. However, “he was dissuaded from taking a hasty decision by his hawkish defense minister.”³² Secretary Khrushchev also stated, “the only way to save Cuba is to put missiles there.”³³ His seemingly diplomatic style also conveys a sense of risk taking; he expanded upon his initial proposal of removing missiles from Cuba in return for a U.S. pledge of non-invasion of Cuba with a later proposal to remove bases from Turkey and Pakistan.³⁴ This is yet another clear example that scholars writing between the 1960s and the 1980s would not have been able to make assessments on the whole picture for lack of evidence. The Russian Protocol 62, previously classified, provided the evidence that it was Secretary Khrushchev, not hawkish Kremlin officials, who upped the ante of diplomatic stakes. This evidence describes Secretary Khrushchev as the one who increased his demands for the U.S. to remove its bases in Turkey and Pakistan.³⁵

This rash boldness of defending Cuba at whatever the cost, and not including diplomatic options, was also reflected before the crisis. Secretary Khrushchev, in 1960, stated “if need be, Soviet artillerymen can support the Cuban people with their rocket fire, should the aggressive forces in the Pentagon dare to start an intervention against Cuba.”³⁶ He also stated that, in the event of America reacting aggressively to the missile deployment, he would send the Baltic Fleet.³⁷ Finally, it seems that Secretary Khrushchev was determined to make the deployment decision, regardless of the risk. He received advice from several advisors stating that Fidel Castro may not even desire such weapons. After all, the last military aid request from Cuba asked for conventionally armed missiles and a 10,000 Soviet troop deployment.³⁸ Instead of taking this advice under consideration, he “wait(ed) out storm...(to) get his way.”³⁹ It was a hard sell to his advisors with two meetings and four days for him to get his colleagues on board. Reinforcing the idea that the deployment of missiles was a rather bold decision, Secretary Khrushchev painted the deployment of missiles as an “offensive policy”; this was not a defensive or a moderate policy.⁴⁰

³² Michael Dobbs, *One Minute to Midnight: Kennedy, Khrushchev, and Castro on the Brink of Nuclear War* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2008), 34

³³ Fursenko & Naftali, “One Hell of a Gamble: Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958-1964,” 178.

³⁴ Timothy Naftali, “The Malin Notes: Glimpses Inside the Kremlin during the Cuban Missile Crisis,” in Hershberg and Ostermann, eds. “The Global Cuban Missile Crisis at 50,” 301.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (New York: Norton, W. W. & Company, 2003), 533

³⁷ “Sino-Cuban Relations and the Cuban Missile Crisis, 1960-62: New Chinese Evidence” (Documents provided by Shen Zhihua and Sergey Radchenko, translated by Zhang Qian, and introduced by James G. Hershberg and Sergey Radchenko), in Hershberg and Ostermann, eds. “The Global Cuban Missile Crisis at 50,” 24

³⁸ Timothy Naftali, “The Malin Notes: Glimpses Inside the Kremlin during the Cuban Missile Crisis,” in Hershberg and Ostermann, eds. “The Global Cuban Missile Crisis at 50,” 299.

³⁹ Fursenko and Naftali, “One Hell of a Gamble,” 180.

⁴⁰ Timothy Naftali, “The Malin Notes: Glimpses Inside the Kremlin during the Cuban Missile Crisis,” in Hershberg and Ostermann, eds. “The Global Cuban Missile Crisis at 50,” 300.

It should be noted that, ultimately, Secretary Khrushchev took the more diplomatic approach towards the end of the crisis by agreeing to withdraw missiles from Cuba, much to the displeasure of many fellow communist nations, including Cuba and China. Moreover, despite Castro urging Secretary Khrushchev to start a nuclear war in the event of an American attack on Cuba, the Soviet leader ultimately chose a less aggressive path.⁴¹ However, this article is primarily concerned with analyzing Khrushchev's decision-making in planning the crisis and partly during the crisis. And, in this respect, such decision-making was reckless and risky.

Interestingly, the Cuban Missile Crisis has been described at one point as “the most widely studied crisis of the postwar period.”⁴² Unfortunately, most of the studies on the Cuban Missile Crisis focused on the American perspective with comparatively little analysis regarding the Soviet perspective.⁴³ As McGeorge Bundy aptly pointed out, “although vast amounts have been written about the crisis, we still have no solid account of one half of it – the Soviet side.”⁴⁴

This was primarily because much of the evidence from “the other side” of the Cold War was neither available nor readily accessible. As such, there were relatively few scholarly works on Secretary Khrushchev's decision-making. Surprisingly, historians and other scholars writing between the 1960s and the 1980s often included the mention of the USSR gaining benefits but gave little consideration of the possible negatives to such a deployment. The positives primarily reference the moderate gains to be expected from the deployment; this includes a strategic military boost of having missiles that could easily strike the United States homeland and maintaining the status quo of China and West Germany not having nuclear weapons. These studies therefore characterize Khrushchev's decision-making in deploying nuclear missiles to Cuba as moderate, cautious, and calculated.

The picture of a risk taking, rash, and emotional Khrushchev in his decision-making regarding nuclear missile deployment to Cuba begins to emerge in the scholarship that relied on primary evidence that surfaced since the end of the Cold War. These studies emphasize that Khrushchev had knowledge that the Soviet missiles placed on Cuba had a strong chance in being detected and that he understood that such a deployment decision was fraught with risks. They also show that Khrushchev's bold move was driven by his desire to protect Cuba against all odds and to change the status quo of the Cold War competition with the United States.

This article has argued that the disparity of views between Cold War scholars and post-Cold War scholars regarding Khrushchev's decision-making towards Cuba is primarily due to the lack of primary sources that produced such different assessments. Following the end of the Cold War, several key Soviet and American archives with records pertaining to the Cuban Missile Crisis have been declassified by their respective governments, making records available to scholars

⁴¹Ibid., 300

⁴²Welch, “Crisis Decision Making Reconsidered,” 431.

⁴³Mark Laffey and Jutta Weldes, “Decolonizing the Cuban Missile Crisis,” *International Studies Quarterly* 52, no. 3 (September 2008), accessed August 8, 2016, doi:10.2307/29734251, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29734251>.

⁴⁴McGeorge Bundy, “The Presidency and the Peace,” *Foreign Affairs* 42, no. 3 (1964), doi:10.2307/20029695, 359

(although the U.S. side is still ahead in declassification process).⁴⁵ Moreover, Cuban Missile Crisis records, including meetings involving the major players of the crisis, from Eastern Europe, China, and Latin America have been declassified and have helped shed light on the topic.⁴⁶ All of these sources combined helped shine a light on the Soviet side on the Cuban Missile Crisis, which has been a side missing from the clear majority of the scholarship written on the crisis. They all helped present a view of Khrushchev who was much more risk prone, emotional, and rash in his decision to deploy nuclear missiles to Cuba than previous historians, who saw him as cautious and moderate, have ever been able to piece together.

⁴⁵Melissa Akin and Brian Humphreys, "On the paper trail of Cold War secrets," *Christian Science Monitor*, August 19, 1986.

⁴⁶"Introductions" (Two introductions referenced with one written by James G. Hershberg and the other by Thomas S. Blanton), in Hershberg and Ostermann, eds. "The Global Cuban Missile Crisis at 50," 7-8, 12.

