

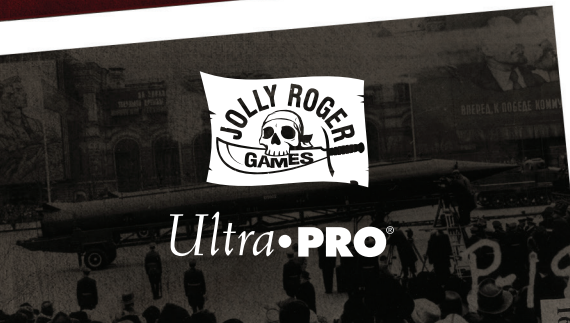


“WE WERE EYEBALL-TO-EYEBALL AND  
THE OTHER FELLOW JUST BLINKED”

— DEAN RUSK  
US SECRETARY OF STATE

# ★ 13 DAYS ★

THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS, 1962





# 13 DAYS THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

2 Players • Ages 10+ • 45 min.

## COMPONENTS

- 1 Game board
- 39 Strategy cards (13 UN, 13 US & 13 USSR)
- 1 Personal letter card
- 13 Agenda cards
- 34 Influence cubes (17 red & 17 blue)
- 6 DEFCON markers (3 red & 3 blue discs)
- 6 Flag counters (3 US & 3 USSR)
- 1 Prestige marker (yellow disc)
- 1 Round marker (black disc)

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## GAME SET UP

- A Place the Game board on the table and decide which player controls US (blue) and USSR (red).
- B Each player takes all 17 Influence cubes in their colour and their 3 flag counters.
- C Place 1 blue Influence cube in both Italy and Turkey, and 1 red Influence cube in both Berlin and Cuba (military) as indicated on the Game board.
- D Place the Round marker on the first space of the Round track.
- E Place the Prestige marker in the middle of the Prestige track.
- F Place the 3 blue and the 3 red DEFCON markers on the indicated starting spaces of the DEFCON tracks.
- G Take the 13 Agenda cards, shuffle them and place the deck facedown near the Game board.
- H Take the 39 Strategy cards, shuffle them and place the deck facedown near the Game board.
- I The US player starts the game with the Personal letter. Place it faceup on the table in front of him.

Will update board, cards and flag counters later.



## OBJECTIVE

As President Kennedy or Premier Khrushchev you control of one of the superpowers during the tense days of the Cuban Missile Crisis. You win 13 Days by emerging from the crisis with the most Prestige.

During the game you earn Prestige by dominating the nine different battlegrounds around the globe or by dominating the political, military or world opinion arenas. Each round you select a hidden Agenda that will award Prestige to the dominating player, so be careful to not reveal your true Agenda too soon while trying to outwitting your opponent.

Players take turns playing Strategy cards to place or remove Influence cubes striving to gain majorities across the Game board. The tricky part: if you push too far, you risk losing the game by triggering global nuclear war! What will history remember you as: a hero, a villain or a coward?

## GAME STRUCTURE

13 Days is played over 3 rounds. During each round both players will go through 7 steps as outlined below:

1. ESCALATE DEFCON TRACKS
2. DRAW AGENDAS
3. STRATEGY CARDS & INITIATIVE
4. SAVE CARD FOR AFTERMATH
5. WORLD OPINION BONUS
6. RESOLVE AGENDAS
7. CHECK FOR NUCLEAR WAR
8. ADVANCE ROUND MARKER

### 1. ESCALATE DEFCON TRACKS

Escalate all DEFCON markers one step (even on the first turn).

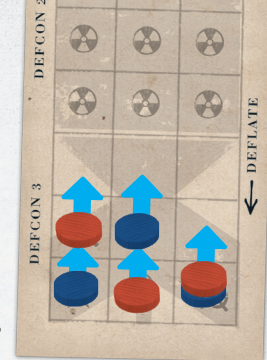
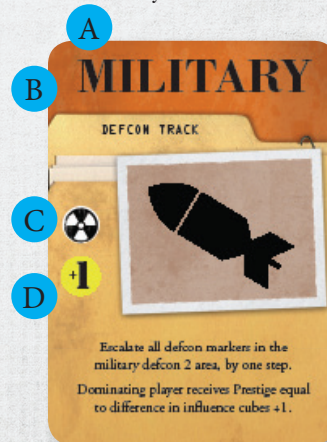
### 2. DRAW AGENDAS

First shuffle the Agenda deck, then deal 3 cards to each player. Each player then take their flag counters and place them on the 3 battlegrounds and/or DEFCON tracks they drew.

Both players secretly select one Agenda card and tuck it facedown beneath the Game board where indicated. These Agendas are revealed at the end of the round. The two other Agenda cards are returned to the deck without revealing them.

The Agenda cards contain the following information:

- A The name tells which specific battleground or DEFCON track they relate to on the Game board.
- B The colour coding, symbols and subheading indicate whether or not they are related to politics, military or world opinion.
- C If and how the card affects DEFCON.
- D If they add a bonus to the Prestige gained once revealed.







## Strategy Card Overview

- A. Name
- B. Faction (US, USSR or UN)
- C. Command Cubes
- D. DEFCON
- E. Event Text
- F. Historical Text

### 3. STRATEGY CARDS & INITIATIVE

Each player draws 5 Strategy cards (keep the cards hidden from your opponent). You may look at them. Then the player trailing on Prestige determines which player has initiative this round. If the players are tied, the USSR determines the initiative (this is always the case in the first round). The player with initiative must play the first Strategy card.

There are two ways in which a Strategy card can be played: either for Command, or for the Event. Each play of a Strategy card represents half a day of the missile crisis.

#### COMMAND

You can play all Strategy cards for Command. If played for Command you may either place or remove (not both) the number of Influence cubes shown on the card to or from a single battleground. You are allowed to use a card for less than the number of Influence cubes shown. A battleground may never hold more than 5 Influence cubes from one player.

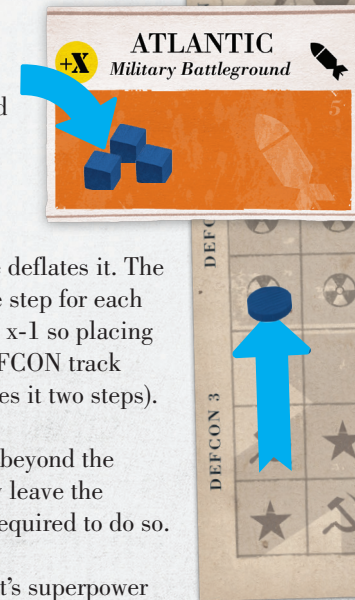
There is a hard limit of 17 Influence cubes per player and you are only allowed to place cubes that are not already on the Game board. If none are available you cannot place any until you have removed some.



Placing and removing Influence cubes from a battleground also impacts the DEFCON tracks. All military battlegrounds are connected to the military DEFCON track. Likewise for political and world opinion battlegrounds. Placing Influence escalates the connected DEFCON track, removing Influence deflates it. The impact on the DEFCON track is one step for each Influence placed after the first. (e.g. x-1 so placing 1 Influence does not impact the DEFCON track whereas placing 3 Influence escalates it two steps).

No DEFCON marker can be moved beyond the limits of the DEFCON track. Simply leave the marker in the top or bottom step if required to do so.

Cards associated with your opponent's superpower can only be played for Command, not the Event. When you play your opponent's card for Command, first hand over the card to your opponent. He may then choose to trigger the Event *before* you spend any Influence on your Command action. If the opponent decides to trigger the Event, it is resolved exactly as if he had played the card himself (but in your turn).



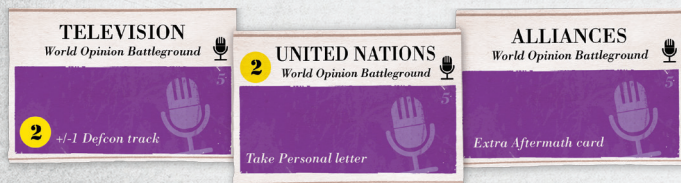


## EVENT

You may choose to play any Strategy card associated with your own superpower or the UN as an Event rather than Command. Typically Events provide a way to either break or tweak the core rules of a Command action, or allows a more powerful but restricted action. When played as an Event, follow the Event text on the Strategy card. If at odds with the general rules for spending Influence, the Event takes precedence. If the card has a 'DEFCON' icon the Event may affect the DEFCON tracks according to the normal rules for placing/removing Influence. If the card has no DEFCON icon on it, the Event does not affect the DEFCON tracks.

## 4. SAVE CARD FOR AFTERMATH

After having had 4 turns both players will have one Strategy card left in their hand. This card is tucked facedown beneath the Game board where indicated to form a special Aftermath stack that is tallied up at the end of the game.



## 5. WORLD OPINION BONUS

The player with the most Influence on each of the three world opinion battlegrounds may trigger the corresponding end of round effect (in case of a tie, no one triggers the effect). Resolve the effects one at a time in the following order:

- United Nations battleground: The dominating player receives the Personal letter card from his opponent. If the player already holds the Personal letter card there is no effect.

- Television battleground: The dominating player may escalate or deflate one of his DEFCON tracks one step.
- Destabilization battleground: The dominating player draws the topmost card from the Strategy deck and decides to add it facedown to the aftermath stack or place it face up on the discard pile.

## 6. RESOLVE AGENDAS

Turn over and reveal the two Agendas selected at the beginning of the round. Remember to retrieve your flag counters from the game board at the same time. If an Agenda has a DEFCON icon all DEFCON markers in the DEFCON 2 area of that specific track escalates one step.

Resolve both Agendas simultaneously, awarding Prestige in accordance with the card text to the dominating player. The basic amount of Prestige gained is equal to the difference between the player's Influence cubes or DEFCON steps (in case of a tie, no Prestige is awarded for that Agenda). Often a modifier is added. You find the modifier inside the yellow circle on Agendas and on battlegrounds across the Game board. DEFCON tracks always award a +1 Prestige modifier. Battlegrounds award 0-2 extra Prestige. Be aware that Cuba (military), Cuba (political) and Atlantic are connected battlegrounds. They award +1 Prestige for each connected battleground also dominated. A player can never lead by more than 5 Prestige.

Place the resolved Agendas faceup in the discard pile after use.





## 7. CHECK FOR NUCLEAR WAR

If you push yourself or your opponent to the brink, you risk not being able to pull back before it is too late. A player that triggers global nuclear war loses when this phase is resolved, and the game ends immediately. A global nuclear war is triggered if any of the following conditions are met:

- Any DEFCON marker in the DEFCON 1 area
- All 3 of one player's DEFCON markers in the DEFCON 2 area

If both players trigger global nuclear war in the same round, they both lose.

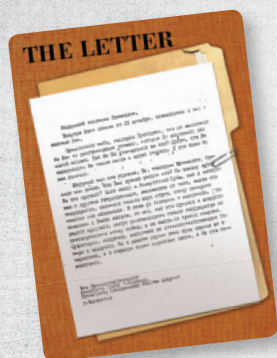
## 8. ADVANCE ROUND MARKER

Advance the Round marker one step on the Round track. Unless the Round marker has advanced to the aftermath spot, play a new round. If the aftermath has been reached, resolve it and determine the winner.

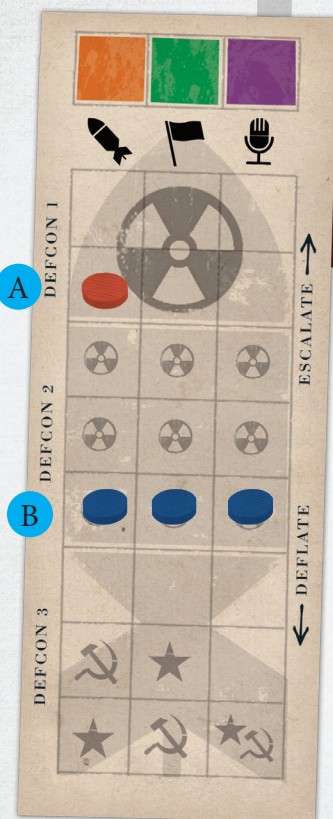


## END OF GAME

First you flip the stack of Strategy cards saved for the aftermath (there should be between 6 and 9 cards in the stack). Then count all the Influence of US and USSR associated Events in the stack. Ignore UN Events. It does not matter which player placed which card. The player with the highest Influence total gains 2 Prestige. In case of a tie, no Prestige is awarded.



Assuming no one triggered global nuclear war, the winner of 13 Days is the player with the most Prestige. In case of a tie the player holding the Personal letter wins the game.



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## **13 DAYS: THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS PLAY-THROUGH**

**David Janik-Jones (US) vs Robert Hahn (Soviet)**

13 Days: The Cuban Missile Crisis opens with the United States and Soviet players tied for Prestige, at 0. This means that neither side is winning. The three DEFCON tracks are set up as indicated on the board at the start of the game, and the US and Soviet players place a single Influence cube in four of the battlegrounds; Italy and Turkey for the US, and Cuba and Berlin for the Soviet. The US takes the Personal Letter card. The crisis that brought the world to the brink of nuclear war, has begun again.

### **ROUND 1**

On turn one, DEFCON markers are increased and each player receives three Agenda cards at the start of turn one. The US player has had a stroke of luck! He receives Turkey and Italy, plus World Opinion DEFCON. The Soviet player receives the Atlantic, Personal Letter, and Political DEFCON track. Each player marks these three agendas on the board.

The US player decides that it is easiest to bolster his existing influence in Italy, and selects that agenda. The Soviet player notes he is initially behind on the Political DEFCON track, so the Personal Letter is an easier option, and he hopes to gain the advantage of that card, which can be useful later. The unselected four agenda cards are shuffled back into the Agenda card deck.

Each player draws five Strategy cards. The US player receives: Public Protests (US-centric), Containment (UN), and U-2 Downed, Defensive Missiles and Suez-Hungary (three Soviet-



centric). Three of the five cards allow the Soviet player to use their events, so not a good starting hand for the US. The Soviet receives: Fidel Castro (Soviet-centric), Scramble and Intelligence Reports (UN cards), and Lessons of Munich and Quarantine (US cards), not an especially good hand for the Soviet either. Tied Prestige Points mean the Soviet player decides whether to play first or second this turn. He wants to see how the US reacts to the crisis, and chooses to play second.

*Designer's note: This is a good example of both players feeling the agony of drawing opponent events right from the start of the game. You will play cards that benefit your opponent, so your job is to play them when they hurt you the least, and when you draw a bad hand, remember: your opponent is probably in the same situation.*

The US player begins the game by playing Public Protests for 3 Command, and places three cubes in the Atlantic military battleground as a hedge against future Soviet aggression in the region and to try to block his opponent if that is the Soviet agenda. The Command action always adjusts the DEFCON track. Here the military US DEFCON is escalated two steps (one less than the number of Influence cubes placed). The Soviet plays the Scramble card's event and places 1 Influence cube in the Atlantic military battleground (to counter the US player), the United Nations, and lastly Turkey; to counter the one US cube already there. Since there is no DEFCON icon on the card, playing the event does not escalate the DEFCON tracks.

For his second card, the US plays Defensive Missiles. Since this is a Soviet card, the Soviet player may use the event first. He chooses to, placing one Soviet Influence cube in both the Television and UN battlegrounds. The US now gets to act and places a single cube into the UN battleground to counter the Soviet's growing presence. For his second card, the Soviet plays

Lessons of Munich. The US player chooses to use the event, putting a single Influence cube in Berlin, to counter the one Soviet Influence cube already there, attempting to misdirect his opponent about his Italy agenda. The Soviet player may be uncertain of the US agenda at this point, but moves forward with his own plan, confidently commands three Influence cubes in the Atlantic military battleground for his play. The US player is now torn ... is the Soviet agenda the Atlantic?

For his third card the US plays U-2 Downed. The Soviet uses the event to place 2 more Influence in Turkey, hoping to block Turkey if that's the US agenda for the turn. The US has no cubes in either Cuba battleground so the Soviet use of the event is complete. The US commands two Influence in the Atlantic (to his maximum of five), convinced this is the Soviet's agenda.



The Soviet player uses the Quarantine card to play one Influence cube. The event is not usable by the US, since he already has the maximum number of cubes permitted in the Atlantic. The Soviet uses the command action, adding one more cube into the United Nations battleground.

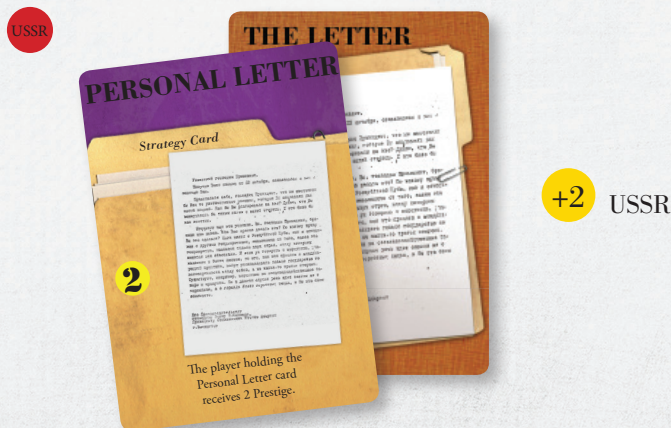
Question 1: Your note said Turkey should have a total of 3 US and 1 Soviet cubes. Should that have been 3 US and 2 Soviet?



The US now plays his last card for the turn: Containment. He has assumed Italy safe from Soviet influence, and commands two cubes into the Alliances world opinion battleground. The US player is gambling that by adding only two Soviet cubes to the Aftermath pile (on his remaining Suez-Hungary card) he'll be safe. The Soviet, however, surprises the US and plays Intelligence Reports for the event, forcing the US player to hand the Suez-Hungary card over (since it's his only card in hand) and draw a new one. The Soviet discards the card. Unfortunately for the US player, the replacement card drawn is Moscow, our Brain, a three-cube Soviet card that will now wind up in the aftermath pile.

*Designer's note: The Soviet player could have used the Suez-Hungary card to take over the Italy battleground for a late 2 Prestige swing! In 13 Days you are playing your opponent as much as you are playing the game. The US player has done a nice job of misdirection, which is even more important here as the Soviet player is going last and could have responded to a massive influx of US cubes in Italy.*

Both players place their one remaining Strategy card into the Aftermath pile and work through the last steps in a turn. World Opinion bonuses are resolved. The Soviet player wins the UN world opinion battleground and receives the Personal Letter. The Soviets also win the Television battleground, choosing to deflate their military DEFCON by one. The US win the Alliances and draws one Strategy card. It is Bay of Pigs, a Soviet card, so the US discards it instead of adding it to the Aftermath pile. Agendas are now resolved. The US reveals Italy, scoring 1 Prestige for his unopposed cube plus one extra as marked on the battleground and his agenda card. The Soviets reveals Personal Letter and also receives 2 Prestige for having the Personal Letter card in possession, meaning Prestige is unchanged after turn, tied at 0. The round marker is advanced and turn two begins.



US +2 , USSR +2 = No change in Prestige



## ROUND 2

DEFCON tracks are increased and Agenda cards are drawn. The US receives Political DEFCON, Cuba Political, and Berlin. The Soviet draws Turkey, Atlantic and Military DEFCON. The US selects Cuba while hoping to maintain his strong influence in the Atlantic. The Soviet chooses the Atlantic, hoping to drive the US out. The US player is running low on Influence cubes and will need to pull some out of battlegrounds to act in new areas. The Soviet also hopes to gain bonus Prestige for control of at least one of the two Cuba battlegrounds. Since there is a tie in Prestige, the Soviet again chooses to go second. Five Strategy cards are drawn for each player.

The US draws MRBMs & IRBMS, Strategic Balance, Berlin Blockade, Operation Mongoose, and Wave and Smile, another hand dominated by Soviet cards. The Soviet draws Air Strike, Noninvasion Pledge, Missile Trade, To The Brink and Fifty, Fifty. Not a strong hand, but there are only two US-centric cards.

The US wants to get rid of his Soviet cards and plays Berlin Blockade. The Soviet chooses to gain 2 Prestige, followed by the US escalating the Soviet's World Opinion DEFCON by two, trying to push the Soviets into starting a war. The US player places 2 cubes (his second and third) into Turkey, to try to balance the three Soviet cubes in that battleground (wrongly assuming the Soviet agenda lies there). The Soviet plays Fifty, Fifty for the event, and de-escalates his World Opinion and Military DEFCON tracks by one each.

*Designer's note: Beginning round 2 the US player is in a weaker position on the DEFCON tracks with more escalated tracks. I interpret the early play of Berlin Blockade as an attempt to increase the pressure on the Soviet player to take away some flexibility. Accepting the 2 Prestige at the expense of risking nuclear war*

*later on is a dilemma. It didn't pay off because the two next events allow the Soviet player to deflate DEFCON tracks and take away that increased pressure.*

The US plays MRBMs & IRBMs as his second card. The Soviet uses the event to deflate his Military DEFCON track by one and puts 1 cube into the Atlantic military battleground. The US player places one cube in Berlin in an attempt to confuse the Soviet. Since only one cube was commanded, the US Military DEFCON track remains unaffected. The Soviet plays To The Brink for the event, to hamstring the US for the remainder of the round (US cards are now worth -1 Influence when commanding).

The US plays his third card, Wave and Smile, for the event. He relocates two cubes from the Alliance battleground into the Cuba political battleground.



Correctly assuming the US agenda is that battleground, the Soviet plays Noninvasion Pledge. The US uses the event to remove two Soviet cubes from Turkey because the Soviet agenda might be Turkey, and also lowers his political DEFCON track by two. The Soviet then places two Influence cubes into the Cuba political battleground to equal the US cubes



already there. For the last card of the turn, the US plays Strategic Balance. The Soviet cannot use the event to place more cubes in the Atlantic since the max of five has been reached, so the US simply places one more cube into Cuba's political battleground. The Soviet plays Air Strike. The US player uses the event to remove one cube from Cuba's political battleground, but the Soviet command 2 cubes back into that battleground, to even the US player's cubes.



Operation Mongoose and Missile Trade are added to the Aftermath pile. The Soviet player wins the UN world opinion battleground to retain the Personal Letter. The Soviets win Television, and deflate their world opinion DEFCON by one. No one wins Alliances. The US reveals his Cuba Political agenda, but both players have three cubes in that battleground, so no one wins any Prestige. The Soviets reveal Atlantic, but here is a tie as well with both players having five cubes in that battleground, so no Prestige is won. The Prestige score is now 2 for the Soviets (after the events of the Berlin Blockade card). The round marker is advanced and turn three begins.

*Designer's note: The three battlegrounds around Cuba are quite important. Here both players go toe-to-toe for domination, thus evening each other out. That doesn't mean that the round is wasted. Players are jockeying for board position, the DEFCON tracks continue to escalate, players run low on Influence cubes etc. This will greatly affect the maneuverability in the last round where the game is decided.*

## ROUND 3

DEFCON tracks are increased (The US military DEFCON track reaches the critical DEFCON 1 area, while all three Soviet DEFCON tracks are in the DEFCON 2 area – so both players must be careful to avoid triggering nuclear war) and Agenda cards are drawn. The US receives Political DEFCON, Military DEFCON, and Cuba Military. The Soviet draws Berlin, Political DEFCON and World Opinion DEFCON. The US selects Military DEFCON because he is ahead of the Soviets on that track. The Soviet chooses Berlin, even though the US has a 1 cube advantage in that battleground to start the turn (the Soviet player has more freedom to place Influence on a military battleground without escalating into the DEFCON 1 area). The US is behind in Prestige so chooses to play second. Five Strategy cards are drawn for each player.

*Designer's note: The US is under a lot of pressure from the military DEFCON track. The Soviet could have exploited that by picking the Political DEFCON agenda safely assuming that the US would stay deflated on that part of the track.*

The US draws National Liberation, Eyeball to Eyeball, Summit Meeting, Close Allies and Nuclear Submarines, a mixed hand. The Soviet draws SOPs, U Thant, A Face-Saver,



Invasion of Cuba and Math Precision, a poor hand for the Aftermath segment with two US cards and three UN cards.

The first Soviet card is SOPs used for the event, so for the remainder of the turn Soviet command actions are +1. The Soviet player is running low on Influence cubes, and that card will allow for better actions when removing cubes. The US plays Summit Meeting and removes two Influence cubes from the Atlantic, thus deflating the military DEFCON track one step (back down into the DEFCON 2 area). The second Soviet card is Invasion of Cuba. The US decides not use the event (he does not want to escalate back into DEFCON 1 on his military DEFCON track), so the Soviet places one cube into the Alliances battleground. The US plays Eyeball to Eyeball and since he is the most escalated on the military DEFCON, uses the event to place a single Influence cube on Cuba military without escalating the DEFCON further.



The third Soviet card is Math Precision. The US player uses the event to deflate his Political DEFCON track by one and puts one cube on the Cuba military battleground. The Soviet then commands four cubes out of the Atlantic (three from the card and one extra

granted from the previously played SOPs card). The US plays Close Allies and again removes two cubes out of the Atlantic, deflating his military DEFCON another step.

*Designer's note: Since the US player keeps adding Influence to the Cuba military battleground, the Soviet player wrongly assumes that is his secret agenda. From that perspective, and due to running low on cubes, drawing four cubes out of the Atlantic and deflating the military DEFCON track is not that bad a move, though here it proves costly.*

The Soviet plays his final card, A Face-Saver, for the command action. He moves two Influence cubes into Berlin (again using the bonus from the SOPs card), and escalates his military DEFCON marker one step. The US plays National Liberation; (the Soviets decide to abstain from using the event to not escalate the political DEFCON marker into the DEFCON 1 area). The US places one cube into Berlin to counter the Soviet move.

Nuclear Submarines and U Thant are added to the Aftermath pile. The Soviet player wins the UN world opinion battleground to retain the Personal Letter. The Soviets win Television, and deflate their political DEFCON track by one (to avoid losing if US player has the political agenda). The Soviet also win Alliances and draws the U-2 Photographs card (one US cube), discarding it. The US reveals his military DEFCON agenda. He is ahead on that track by 3 points. He increases that DEFCON marker by one (to just under the DEFCON 1 area) and gains 4 Prestige for that, moving the Prestige marker to the 2 space on the US side. The Soviets reveal Berlin as his agenda. Both players have three Influence cubes and no one receive Prestige.

The Aftermath cards are now revealed and added up. The UN cards are discarded, and only the cubes on the US and Soviet





cards are counted. The US only has two cubes on one card. The Soviets have a total of nine cubes on three cards and gain two Prestige for this, moving the marker back to the 0 space on the Prestige track. The game is a tie on Prestige so the Soviet player wins because he holds the Personal Letter card. The game is over and the Soviet Union walk away from the crisis the winners in the world's eyes. Nuclear war has been averted.

AFTERMATH







## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

### THE PROLOGUE

Few people now realize the significance of the Cuban Missile Crisis and what it meant for modern political history meant for modern political history. In school books, it is explained in a paragraph or two and never with the most important point mentioned—at no point since the creation of the atomic bomb has the world truly been closer to destruction. A different decision here or there and no one is reading this history; we are in Einstein's world where the next war is fought with sticks and stones.

The opening act comes much sooner than October, 1962. It started with Castro's revolution and Kennedy's botched attempt to overthrow the Cuban communist regime with the Bay of Pigs Invasion. That attempt showed Castro the United States was serious about his removal and encouraged him to look for more and stronger support from his benefactor, the Soviet Union.

But that wasn't the start. In the 1960 election, Kennedy asserted there was a 'missile gap' between the US and Soviet Union, a false statement as the Eisenhower administration knew from its spy flights and satellite information. Since that information was secret, Kennedy had boxed himself in in terms of foreign policy; for domestic political consumption, he needed to be firm and aggressive with 'the communist menace', so he continued an Eisenhower program to deploy missiles to Europe, placing Jupiter medium-range missiles in Italy and Turkey beginning in 1961.

But it went deeper still for Kennedy. He'd met with Khrushchev in June, 1961, in Vienna, and though the media thought Kennedy the 'victor' initially, opinion changed over the following months to the point that Kennedy declared, "He beat the hell out of me." Unhappy to have been shown up, his angst was reinforced by American inability to take effective action when the Berlin Wall was constructed that summer during the second Berlin Crisis. Faced with this impotence, Kennedy vowed that he'd be tough the next time, win the next crisis no matter the cost.

The USSR was unhappy with the missiles in Turkey, less than one hundred miles from the Soviet border. The Soviets felt this was a significant threat and said so to the United States. The US response was simple—Turkey is an independent nation and we have an agreement with them and that's that. American intransigence on what the USSR saw as a vital issue to their national security now led Khrushchev to look at American logic and formulate his own plan, what was known as Operation Anadyr.

The US had suspicions the Soviets were constructing a missile base in Cuba as early as August, but after the downing of a Taiwanese U-2 over China, the CIA was worried about surface-to-air missiles in Cuba, so that the US was relying on satellite photographs. Unfortunately, those were blocked by storms and heavy cloud cover, creating what was eventually called 'The Photo Gap'. Finally on October 14, a U-2 was finally able to overfly Cuba and return with photographs of the Soviet missile base under construction. This, according to



## THE CRISIS

When President Kennedy saw the photographs the next day, he created a committee, eventually called 'EXCOMM' to discuss options and figure a course of action. EXCOMM met for the first time the next day, the 16th. The primary US options were:

- Air strike to destroy the base before it could be completed
- Military invasion and occupation of Cuba
- Blockade Cuba
- Diplomacy
- Negotiations with Cuba looking to convince Castro to give up communism
- Do nothing

Because of his 1960 campaign and feelings on Berlin and Vienna, doing nothing was a political impossibility for Kennedy, and after the Bay of Pigs, there was no chance of Castro leaving the Soviet orbit or trusting the United States which immediately reduced the possible options. On the 18th, Kennedy spoke with Andrei Gromyko though there was no progress. It was suggested by Gromyko that the missiles were not the business of the US, that they were there with Cuban permission and that was that, using the same logic the United States used with the Jupiter missiles in Turkey.

The following day, the 19th, the US began mobilizing five divisions and all continental elements of the Air Force, prepared to implement one of two plans, OPLAN 312 or OPLAN 316, while the State Department worked to prepare the structure of a new Cuban government for when Castro was removed. Kennedy wanted tough and the US military prepared for that, though documents released in the past decade, well after the Crisis show that at no time did the Soviet military bring itself to full military readiness—and that the US was well aware of this behind the scenes.

Three days later, the US briefed NATO and allied leaders and briefed those nations on possible Soviet actions. Approval was unanimous from the NATO nations, at which point the media was informed and a blockade, referred to as a quarantine, was put in place, enforced by several nations, though primarily by the US Navy. It was important that it be referred to as a quarantine—a blockade was an act of war and the US did not want to be seen as provoking World War Three.

With the world now aware of the situation and the potential stakes involved (though details were secret, there was no question of what the ultimate fear was), efforts now began to lessen the tension or find a diplomatic solution. Using backchannels, the United States now let it be known they would consider the removal of the Turkish missiles if the Soviets ceased construction in Cuba and removed the missiles there. Added to this, on the 25th, a message from the Pope urging peace was broadcast worldwide (though it was not broadcast in the USSR until the 26th). The Pope's message was critical, changing the course of the crisis and giving a rational reason for either/or both sides to back away from saber-rattling and intractable positions. In the meantime, at the same time as the Pope recorded his message, Khrushchev wrote a letter to Kennedy informing the President that Soviet ships would continue towards Cuba and that the US had no business stopping them, leaving unsaid an implicit 'or else' and setting up a confrontation between the two navies.

But Khrushchev was never a man to put all his eggs in a single basket and even as he told Kennedy Soviet ships would violate the quarantine, a dozen Soviet merchant ships turned away from Cuba rather than be boarded by US Navy vessels. That was not enough for members of EXCOMM, and one of Kennedy's advisors, Curtis LeMay, demanded the US take the opportunity given to provoke a war and eliminate communism and the Soviet threat once and for all, even as the committee



saw evidence that Soviet forces were not mobilizing for war. At the behest of men like LeMay, for the first and only time in history, the president authorized the raising of military alertness to “DEFCON 2”, putting B-52 bombers in the air everywhere, armed with nuclear bombs. The only alternative left was to wait....

Twenty-four hours later, a letter arrived from Khrushchev, suggesting that the knot of war not be pulled so tight that it could not be undone. Later, Kennedy would say Khrushchev blinked, but at the moment, it provided another reason to climb down from the brink. The basis of negotiations would be the removal of missiles from Turkey in return for the removal of the Cuban base. The timing of that consensus was important. Even as the two sides were reaching an agreement, a U-2 was shot down over Cuba on the orders of a local commander and against the wishes of Khrushchev. The US had decided that if a U-2 was shot down, it meant outright war, but Kennedy decided not to take the next step, hoping that the decision was an accident or taken by an ‘itchy trigger finger’ on the scene and not representative of Soviet intent.

Just as important, out at sea, a US destroyer spotted a Soviet submarine on sonar and dropped training depth charges (basically hand grenades), forcing the Soviet sub to remain submerged to the limit of its engines and oxygen. On board the sub, a debate raged whether the depth charges permitted the use of the nuclear torpedo on board. To launch required unanimity, but the vote was 2-1; the first officer refused to agree even when pressured by the political officer on board. If it had been launched, nuclear war would have been unavoidable.

Even then, that was not the last threat to peace. Behind the scenes, Fidel Castro urged Khrushchev to use the missiles and planes already in Cuba to launch a first-strike on the US, going so far as to suggest that he would rather see his own land vaporized than the Americans win. Castro even

formulated plans for his own soldiers to seize the Russian nukes and use them himself against the United States. Luckily cooler heads prevailed.

On October 28, the day after these incidents, the crisis ‘ended’. The US guaranteed it would not invade Cuba or sanction invasion by Cuban emigres, and that it would remove the Jupiter missiles from Europe—something already planned for 1963 anyways (though the USSR did not know that). In return, the Soviet Union dismantled its missiles in Cuba.

## THE AFTERMATH

The ‘quarantine’ was lifted in November and the Jupiters were gone in April, but repercussions continued. Buoyed by his success, Kennedy decided a harder line and a more active US role in fighting communism could work, setting the stage for Vietnam. Unhappy that Khrushchev backed down in a way that cost the USSR prestige, he was removed almost exactly two years later in a conspiracy led by Leonid Brezhnev. Brezhnev wanted stability, something the erratic Khrushchev was not known for, and thus the era of bureaucracy overtook the Soviet Union.

The crisis also showed the two superpowers that they needed quicker communications and that there were too many ways miscommunication could lead to unwanted drastic actions. Initially, this meant the creation of the Hotline, a direct phone link between Washington and Moscow in case of emergencies. Later, but before the decade was ended, Brezhnev reached a consensus with President Nixon that continuing an arms race hurt both nations, so that ‘detente’ was born, solidifying Brezhnev’s quest for stability and reducing the ruinous military spending of both nations.

History has been cruel and kind to the actors in the Cuban Missile Crisis. While criticized for allowing ego to drive him



to push the situation into a crisis, Kennedy's cool at the key moment prevented nuclear war. Similarly, while Khrushchev had gone forward with the missiles, knowing it would cause a US reaction, he quickly backed away from the brink.

How do you explain the edge of nuclear war to someone who did not live through it? Is there a way to explain life with two nuclear superpowers and the potential for World War Three on any given day for any given reason to the generations who have been born since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989? Our remoteness from events such as the Cuban Missile Crisis should not lessen our worry over how close we came to destroying civilization in 1962 or that such a crisis could happen again whether in Kiev, Seoul, or Cairo. Will the leaders in such a crisis be as level-headed and determined to avoid Armageddon? We can only hope.

## SCORING CARDS

**Berlin:** The site of two earlier crises in 1948 and 1961, most prognosticators figured that Berlin would be the spark which set off a US-Soviet conflict within Europe given the city's divided status and location far within the Soviet zone (which became the German Democratic Republic). West Berliners understood that in case of war, they would be overwhelmed by Communist forces.

**Italy:** It may seem hard to believe today, but in the 1950s and early 1960s, Italy's economy was the second most prosperous in Europe (behind West Germany's), making it a critical nation for rebuilding the continent in the years after World War Two. A loyal ally of the United States and staunchly anti-communist (perhaps a feeling leftover from its decades of fascism), Italy gladly permitted US bases on its soil as well as Jupiter missiles positioned around the airbase at Giola del Colle. The Jupiters were used as tokens in negotiations during the Cuban crisis.

**Turkey:** With a long hatred of Russia, communist or otherwise, Turkey's military happily agreed to host a squadron of Jupiter missiles. Negotiated with Eisenhower, the missiles were deployed after Kennedy was in office. Turkey's outright hostility to the Soviet Union made it a staunch advocate of American hardline positions while the US enjoyed having an ally adjacent to the Soviet Union and capable of restricting Soviet naval movement to the Black Sea vis a vis control of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles.

## US CARDS

**Air Strike:** The US prepared to flatten Cuba if needed, deploying B-47 bombers to the American Southeast. B-47 pilots were trained to launch rapidly in case of nuclear



war, sometimes taking only 10-15 seconds between planes to launch. Cuba's nearness to the US (and distance to the USSR) was a significant military advantage for the US during the Crisis.

**EXCOMM:** The Executive Committee of the National Security Council, set up to handle the Crisis and advise Kennedy. Historians have credited the core committee members with avoiding 'groupthink' and remaining open to all possibilities rather than marching to full conflict. Given their ages and knowledge of World War Two and that it was less than twenty years since Hiroshima and Nagasaki, those life experiences probably served to temper any aggression members held towards the USSR.

**Eyeball to Eyeball:** Castro was furious when Khrushchev agreed to remove missiles from Cuba to defuse the Crisis. He felt it would encourage anti-communist emigres in Florida and hurt his own chances of survival. The phrase is a quote from Secretary of State Dean Rusk: "We went eyeball to eyeball, and the other fellow just blinked."

**Invasion of Cuba:** One option for the US was an immediate invasion of Cuba. The US was not fully prepared for this and was forced to scramble to make sure a replacement government could be made available quickly. While the idea had some backers (such as Gen. LeMay), it was never given extended, serious consideration by EXCOMM.

**Lessons of Munich:** Ever since the agreement in 1938, any time discussions take place with an authoritarian regime, the name 'Munich' is brought up along with the word 'appeasement'. The difficulty is that historians do not agree whether the concessions made to Hitler at Munich were good or bad for the long term, but for a generation which grew up or fought during World War Two, there is no question, 'Munich' was a very bad thing, something to avoid being compared to.

**Mathematical Precision:** Beginning with World War Two, math was applied to war more effectively, starting first with Robert McNamara's analyses of US firebombing of Japan. This meant that by the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis, bombs and missiles were far more accurate, so that strikes designed to hit specific targets (such as missile launch rails) were now feasible and effective.

**Non-invasion Pledge:** Suggested by the UN Secretary-General, Kennedy's promise that the US would not invade Cuba helped de-escalate the Crisis. Along with the removal of the Jupiter missiles from Italy and Turkey, this pledge gave Khrushchev enough political maneuvering space to turn his boats around and agree to remove Soviet missiles from Cuba.

**Offensive Missiles:** Practically speaking, there was no difference between missiles in Turkey pointed at the USSR and missiles in Cuba pointed at the US, but to Kennedy and his advisers, the difference was significant since the US had no intent of beginning a war and believed the USSR did. Thus, the missiles in Cuba offered the Soviets a chance at a crippling first strike.

**Operation Mongoose:** A series of plans created by the CIA for the overthrow of Cuba, including the use of propaganda, assassination of communist leaders, faking a Cuban attack on the US to justify intervention, and the covert destruction of Cuban crops. As of 2015, Fidel Castro and the Communist Party remain fully in control of Cuba

**Public Protests:** Europeans protested American military deployments and nuclear missiles regularly, right up to the end of the Cold War. In most instances, the US and NATO ignored the protesters, but in others, the US used the protests to justify actions (such as reducing deployments or engaging in arms talks) which may otherwise have been damaging within US domestic politics.



**Quarantine:** The US euphemism for 'blockade'. The use of the term is important. With a quarantine, the US was in the gray area of legality when it came to searching ships approaching Cuba. A blockade was an act of war and while the US was escalating the Crisis when the quarantine was declared, Kennedy did not want to go straight to war with the USSR.

**U-2 photographs:** The spyplane proved necessary over Cuba when weather blocked satellite surveillance. The U-2 was no longer fit for duty by 1962 as surface-to-air missiles could now reach his flight altitude. Indeed, at a critical moment during the Crisis, a U-2 was shot down while flying over the Soviet missiles.

**Wave and smile:** Kennedy continued to exude confidence during the Crisis, hoping to keep the American public calm—and confident in his leadership. Eisenhower had been similar, smiling and golfing regularly, noting to friends that if the President can smile and golf, it means the American public doesn't need to worry. A calm president is a safe America.

## SOVIET CARDS

**Bay of Pigs:** A 1961 CIA operation to land Cuban emigres to overthrow Castro's regime. The operation was poorly planned and lacked proper intelligence, relying on the word of emigres about conditions instead of actually checking them. Kennedy went forward with the operation even though Eisenhower had warned him not to (during the transition period between November 1960-January 1961).

**Berlin Blockade:** In 1948, Stalin attempted to force the Allies out of Berlin by cutting off all ground access to the city. This was averted by the Berlin airlift, a constant flight

of planes bringing in supplies, but it was a fear that never went away even as decades passed. The Soviets would occasionally use this threat to exact concessions in various negotiations with the US or even the Federal German Republic.

**Defensive Missiles:** The opposite of American claims, Khrushchev said the deployment to Cuba was purely defensive. In the realm of nuclear weapons, this was plausible; it countered the American deployment on the Soviet border (in Turkey). Realistically, Khrushchev and his circle of advisers had to know the US would react like a beehive hit with a stick when the missiles were found.

**Fidel Castro:** Communist leader of Cuba, he denied being communist until the Bay of Pigs invasion. After that, he outlawed all non-Communist parties and made Cuba a single-party state. During the Crisis, Castro demanded Khrushchev strike at the US and even plotted to seize Soviet missiles and use them himself against the United States, even if it meant destroying Cuban territory, incensed by repeated and constant attempts by the CIA and the US government to remove him from power (or assassinate him).

**Maskirovka:** The Russian term for deception. Soviet camouflage and misdirection was the best in the world, used to hide forces from the Germans during World War Two, aggressive intents in Hungary during 1956, and the construction of the missile facilities in Cuba in 1962.

**Missile Trade:** A key part of defusing the Crisis was Khrushchev's suggestion that the USSR would remove missiles from Cuba if the US removed their missiles from Turkey and Italy, though it is left for perpetual argument whether the same goal could have been achieved merely by threatening to position missiles in Cuba rather than actually doing it.



**‘Moscow is our brain’:** A statement by Fidel Castro, the full quote is ‘Moscow is our brain and our great leader.’ It suggested that the world leader for communism was the USSR, but also that the USSR would support other post-colonial nations in their quest for independence (whether from colonial states or their remaining influence).

**MRBM & IRBM:** Medium Ranged Ballistic Missiles and Intermediate Ranged Ballistic Missiles. MRBM have a operational range of 2,000 miles (roughly) while IRBM have greater range, up to 3,500 miles. Soviet MRBM in Cuba could have potentially struck 2/3 of the United States including all East Coast population centers as well as many ICBM bases in the Midwest.

**National Liberation:** When the USSR was founded, it was with the belief that the workers of the world would rise up and overthrow oppressive governments. That didn’t happen, nor did it happen after World War Two, not even in freed colonial territories. Thus, the Cuban Revolution was important as it represented a link to original Soviet ideology (as opposed to fraying relations with Communist China).

**Strategic Balance:** Khrushchev and Soviet leaders feared American efforts at containment, so that they tried to counter American actions wherever possible. In the case of the Crisis, this meant missiles in Cuba because of those in Italy and Turkey. After the putsch which removed Khrushchev, the concept of strategic balance became an underpinning for detente, that balance was more preferable than one side gaining a surprise advantage and provoking a first strike by the other side.

**Suez-Hungary:** When France and Israel convinced Britain to join them in invading Egypt in 1956, the Soviet Union had been dealing with uprisings within its eastern European satellites, starting with Poland, though it spread to Hungary.

With attention focused on the Mideast, the USSR sent more than a corps into Budapest and crushed Hungarian dissent. Later, the Soviet Union followed a similar strategy in timing actions with Czechoslovakia (the Prague Spring of 1968) and Poland (consenting to martial law in Poland after Solidarity’s growth in 1981).

**Turn Back the Ships:** Khrushchev’s decision to not test the American quarantine and provoke a confrontation kept tensions from rising. A dozen ships turned back, but not all ships heading to Cuba, suggesting that there had been many more missiles en route to the island.

**U-2 downed:** On October 27, a U-2 (piloted by Rudolf Anderson) was shot down by an SA-2 Guideline SAM. The downing raised tensions—initially EXCOMM determined that if a U-2 was shot down, it meant immediate war, but cooler heads prevailed. Anderson was the only combat fatality on either side during the Crisis.

## NEUTRAL CARDS

**To the Brink:** Many crises reach a very simple point, yes or no, war or back down. The question is always—how will the decision-makers respond? In August 1914, they went forward to war, figuring it was inevitable. At Munich, leaders backed away, afraid of another war like 1914, and have been criticized ever since for that while with the Cuban Missile Crisis, Khrushchev and Kennedy feared something far worse, the potential destruction of modern civilization.

**Close Allies:** Though the Cold War is usually considered to be the US vs. the USSR, neither superpower stood alone. Both had to work with allied and associated nations. In the Crisis for the Soviets, that meant primarily Cuba; Warsaw Pact nations were not consulted and were expected to toe the



line. For the US, consulting NATO, but especially Britain, France, and West Germany was critical since they would be on the frontline if the situation expanded into full-out war.

**Containment:** Coined by George Kennan in ‘The Long Telegram’, containment was an American policy designed originally to prevent the USSR from expanding its influence into areas of critical importance to American economic and military security. Truman then used the idea to expand it, using it to justify US efforts to prevent any Soviet influence being exerted worldwide. Containment was pursued through numerous organizations and ideas. The pet theory of Kennedy was ‘flexible response’ and it can be argued that that idea, combined with containment, led to America’s tragic decade fighting in Vietnam.

**Face Saver:** Once Khrushchev consented to removing the missiles from Cuba, it would look as if he backed down for no reason at all. Within the USSR, that would be political suicide and likely lead to a new Soviet leader pursuing a more militant policy. Thus, Kennedy agreed to remove the Jupiter missiles in Italy and Turkey, so that Khrushchev could claim some form of victory of his own.

**Fifty-fifty:** At the height of the crisis, Kennedy was asked the chances of war. He said, “Fifty-fifty.” What has gone unsaid until recently was that the Soviets had not fully mobilized like the US had, and if war came, would have been unprepared. The chances of war were far less than 50-50 unless the US provoked it.

**The Guns of August:** Published by Barbara Tuchman in 1962, it is a history of the events leading up to the beginning of the Great War in Europe. Her thesis is that it was a collection of mistakes and misunderstandings which led to the war. Kennedy read the book before the Crisis and said he was greatly affected by Tuchman’s conclusions.

**Intelligence Reports:** Lack of intelligence provoked the crisis as the US discovered too late that the Soviets were constructing a missile base in Cuba. The Crisis showed the limits of various forms of intel as the US lacked sources within Cuba, Cuba was capable of shooting down US spy planes, and weather prevented satellite coverage in the first part of the Crisis, though the USSR was hurt by the lack of spy satellites at all as well as lacking scouting abilities such as those possessed by US Navy fleets.

**Nuclear submarines:** Faster, quieter than their World War Two counterparts, nuclear submarines could remain submerged for extended periods, ideal for vessels armed with nuclear missiles, and making any first-strike by an opponent suicidal since it would be impossible to eliminate the opposing submarines. Both sides deployed subs in the Crisis and the US ‘practice’ depth-charging of the B-59, a Soviet sub, almost led to the B-59’s use of a nuclear torpedo.

**Personal Letter:** Both sides communicated via multiple written letters during the conflict. This was critical for keeping negotiations personal—that it was people on the other side of the Crisis, not just a faceless government. It was a means of private communication, but it also created some tension as in at least one instance, Khrushchev contradicted himself in two different letters, leading to some confusion and a debate regarding trustworthiness.

**Scramble:** Scrambling is the rapid launch of aircraft to either launch a strike or prevent an enemy attack. During the Crisis, the US kept multiple stations on full-alert, prepared to launch on less than 5-10 minutes notice. In the Far East, a U-2 violated Soviet air space, triggering a scramble of MiG fighters whose launch triggered the scramble of an American fighter squadron in turn.



**SOPs:** An acronym for ‘standard operating procedures’, guidelines designed to maximize efficiency and in many instances add a level of security against espionage or deception.

**Speech to the nation:** Especially critical in republics, Kennedy twice addressed the American public, once at the onset of the Crisis and again after it concluded. He did this initially to gain backing against Congressmen who wanted to use the discovery of missiles in Cuba as a pretext for aggressive action worldwide against the USSR.

**Summit Meeting:** Many political leaders believe in-person discussions are more fruitful, a tradition that has continued into the modern day. Unfortunately, Kennedy’s performance at the Vienna summit, before the Crisis, convinced Kennedy he needed to be more aggressive and led to a more aggressive US approach to Cuba and thus the crisis.

**U Thant:** His name was actually ‘Thant’. ‘U’ is a sign of respect within Myanmar/Burma, the equivalent of ‘Mister’ in the US or Britain. Thant spent a decade as Secretary-General of the United Nations. During the Crisis, Thant was the first to suggest a non-invasion pledge for Cuba and may have also convinced Khrushchev to turn ships back rather than run the American quarantine.