1 Success Story

"They're too busy. Can't read what they get now. They'll glance at papers in the limousine, thumb them while someone is talking, or just wing it. If you do get their attention, you can't keep it. They will have to catch a plane or go to a press conference."

So an experienced diplomat responded to our argument that government officials should make better use of history. He was right. It may be easier to get a million dollars of public money than a minute from a president or a cabinet officer. The Bay of Pigs debacle (discussed later) occurred in part because President John F. Kennedy and his key advisers could never give it sustained attention for more than forty-five minutes at a time.[1] The same strains work on governors, mayors, and many officials much less exalted.

But we are not asking a lot. In government and outside, decision-makers use history now. They draw every day on the past experience of other people. They assign aides bits and pieces of historical research: going to the files or checking memories and comparing recollections. They look at a great many words on paper. A former high official wrote us, "Although the public impression is that Presidents and Secretaries of State have no time to read or think, the truth is that most of them spend an enormous amount of time

reading material generated both in the government and outside."[2] We argue chiefly that uses now made of history can be more reflective and systematic, hence more helpful.

This book is about how to do it. With stories of success and failure we suggest practices which, if made routine, could at least protect against common mistakes. We have tried to make the stories entertaining. We think them also instructive, even for readers too young to vote. Our particular target audience, however, consists of decision-makers and the women and men who work for them (or hope to do so) as direct or personal staff. Almost every executive has a split personality. He or she wants to act and feels impatient with those who block action. Presidents feel so about Congress, the bureaucracy, foreign allies, and the press; cabinet officers feel so about Presidents; assistant secretaries feel so about cabinet officers; and so on down to the bottom rungs of management. At the same time, every executive fears being hustled into action by those impatient people down below. The same holds true for legislators; they also make decisions and have decisions thrust upon them. Good staff work consists of helping a boss with both sets of concerns—clearing obstacles on one side while setting them up on the other. This book is intended to be a manual for such staff work. We hope the bosses will read it and tell their aides to put its recommendations into practice. We hope the aides will use it and use it and use it.

We start with a pair of stories about successes: the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 and the social security reform of 1983. Not everyone will agree that those were successes, but the participants so regarded them, and the majority of journalists so label them. Knowing mostly tales with less happy endings, we are not inclined to apply more rigid criteria. In the one case the missiles were withdrawn and nuclear war didn't happen. In the other, the system didn't run out of cash and wage-earners weren't penalized. Both met immediate issues without ending longer-run concerns. Castro remains an unrepentant Communist; cost-of-living adjustments still give Budget Directors fits. The priorities, however, appeared sound to most contemporaries and appear so still, in retrospect. The results are enough for us. Besides, one case is foreign, one domestic, one occurred under Democrats, the other under Republicans. They thus argue that effective use of history is independent of policy area or party.

We turn now to the first of the two stories; the other follows

in our second chapter. Then we sum up what both show about using history better.

For President Kennedy, the acute phase of the missile crisis started about 8:45 A.M. on Tuesday, October 16, 1962, when his National Security Assistant, McGeorge Bundy, came to his bedroom to report that a U-2, a high-flying reconnaissance airplane, had brought back photographs showing Russians at work in Cuba on launch sites for medium-range nuclear missiles.[3]

Kennedy reacted with a mixture of alarm and anger. Five years earlier the Russians had startled the world by sending "Sputnik" rockets into space. The Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev, said this showed Russia could destroy the United States with intercontinental nuclear missiles. Americans feared a "missile gap" opening in the Russians' favor. Elected in 1960 partly on a promise to close that gap, Kennedy as President gave high priority to a big defense buildup. By the time new intelligence had proved Khrushchev to be bluffing, the United States was on the way to creating a missile gap about two hundred to one in its own favor. Relations had been tense, especially when the Russians suddenly put up a wall between East and West Berlin. More recently tension had eased. Kennedy reached a few agreements with Khrushchev. He hoped for more. Now this!

And in *Cuba!* The revolution of 1959 putting in power Fidel Casto and a Communist regime had shocked Americans at least as much as Sputnik had. Kennedy in 1960 held out hope that he would also get Cuba back into Washington's orbit. His failure to do so gave Republicans an issue for 1962. Castro helped them by asking for—and getting—Soviet military aid. Republican Senator Kenneth Keating of New York charged that the Russians were going to base nuclear missiles in Cuba. Other Republicans echoed him. Senator Homer Capehart of Indiana, running for reelection, called for an invasion of the island. No one, however, produced solid evidence of anything but defensive, nonnuclear air defense missiles. CIA analysts pointed out to Kennedy that the Russians had never placed nuclear missiles even in Eastern Europe: Why would they put them in Cuba? (The answer probably was that a medium-range missile in Eastern Europe could reach the Soviet Union; one in Cuba could not. But that point was easier to see after the fact.)

By late August Kennedy felt worried. He began daily reviews of relevant intelligence. On September 4 he assured the public

that the government had no evidence that any Soviet offensive weapons were going into Cuba. For Khrushchev's ears he added, "Were it to be otherwise, the gravest issues would arise." Afterward he received reassurances not only from his intelligence services but directly from Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin. To Theodore Sorensen, the President's chief domestic policy adviser and speechwriter, Dobrynin said that everything the Russians were doing in Cuba was "defensive in nature." Dobrynin said the same to Robert F. Kennedy, the Attorney General (and the President's brother).

The news Bundy brought to the President's bedroom that Tuesday morning was thus not utterly unforeseen. It was none the less shocking. Kennedy's immediate response was to name a handful of men with whom he wanted to take counsel. The group would come to be called the Executive Committee of the National Security Council—ExComm for short. It included Bundy, Sorensen, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, and Secretary of the Treasury Douglas Dillon. Robert Kennedy took part continuously. Others were eventually asked in.

For a week, the President and ExComm managed to keep the matter secret. Kennedy preserved a noncommittal smile when Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko repeated to his face assurances that Russia would do nothing provocative before November's congressional elections. By various ruses, Kennedy and the others kept the White House press corps ignorant of their day-and-night debates.

When Kennedy and his ExComm first went to work, they used history—and did not use it—in very standard ways. In cases of which we know, debate in serious decision situations starts at least nine times out of ten with the question: What do we *do?* Background and context get skipped. The past comes in, if at all, in the form of analogy, with someone speaking of the current situation as like some other. That may be to put a familiar face on something strange. It may be for advocacy—because the analogue's supposed lesson supports the speaker's preference as to what to do. Otherwise, all concern is for the present, with seldom a glance backward or, in any focused way, toward the future. Of such usual practice we shall offer many examples. Here, even in the missile crisis, one sees it at the outset.

Recordings of ExComm's first meetings are now publicly available. Anyone visiting the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston can

hear excerpts. The group assembles in the Cabinet Room of the White House a little before noon. Experts from the Central Intelligence Agency explain the U-2 photographs. A few questions are asked about details. Then, in a measured Southern accent, part rural Georgian and part Rhodes Scholar, Secretary Rusk starts substantive discussion by setting forth two choices: give an ultimatum for withdrawal of the missiles or stage a quick surprise strike to destroy them. The crackling, confident voice of McNamara asserts that "any air strike must be directed not solely against the missile sites, but against the missile sites plus the airfields plus the aircraft . . . plus all potential nuclear storage sites." Joint Chiefs Chairman General Maxwell Taylor says clearly, "What we'd like to do is . . . take 'em out without any warning whatever," but he tallies other military options, including a naval blockade. After some back and forth, Kennedy himself, his famous Boston cadence soft-voiced and hesitating, sets the terms for the rest of the day's debate. He specifies three choices: "One would be just taking out these missiles. Number two would be to take out all the airplanes. Number three is to invade." His conclusion as the group recesses is, "We're certainly going to do Number One. We're going to take out these missiles."

During the initial meeting analogies make an appearance. Saying that the Russians may be trying to draw attention to Cuba because they plan a move elsewhere, perhaps against Berlin, Rusk speaks of the "Suez–Hungary combination," alluding to 1956, when Western preoccupation with Suez had made it easier for the Soviets to use tanks to crush a revolution in Hungary. Subsequently, "Suez" becomes shorthand for such a diagnosis.

For subsequent days' debates, we do not yet have verbatim transcripts. We have to reconstruct from contemporary memoranda and later reminiscence. Wednesday saw members of ExComm hold various meetings with Kennedy not present. He had concluded that second-level people such as Rusk's deputy, George Ball, or McNamara's, Roswell Gilpatric, were more likely to speak up with the President not in the room. The scene shifted too. An antiseptic conference room on the seventh floor of the new State Department building became from then on the principal meeting place.

From some early point Robert Kennedy had begun to feel queasy about an air strike. On Tuesday he spoke against going for both missiles and bombers. "I would say that, uh, you're dropping bombs all over Cuba if you do the second. . . . You're going to kill an

awful lot of people, and, uh, you're going to take an awful lot of heat on it." Expressing similar doubts, George Ball invoked an analogy. "This, uh, come in there on Pearl Harbor just frightens the hell out of me." Robert Kennedy later recalled passing his brother a note which said, "I know now how Tojo felt when he was planning Pearl Harbor." On Wednesday Robert Kennedy emphasized this analogy. Arguing now against any surprise air strike at all he said that it would be "a Pearl Harbor in reverse, and it would blacken the name of the United States in the pages of history." Notes on the Wednesday meetings prepared for the President by Sorensen referred several times to "Pearl Harbor."[4]

All this parallels what we see as standard practice, far from any ideal. The records of the ExComm suggest myopic concentration on what to do tomorrow. Reference is made now and then, partly for word-saving, partly for advocacy, to analogies from recent history. Looking back now, one can see signs of practice contrary to the usual. If action had been taken either the first day or the second, however, those signs would be scarcely noticeable. The decision would almost surely have been for an air strike. Whether the President would have chosen to hit not only the missile sites but also bombers and air defenses, we cannot guess. Whatever his choice, and whatever happened in the longer term, historians looking back (assuming there were any) would see Kennedy's decision as a product of usual practice.

In fact, Kennedy was not to announce a decision until Monday, October 22—after more than six days of nearly continuous debate. Then, telling the world what the Russians were doing, he was to proclaim a naval "quarantine." That course of action, initially mentioned in passing by General Taylor, had found its first champion in Vice President Lyndon Johnson. By the evening of the first day it had also become McNamara's favorite option—"this alternative doesn't seem to be a very acceptable one," he said, "but wait until you work on the others."[5] At some point—probably early on—the President came to the same opinion. By the weekend there was near-consensus. The U.S. Navy would stop any new missiles from going to Cuba. Kennedy would thus buy time for trying to talk the Russians into removing the missiles already there. By the following weekend, however, having used the time to no avail, it seemed, Kennedy was back at his starting point. The question again was whether to bomb only the missile sites or to go also for airfields. But on the second Sunday Khrushchev announced

that he would withdraw the missiles. The story thus became one of success.

It may be that the only decision-making that mattered was Moscow's. The main American contribution may have been delay that allowed the Soviets to collect themselves. We suspect that American decisions and nondecisions had some more independent influence on the outcome. Whatever the case, as we look back, it seems clear to us that deliberate prolonging of the crisis, together with various moves aimed at producing a peaceful settlement, originated in or were at least much influenced by resort to history in ways not ordinary for American government officials. If the happy outcome was due even in part to those choices by Kennedy and his ExComm, then *un*usual uses of history perhaps deserve part of the credit.

Kennedy and his ExComm departed from standard practice first of all in subjecting analogies to serious analysis. The President early invited into ExComm former Secretary of State Dean Acheson, at that time a lawyer in private practice. Acheson favored a quick air strike. Hearing the Pearl Harbor analogy, he judged it, as he was to write later, "silly" and "thoroughly false and pejorative." He told the President that there were no points of similarity and many points of difference, to wit:

> [A]t Pearl Harbor the Japanese without provocation or warning attacked our fleet thousands of miles from their shores. In the present situation the Soviet Union had installed missiles ninety miles from our coast—while denying they were doing so—offensive weapons that were capable of lethal injury to the United States. This they were doing a hundred and forty years after the warning given in [the Monroe Doctrine]. How much warning was necessary to avoid the stigma of "Pearl Harbor in reverse."[6]

For ExComm and perhaps for the President, the effect of Acheson's analysis was the reverse of that intended. By stripping away all the dissimilarities, Acheson exposed the analogy's relevant point. Robert Kennedy responded to Acheson by saying, "For 175 years we had not been that kind of country. A sneak attack was not in our traditions." Then—not earlier—Secretary of the Treasury Dillon was won over. "I felt that I was at a real turning point in history," he recalled later, "I knew then that we should not undertake a strike without warning."[7]

All in all, the proceedings of ExComm are distinguished by

the extent—unusual—to which analogies were invoked sparingly and, when invoked, were subjected to scrutiny. "Suez" did not last. A State Department lawyer referred to FDR's "Quarantine Address" of 1937 when suggesting that "quarantine" be substituted for "blockade," but no one represented the situations as analogous. Though Sorensen recalls talk of the Berlin blockade of 1948–49 and of the Bay of Pigs affair of 1961, possible points of comparison do not seemed to have gripped anyone's imagination.[8] When Kennedy went on television he referred to the "clear lesson" of the 1930s as one reason for demanding that the Russians back off. But that was rhetoric. The available records of ExComm debates are innocent of any allusion to "lessons" of the 1930s.

ExComm's second noteworthy departure from usual practice took the form of attention to the issue's history—to its sources and its context.

Kennedy himself had much to do with this, in part just by the choices he made in forming ExComm. He put a high premium on secrecy. "Maybe a lot of people know about what's there," he said at the initial meeting, "but what we're going to do about it ought to be, you know, the tightest of all, because otherwise we bitch it up." Nevertheless, he included in ExComm men who did not have to be there. Dillon is one example. The Treasury Department had no title to representation. Of course, Kennedy could see a partisan storm coming. "We've just elected Capehart . . . and Ken Keating will probably be the next President," he said to one aide soon after discovery of the missile sites. Since Dillon had been Under Secretary of State for Eisenhower and was the most conspicious Republican in the subsequent Administration, Kennedy may have wanted him for the sake of seeming bipartisan. The same could hold true for his inviting former Defense Secretary Robert A. Lovett to join ExComm, for Lovett was a leader of New York's Republican establishment. Or Kennedy may have turned to Dillon and Lovett just because he valued their judgment. Whatever the case, he got as a bonus the benefit of long and wide-ranging experience. He had around him men whose memories of dealing with the Soviet Union reached all the way back to World War II. He also called in Charles Bohlen and Llewellyn Thompson, two of the most senior serving members of the State Department's Russian service, and Edwin Martin from the State Department's Latin American bureau. Those three had memories, the first two of Russia and the third of Cuba, which also went far back.[9]

We suspect that this result was not accidental. Looking at the whole record of ExComm, one sees Kennedy himself repeatedly raising questions about the actual history of the issue. "I don't know enough about the Soviet Union," he said on the very first day, "but if anybody can tell me any other time since the Berlin blockade where the Russians have given us so clear a provocation, I don't know when it's been because they've been awfully cautious really." He went on to wonder aloud whether the crisis might have been averted if he had said something more clearly, earlier (in retrospect, a telling criticism). He kept trying to find out when the Russians had decided to install the missiles, seeking in the timing some clue to their possible motives. On his orders the CIA produced a detailed review of the history of Soviet military aid to Cuba. During the terrifying six days between his public speech and Khrushchev's backdown, Kennedy also asked an ExComm planning subcommittee to give high priority to a paper on "the Cuban base problem in perspective."[10]

Third, in unusual degree Kennedy and his ExComm looked hard at key presumptions. During the initial meetings, the President said "it doesn't make any difference if you get blown up by an ICBM flying from the Soviet Union or one that was ninety miles away."[11] When Sorensen summarized for Kennedy the first two days' ExComm deliberations, he wrote: "It is generally agreed that these missiles, even when fully operational, do not significantly alter the balance of power. . . . Nevertheless it is generally agreed that the United States cannot tolerate the known presence of offensive nuclear weapons in a country ninety miles from our shore, if our courage and commitments are ever to be believed by either allies or adversaries." Though no one paused over it at the time, an early exchange between Kennedy and Bundy exposed a weakness in that particular pair of presumptions:

> KENNEDY: It's just as if we suddenly began to put a major number of MRBMs [medium range missiles] in Turkey. Now that'd be goddamn dangerous, I would think.
>
> BUNDY: Well we did, Mr. President.

In fact, since 1957 the United States had had in Turkey Jupiter missiles of greater range than most of the Soviet missiles going into Cuba. Fifteen were still there.[12] The Soviets had "tolerated" them throughout.

In later ExComm sessions the President included one of McNa-

mara's subordinates, Assistant Secretary of Defense Paul Nitze. In doing so, Kennedy dropped another tap into the past, for Nitze had been Acheson's chief planner back in Truman's time. Nitze challenged the proposition that the Cuban missiles did not affect the balance of power. The existing missile gap, he said, gave the United States an unquestionable "second-strike" capacity. The Russians knew the United States could devastate their country even if they successfully staged an all-out surprise attack. That knowledge presumably made them cautious about running any risk of war. With missiles in place in Cuba, Nitze argued, the Russians might reason differently. They might suppose that an all-out surprise attack could destroy enough American missiles and bombers so that Soviet territory would not suffer terrible damage. In any case, they might suppose that their home-based and Cuban-based missiles together posed such danger to the United States that the American government would not risk war over, for example, Berlin. Nitze argued that the missiles in Cuba thus made a real difference.

Given the President's puzzlement as to why the Soviet Union had suddenly ceased to behave conservatively, Nitze's argument had some force with Kennedy. He at least altered his previous presumption, taking thereafter the position that the missiles were more than symbolic. As one result he became clear in his own mind that the missiles mattered much more than did the Soviet bombers also going into Cuba. He pressed for removal of all "offensive" weapons, including the bombers, and the Russians in fact withdrew both; but Kennedy told ExComm that "we should not get 'hung up' on the . . . bombers."[13]

Another presumption tested and changed concerned U.S. capacity for a "surgical" air strike, one that would take out only the missile sites. Since military planners wanted to protect U.S. bombers by suppressing Cuban and Soviet air defenses, they exaggerated somewhat the difficulty of effectively bombing only the missile sites. Because McNamara had misgivings akin to Robert Kennedy's about any air strikes, he may have encouraged that exaggeration. Nevertheless, at least through the first few days, several members of ExComm believed that Kennedy should order a "surgical" strike and would end up doing so.

Like the presumption that missiles were missiles, wherever placed, the presumption that a "surgical" strike could be effected gave way less because scrutinized or explicitly tested against the

historical record than because it was questioned by men who had lived relevant history. No one tallied up the precision of past air operations, but some of those present had seen a lot of them. Lovett, himself a one-time Navy flier, had been in World War II the civilian in charge of U.S. land-based air forces. That fact counted when he spoke for a naval blockade in preference to an air strike. Robert Kennedy was ever afterward to treasure Lovett's use of the quotation, "Good judgment is usually the result of experience. And experience is frequently the result of bad judgment."[14]

The thirteen days of the missile crisis saw many other presumptions challenged. McNamara and the Chief of Naval Operations exchanged furious words because McNamara questioned the presumption that the Navy knew how to put in effect the quarantine the President had ordered. Secretary Rusk provoked a lot of paper-writing in his own department and in the CIA by voicing doubt as to whether Castro was truly in the Russians' pocket. In fact, the Navy knew exactly what to do, and, though Castro was sometimes angry with the Russians, he never showed for a moment an inclination to strike a deal at their expense.[15] Nevertheless, Kennedy and his ExComm seem to us exemplary for the extent to which they asked: How well-founded are the presumptions on which we plan to act?

Fourth, Kennedy and ExComm showed uncommon interest in the history in the heads of their adversaries. Kennedy's questions at the first ExComm meeting were about the Soviet Union, conceived as a single rational actor. He asked, in effect, Why is *he* doing this to *me?* Most high-ranking officials involved in international disputes ask that type of question. Early speculation is anthropomorphic. "This is a left hook designed to make him tougher when he comes at us in November, presumably on Berlin," hazarded one ExComm participant endorsing the "Suez" thesis.[16] All that distinguished Kennedy's initial formulation was his retrospection—his interest in when the rational actor had decided to depart from a previous line of conduct. As the crisis continued, however, Kennedy and others began to conceive of the Soviet government more as a collection of individuals.

Coached chiefly by Thompson, members of ExComm began to consider the possibility that certain U.S. actions might provoke Khrushchev to act impulsively rather than out of cool reasoning. ExComm members also took into some account the possibility that pride might affect the Soviet military in case of an attack on *their*

missile sites. So far as we can tell, neither Kennedy nor any member of ExComm wondered aloud about the Russian history that Khrushchev and other Soviet leaders had experienced—the Revolution, the civil war, the Great Purge, World War II, de-Stalinization, the split with China, and other great events. On the other hand, Thompson surely had some of that history in his own mind. Probably remembering the Soviet struggle for full diplomatic recognition and the Soviet role in designing the UN, Thompson talked to ExComm of how the Russians might be influenced by a vote of the Organization of American States. They set high store on legal formalities, he said. Also, Thompson predicted that they would press for removal of the U.S. missiles in Turkey: "they like parallels."[17]

According to Robert Kennedy, the President tried constantly to put himself in Khrushchev's position. Once during the crisis he even described to Ben Bradlee of the *Washington Post* how he thought he would feel if in the Kremlin, but he cautioned Bradlee that his words were off the record. "It isn't wise politically to understand Khrushchev's problem in quite this way."[18]

In the climactic hours of the crisis Kennedy received two messages from Khrushchev, the first a rambling four-part cable seeming to offer withdrawal of the missiles in return for a U.S. pledge not to invade Cuba, the second, more curt and formal, seeming to retract that offer. Instead of returning to "left hook" imagery, the President and members of ExComm speculated about factionalism in the Kremlin. They visualized Khrushchev, stamping around his giant office in the Kremlin, possibly not altogether sober, dictating to a secretary, and sending off the text without showing it to anyone. They imagined other members of the Politburo bending over the second cable and tightening its wording. All that made easier their decision to ignore the second cable and simply say yes to the first. Some of them thought later that this tactic was the source of their success, the means to bring the crisis to a close, yet they probably would not have settled on it had they not by then begun to think of Khrushchev as a person, with a history of his own.

Fifth, Kennedy and his ExComm paid attention to organizational histories. They did not do so in quite the way we shall advocate later. They thought of how organizations behaved without asking explicitly how they had behaved over time, and why. But the fact that they took organizational behavior into account at all distinguishes them from ninety-odd percent of the decision-making groups of which we have personal knowledge.

Again, Kennedy himself gave ExComm its cue. He seemed to understand in his bones the tendency of large organizations to act today as they acted yesterday. He pursued his own hunches about American performance. Among other things, he sent the CIA to photograph Air Force planes at Florida bases. The pictures showed that, contrary to his orders, the planes were lined up in the highly vulnerable standard position—wing tip to wing tip—just as at Manila twenty-one years before. Schooled in the inertia of military procedures as a junior officer in World War II, Kennedy was annoyed but not surprised.

Kennedy and ExComm were encouraged toward the quarantine option by Thompson's reminder that Russian military organizations practiced extreme secretiveness. Built into organizational routines, that secretiveness would make the Russians hesitant, they hoped, to risk having their ships boarded and searched.[19] In fact the Russians halted all missile-carrying ships well outside the quarantine line.

Thompson and other Sovietologists also helped Kennedy and the members of ExComm appreciate the possibility that events on the Soviet side could be products of organizational routine or momentum rather than deliberate purpose. Just when Kennedy and his advisers were trying to puzzle out the differences between the two Khrushchev cables, a U.S. U-2 plane was shot down over Cuba. It would have been easy, even natural, to see that as a signal confirming a hardened Soviet line. Kennedy, however, accepted Thompson's counsel not to read political significance into what could well have been just a Soviet air defense unit acting according to the book. Others urged at least tit-for-tat retaliation, but Kennedy chose to wait. As a result, no U.S. strike on a Soviet air defense site complicated Khrushchev's decision to accept Kennedy's terms. (He meanwhile must have had to show equal good sense, for another American U-2 blundered coincidentally into Soviet air space, moving Kennedy to explain, "There's always some son-of-a-bitch who doesn't get the word.")[20]

After the crisis ended, Kennedy said he thought the odds on war had been "between one out of three and even." At the same time, according to Robert Kennedy, the President believed Khrushchev to be "a rational, intelligent man who, if given sufficient time and shown our determination, would alter his position." The historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, who knew the Kennedy brothers well and has written movingly of both, offers an explanation for the seeming contradiction in terms that seem plausible to us, namely:

"Kennedy's grim odds were based on fear, not of Khrushchev's intentions, but of human error, of something going terribly wrong down the line."[21] If that is accurate, then the taking into account of historical patterns in organizational conduct may have been exceptionally important among the unusual practices exemplified by Kennedy and ExComm.

But a final peculiarity in their practice strikes us as perhaps most important of all. In unusual degree, Kennedy and his ExComm saw the issues before them as part of a time sequence beginning long before the onset of crisis and continuing into an increasingly indistinct future. The more Kennedy and ExComm deliberated, the more they weighed consequences and the more they shifted from the simple question of what to do *now* to the harder question: How will today's choices appear when they are history—when people look back a decade or a century hence?

The initial debate in ExComm involved no evident thought beyond the next week or so. As early as the evening of the first day, however, a few participants had lifted their sights. "I don't know what kind of a world we live in after we've struck Cuba," McNamara said. And Bundy: "Our principal problem is to try and imaginatively to think what the world would be like if we do this and what it will be like if we don't."[22]

The President's own way of looking ahead appeared most clearly in his eventual handling of the parallel problem—those U.S. missiles in Turkey. In early sessions the notion of a swap had been dismissed as unthinkable. By the tenth and eleventh days of the crisis, on the other hand, Kennedy and his advisers talked about the possibility in terms of how it might fit a long sequence of events. Most of Kennedy's advisers still argued against removal, predicting that the Turks would protest and that other NATO governments would then make endless trouble. While those advisers were looking back and looking ahead, they did so with the eyes of men whose worlds were made of foreign offices and defense ministries. Kennedy saw the question more broadly. As the minutes of one ExComm meeting record:

> The President recalled that over a year ago we wanted to get the Jupiter missiles out of Turkey because they had become obsolete and of little military value. If the missiles in Cuba added 50 percent to the Soviet nuclear capability, then to trade these missiles for others in Turkey would be of great military value. But we are now in the position of risking war in Cuba and in Berlin over missiles in Turkey

> which are of little military value. From the political point of view, it would be hard to get support on an airstrike against Cuba because many would think we could make a good trade if we offered to take the missiles out of Turkey in the event the Russians would agree to remove the missiles from Cuba. We are in a bad position if we appear to be attacking Cuba for the purpose of keeping useless missiles in Turkey. We . . . have to face up to the possibility of some kind of a trade over missiles.

Robert Kennedy found a way around the dilemma. In very private conversations with Dobrynin, he promised that the U.S. missiles would be out of Turkey in four to five months. He also said not only that he would deny ever making such a promise but that, if any Russian revealed it, all deals would be off. The bargain was struck. No word was said of any trade other than Soviet withdrawal of missiles from Cuba in return for assurances that the United States would not invade Cuba. Five months later the U.S. missiles came out of Turkey.[23]

That the President came to see such issues in a stream of time is still more sharply illustrated by remarks he made to his brother about World War I. He had recently read a book on the outbreak of that war. It had reminded him of having heard in college of a former German Chancellor who, asked about the reasons for World War I, had replied, "Ah, if we only knew." Kennedy was not invoking an analogy, not even in the vein of his brother's reference to Pearl Harbor. Instead, we think, 1914 came to his mind because he saw himself as part of a long procession of political leaders on whose decisions many lives might depend. The book had been Barbara Tuchman's *Guns of August,* and Kennedy said to his brother, "I am not going to follow a course which will allow anyone to write a comparable book about this time, *The Missiles of October.* If anybody is around to write after this, they are going to understand that we made every effort to find peace and every effort to give our adversary room to move."[24]

The missile crisis may have been only accidentally a success story. We do not know—may never know—why the Russians decided as they did, and different decisions by them could have led toward a horrible ending. To the extent that American decisions shaped the outcome, uncharacteristic ways of using—and avoiding—history do not suffice as explanations of their clarity and cogency. Those choices were products of extraordinary conditions: intense concentration; effective secrecy sustained by media

cooperation (after Watergate that would be thought treasonous to the First Amendment); a high average of mind—these people were not tagged "the best and the brightest" for nothing—along with breadth of experience. While some staff work could have been better, the run of the mill seldom is as good as the poorest was then. Similar conditions are not often likely to obtain at any level. Few issues can carry on their faces the blazing show of novelty and gravity combined—arresting the attention needed for frontal exploration of concerns and options—as did the first directly military confrontation between Washington and Moscow in the missile age.

Even so, the uses made of history appear to have contributed, demonstrably, to the high quality of analysis and management apparent during the missile crisis. Right or wrong, Kennedy had the wherewithal for reasoned and prudent choice, and resort to history helped produce it. One cannot expect that lesser choices on more mundane matters, either at the top level or down below, will often, if ever, benefit from the special factors present in 1962. One cannot even count on those factors in the next crisis. But why not hope that in choice-making, low-level or high, the preparatory work takes heed of history in ways to emulate—or, better still, improve upon—this Cuban instance?