

**TAKE-HOME MIDTERM ASSIGNMENT:  
ANSWERS AND DISCUSSION**

As is true of any international crisis, the Cuban Missile Crisis fits broadly within the framework of a *Generic Bargaining (or Chicken) Game*, as discussed in the section on “Bargaining Tactics.”

*Excerpts from the address by President Kennedy, October 22, 1962*

Neither the United States of America nor the world community of nations can tolerate deliberate deception and offensive threats on the part of any nation, large or small. We no longer live in a world where only the actual firing of weapons represents a sufficient challenge to a nation's security to constitute maximum peril. Nuclear weapons are so destructive and ballistic missiles are so swift that any substantially increased possibility of their use or any sudden change in their deployment may well be regarded as a definite threat to peace. *[This distinguishes between previous Soviet aid to and military support of Cuba, which the U.S. tolerated and which therefore did not provoke a crisis, and the present situation.]*

For many years both the Soviet Union and the United States, recognizing this fact, have deployed strategic nuclear weapons with great care, never upsetting the precarious status quo which insured that these weapons would not be used in the absence of some vital challenge. Our own strategic missiles have never been transferred to the territory of any other nation under a cloak of secrecy and deception; and our history, unlike that of the Soviets since the end of World War II, demonstrates that we have no desire to dominate or conquer any other nation or impose our system upon its people. Nevertheless, American citizens have become adjusted to living daily on the bull's eye of Soviet missiles located inside the U.S.S.R. or in submarines. *[ There had been a well established status quo with respect to the deployment of nuclear weapons, which the Soviet Union is secretly trying to upset. Hence its actions demand a U.S. response (especially as it is occurring in the U.S.'s own “backyard”). Note 1: The emphasis is not so much on any supposed intrinsic evil characterizing the S.U. (as some students suggested and as a subsequent President claimed [Reagan's “evil empire”]) or even on a unfavorable contrast between past Soviet and U.S. behavior but on the contrast between the S.U.'s reckless behavior in the immediate situation and its own quite cautious behavior in the past. Note 2: This was a public speech and JFK was necessarily addressing several audiences simultaneously; this point and some others were included not so much to intimidate the Soviet Union as to legitimize a “tough” U.S. response in the eyes of U.S. public opinion and, more particularly, in the eyes of U.S. allies in Europe (both governments and public opinion). (Europeans been under the gun of Soviet nuclear-armed IRBMs [intermediate range ballistic missiles] for some time and tended to think the U.S. had a “bee in its bonnet” about Cuba.)]*

In that sense missiles in Cuba add to an already clear and present danger — although it should be noted the nations of Latin America have never previously been subjected to a potential nuclear threat.

But this secret, swift, and extraordinary build-up of Communist missiles — in an area well known to have a special and historical relationship to the United States and the nations of the Western Hemisphere, in violation of Soviet assurances, and in defiance of American and hemispheric policy — this sudden, clandestine decision to station strategic weapons for the first time outside of Soviet soil — is a deliberately provocative and unjustified change in the status quo which cannot be accepted by this country if our courage and our commitments are ever to be trusted again by either friend or foe. [*The U.S. had stationed many “strategic weapons” outside of U.S. soil for many years (including IRBMs in Italy and Turkey), but it had not done this in “sudden, clandestine” fashion. The last sentence in this paragraph is a textbook example of investing one’s long-term reputation in the outcome of the present bargaining situation, making it more credible that one will stand firm, and it was so cited in the “Bargaining Tactics” PPT.*]

The 1930's taught us a clear lesson: Aggressive conduct, if allowed to grow unchecked and unchallenged, ultimately leads to war. This nation is opposed to war. We are also true to our word. Our unswerving objective, therefore, must be to prevent the use of these missiles against this or any other country and to secure their withdrawal or elimination from the Western Hemisphere. [*JFK explicitly invokes the “appeasement theory of war” and the lessons of the run-up to WWII in Europe. Given the standard literal version of the Game of Chicken, the language that the U.S. would be “unswerving” in gaining its objective is striking.*]

Our policy has been one of patience and restraint, as befits a peaceful and powerful nation, which leads a worldwide alliance. We have been determined not to be diverted from our central concerns by mere irritants and fanatics. But now further action is required — and it is underway; and these actions may only be the beginning. We will not prematurely or unnecessarily risk the costs of world-wide nuclear war in which even the fruits of victory would be ashes in our mouth — but neither will we shrink from that risk at any time it must be faced. [*“Irritants and fanatics” (e.g., Fidel Castro) do not pose a mortal threat to the U.S., but these Soviet missiles do. Contrary to what some students said, JFK is not dismissing Premier Khrushchev as a “mere irritant or fanatic” — someone who has control over nuclear weapons is not a “mere” anything. Indeed, JFK is attributing a considerable measure of prudence and rationality to Khrushchev, which implies that he can be expected to back down — provided that the U.S. does not demand too much — rather than risk general war. The fact that the U.S. has been restrained visa vis Cuba in the past should not be taken as an index of lack of resolve to respond effectively to this challenge.*]

Acting, therefore, in the defense of our own security and of the entire Western Hemisphere, and under the authority entrusted to me by the Constitution as endorsed by the resolution of the Congress, I have directed that the following initial steps be taken immediately:

First: To halt this offensive build-up, a strict quarantine on all offensive military equipment under shipment to Cuba is being initiated. All ships of any kind bound for Cuba from whatever nation or port will, if found to contain cargoes of offensive weapons, be turned back. This quarantine will be extended, if needed, to other types of cargo and carriers. We are not at this time, however, denying the necessities of life as the Soviets attempted to do in their Berlin blockade of 1948. *[Imposing the “quarantine” (effectively a blockade) was in part a deterrent and defensive measure, i.e., the Soviets might decide not to challenge the blockade (deterrence) and, if they did challenge it, it would physically block the Soviets from delivering additional missiles to Cuba (defense). (Unfortunately, blockading ships — like blockading airplanes but unlike blockading trucks or trains --- puts “the last clear chance” to avoid a hugely heightened risk of general war on the blockading party, which must make a deliberate decision to fire first if the other party challenges the blockade, so the U.S. faced the same dilemma that the Soviet Union faced when the Western Allies responded the Berlin blockade with an airlift. Bear in mind the regular Soviet and U.S. forces had never openly fired shots at each other — and never would do so during entire of the Cold War.) Imposing the blockade also enhanced the compelling threat that JFK directed against the Soviet Union — “you must withdraw your missile that are already in Cuba promptly, or very bad things will happen.” Running the risks of imposing the blockade made it more credible that the U.S. would run other risks to secure the objectives of its compelling threat.]*

Second: I have directed the continued and increased close surveillance of Cuba and its military build-up. The Foreign Minister of the Organization of American States in their communiqué of October 3 rejected secrecy on such matters in this Hemisphere. Should these offensive military preparations continue, thus increasing the threat to the Hemisphere, further action will be justified. I have directed the Armed Forces to prepare for any eventuality and I trust that in the interests of both the Cuban people and the Soviet technicians at the sites, the hazards to all concerned of continuing this threat will be recognized. *[Prior to October 22, the U.S. surveillance of Cuba was done only by very high altitude U-2 flights; closer surveillance (e.g., U.S. planes flying directly over the missiles at relatively low altitude) would have revealed to the Soviets that the U.S. knew about the missiles. But after it revealed on October 22 that it knew about the missiles, the U.S. could carry out closer surveillance (though, of course, with the risk that its planes would be fired on and shot down — indeed, a U-2 was shot down over Cuba on October 27 and its pilot was the single fatality of the Cuban Missile Crisis). Such close-in surveillance had political as well military value to the U.S. — the resulting photos were used to great effect in the famous Stevenson-Zorin confrontation in the U.N. Security Council and were used more generally to persuade the world of the legitimacy U.S. actions.]*

Third: It shall be the policy of this nation to regard any nuclear missile launched from Cuba against any nation in the Western Hemisphere as an attack by the Soviet Union on the United States requiring a full retaliatory response upon the Soviet Union. *[This is probably the most dramatic statement in the speech and certainly deserves analysis, though many students did not comment on it. This is a dramatic instance of Schelling’s “first [or pre-emptive] commitment” tactic. To the extent that this commitment was credible, it gave Khrushchev a strong incentive to keep the missiles under Soviet control and, if possible, under his personal control, and it made it reckless*

*for him to threaten to do otherwise. Conversely, if Khrushchev had already made the first commitment and had announced that he had turned control of the missiles over to the Cuban government, and had indicated that it would be difficult or impossible for him to regain control of them even if he wanted to, it would have become reckless or pointless for Kennedy to make the threat that he did.]*

Fourth: As a necessary military precaution I have reinforced our base at Guantanamo, evacuated today the dependents of our personnel there, and ordered additional military units to be on a standby alert basis. [*JFK is reducing the costs to U.S. of standing firm and pointing this out the Soviet Union (see “Bargaining Tactics,” top of p. 4).*]

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My fellow citizens, let no one doubt that this is a difficult and dangerous effort on which we have set out. No one can foresee precisely what course it will take or what costs or casualties will be incurred. Many months of sacrifice and self-discipline lie ahead — months in which both our patience and our will will be tested, months in which many threats and denunciations will keep us aware of our dangers. But the greatest danger of all would be to do nothing.

The path we have chosen for the present is full of hazards, as all paths are; but it is the one most consistent with our character and courage as a nation and our commitments around the world. The cost of freedom is always high — but Americans have always paid it. And one path we shall never choose, and that is the path of surrender or submission. [*General statements of resolve and willing to endure costs and risks in order to compel the other side to backdown.*]

Our goal is not the victory of might but the vindication of right — not peace at the expense of freedom, but both peace and freedom, here in this Hemisphere and, we hope, around the world. God willing, that goal will be achieved.

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*Looking beyond JFK’s speech, RFK’s narrative and other sources allow us to connect the following concepts and insights (among others) of the course to analysis of the crisis:*

- (1) *It was a two-player game. (Cuba was not a player, as Fidel Castro indignantly pointed out later.)*
- (2) *It was not a zero-sum (strictly determined or otherwise) but a Generic Bargaining (or Chicken) Game, in which one outcome is worst for both players.*
- (3) *The strategy of standing firm in a Chicken Game is neither dominant (if the other player stands firm, it is better to give in) nor maximin (the worst possible outcome results when both players stand firm, which either player can preclude by giving in).*
- (4) *The S.U. used secrecy and deception in the first phase of the crisis (before October 14), the U.S. used secrecy (and in a sense deception) in the second phase (October 14-22), and the third and open phase (October 22-28) was a sequential move game with essentially perfect information. (See the description of the crisis chronology at the end of this*

*handout.)*

- (5) *JFK asserts that the history of the U.S.-S.U. nuclear relationship entailed tacit coordination on a “precarious status quo,” but this certainly was not a pure coordination game. (There was a large element of conflict of interests, as well as common interest.)*
- (6) *The U.S. had a menu of four initial options to choose from in determining its response:*
- (a) *diplomatic protests and negotiations;*
  - (b) *the “quarantine”/blockade;*
  - (c) *a pre-emptive air strike to (try to) destroy the missiles in Cuba; and*
  - (d) *an invasion to capture the missile sites.*

*Choosing (b) initially did not precluding using (c) or (d) subsequently; however, it would necessarily entail losing the advantage of surprise and also risked giving the S.U. the time and incentive to make pre-emptive commitment to hold on to the missiles the best they could.*

- (7) *The ExCom regularly used “look ahead and reason back” (or “backwards induction”) logic, e.g., they explicitly identified alternative U.S. courses of action (strategies), determined the S.U.’s best (or most likely) response to each, and evaluated U.S. choices in terms of the resulting “payoffs.” To quote Kennedy aide Theodore Sorenson: “We discussed what the Soviet reaction would be to any possible move by the United States, what our reaction with them would have to be to that Soviet reaction, and so on, trying to follow each of those roads to their ultimate conclusion.”*

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*Excerpts from NRM paper on “The Cuban Missile Crisis: A Political Analysis” pertaining directly to the JFK speech (with footnotes deleted; the full paper is posted on POLI 388 website):*

Meanwhile secrecy was collapsing rapidly. News stories written on Sunday evening reported an “air of crisis” in the capital. In fact, at least one newspaper learned “some details” of the situation and of U. S. plans that night, but, at the direct request of the White House, “did not print [the story] for reasons of public interest.” The Excom got one scare when it was announced that Gromyko (still in the United States) was to make an important statement at 3:30 Monday afternoon. It prepared a short statement announcing the blockade, which was to be released if Gromyko disclosed the Soviet operation, in order to recoup the initiative as best as possible. It turned out that the Foreign Minister only wanted to give a farewell speech as he left the country.

The nature and timing of the disclosure was designed so as to gain a maximum of both impact and support. Special efforts were made to obtain the greatest possible consent from allies and Latin American countries. Dean Acheson was dispatched to Paris to inform President de Gaulle personally. Richard Goodwin went off to the annual Alliance. for Progress meeting in Mexico City, where many OAS officials would be Monday evening. At Monday noon Pierre Salinger announced that the President would speak on television at 7 PM on “a subject of the highest national urgency.” Prior

to that time the President met with Congressional leaders, disclosing everything. At 6 PM Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin was called into Secretary Rusk's office, informed of everything, and presented with a personal message for Premier Khrushchev. Simultaneously a mass briefing was conducted in the State Department auditorium for diplomats from forty-six allied and friendly nations. At 8 PM neutral diplomats were briefed.

The President read his eighteen minute speech with "grimness unparalleled in recent times." He immediately revealed the well-kept secret. He called the Soviet missiles "offensive," retaining the distinction that he had introduced earlier and could hardly drop now. He directed his speech entirely against the Soviet Union, treating Cuba as a mere pawn in the conflict. He noted Soviet deceptions, specifically the September 11 statement and Gromyko's assurances, each of which he quoted. And of each he said: "That statement was false." He objected to the Soviet operation primarily because it upset the "precarious *status quo*." And in demonstrating his determination to resist, he clearly laid American prestige on the line: "But the secret, swift, and extraordinary buildup of Communist missiles . . . is a deliberately provocative and unjustified change in the *status quo* which cannot be accepted by this country or our courage and our commitments are ever to be trusted again by either friend or foe."

He then announced United States actions, clearly indicating that more would follow if necessary. ". . . I have directed that the following steps be taken immediately": (1) "To halt this offensive buildup, a strict quarantine on all offensive military equipment under shipment to Cuba is being initiated. . . . This quarantine will be extended, if needed, to other types of cargo and carriers." (2) Continued and increased close surveillance. At the same point he again suggested that further, more violent, action might follow. (3) "It shall be the policy of this , nation to regard any nuclear missile launched from Cuba against any nation in the Western Hemisphere as an attack by the Soviet Union on the United States, requiring a full retaliatory response on the Soviet Union." (5 ) An immediate OAS meeting. (6) An emergency Security Council meeting. (7) "I call upon Chairman Khrushchev to halt and eliminate this clandestine, reckless, and provocative threat to world peace and to stable relations between our two nations."

The quarantine had two purposes, as Secretary McNamara made clear at his news conference later Monday night. First, it was designed to deter, or if necessary physically prevent, the introduction of additional strategic weapons into Cuba. Second and more importantly, it was designed to establish a pattern of irresistible United States momentum and visible willingness to run high risks until the weapons already in Cuba were removed. But it did not involve unnecessary risks. It gave the Soviets time to reconsider their action; it permitted them to comply without having to back down before a specific ultimatum.

*Appendices from NRM paper on “The Cuban Missile Crisis in the International System” (with one footnote inserted into the text and others deleted; the full paper is posted on POLI 388 website):*

### **Signals and Communications**

The Cuban crisis provides good example both of signals received and signals missed. During the open crisis, the United States successfully communicated its determination to see the missiles removed and the Soviet Union successfully communicated its willingness to do so, short of outright capitulation. Prior to the week of October 22-28, however, signals were missed.

We can distinguish between purposeful signaling (the purposeful communication of intentions, when one wants to make them clear; this includes both warnings and reassurances) and inadvertent signaling (the inadvertent communication of intentions when one wants to keep them secret). The Soviet Union evidently missed the United States' purposeful signals that strategic weapons in Cuba would not be tolerated. One reason for this was that the American warning was blurred by the domestic political context in which it was made. The burden of President Kennedy's news conference remarks of September 4 and 11 was to restrain and reprimand the domestic opposition; the risk of intervention was stressed; the warning to the international opposition was perfunctory by comparison. This suggests what is likely to be a general problem for a democratic nation — especially the United States — which speaks with many voices for diverse purposes. When it is resolved to respond in a certain contingency, it may be unable to communicate its intent effectively. Thus the contingency is more likely to occur.

With respect to inadvertent signals, one would suppose retrospectively that the Soviet Union might have picked up sufficient signals between October 16 and 22 to move to pre-empt the planned American initiative. (It would be interesting, but difficult, to do a “warning and decision” study from the Soviet point of view. Cf. Roberta Wohlstetter, “Cuba and Pear Harbor: Hindsight and Foresight,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 43, No.4 (July, 1965). But again contradictory signals were emanating from the United States. To use the appropriate jargon, an open (and open-mouthed) society may not be good at damping down inadvertent signals but it excels in at producing noise that can hide them. Apparently the Soviets were taken quite by surprise.

In reconstructing the course of the crisis, one is impressed by the time lag involved when the two principals communicated privately (i. e. not by radio broadcasts). When the crisis looked most grim to American policy-makers (October 27), this may have been due only to delay in receiving a message. One result of the crisis was the establishment of the “hot line,” permitting instantaneous private communication. How a hot line would have affected the course of the Cuban crisis is hard to say, but it should be pointed out that it only facilitates communication. It transmits with equal efficiency all sorts of messages, including threats and deceptions.

### Cuba and Schelling

Thomas Schelling's brilliant book, *The Strategy of Conflict*, certainly provides one useful basis for a partial analysis and understanding of the Cuban missile crisis. In certain respects the contestants were employing the kind of tactics he discusses, especially in the matter of getting in the first strong (though not irrevocable) commitment. Thus for example the Soviet Union conducted its operation in Cuba secretly and hurriedly (somewhat competitive values; they sacrificed a measure of secrecy for extra speed) in order to present the United States with a *fait accompli*. Once the bases had been completed and revealed to the world, the Soviet Union presumably would have had an even stronger incentive to keep them (at least in the relatively short run) and the United States would have had a harder time in forcing their removal; perhaps it would have been reluctant even to attempt it. Conversely, once the United States discovered the Soviet operation, it wanted to make an effective but also not unnecessarily dangerous commitment to remove the missiles before the bases were completed. This required a well thought out plan, reached relatively quickly but also in secret (not too many people involved in the deliberations; participants typing their own working papers and keeping routine obligations, etc.). Again these values were competitive. Thus there was a race to make the first public commitment, and the United States had the critical advantage of knowing it was in such a race.

The second, dramatic instance of the “first commitment” tactic involved the nuclear warning contained in President Kennedy's speech of October 22. This commitment gave Premier Khrushchev a strong incentive to keep the missiles under Soviet control and, if possible, his personal control, and it made it reckless for him to threaten to do otherwise. Conversely, if Khrushchev had already announced that he had turned control of the missiles over to the Cuban government, and had indicated that it would be difficult or impossible for him to regain control of them even if he wanted to, it would have become reckless or pointless for Kennedy to make the threat that he did.

However, I believe that the Cuban crisis suggests that other factors — including other types of strategic moves — that Schelling does not emphasize can also be of critical importance. Specifically, in a crisis, it is important not only to be able effectively to threaten your opponent but also to be able effectively to reassure your opponent.

In the first place, the success of American policy probably depended to a considerable extent on the ability of the United States to assure the Soviet Union as to the limited nature of its objectives. The Soviet Union would have been less ready to retreat if it had not been persuaded that the United States would not press its initiative further and would not make further demands — in particular that the United States would not seek total Soviet withdrawal from Cuba, the elimination of the Castro government (which must have looked tempting to some people in Washington), or the unnecessary humiliation of the Soviet Union or of Premier Khrushchev. The Soviet accommodation was also facilitated by American willingness to go along with Khrushchev's “no invasion – no need for missiles” rationale.



Secondly, the importance of reassurance is illustrated by the changing tone of the messages Premier Khrushchev apparently sent to President Kennedy (not all of which have been published). During the earlier part of the week, he was apparently saying something like this: “Watch out. We may not be able to keep things under control. Therefore, you had better be careful.” This is a Schellingesque type of warning. But later in the week he was saying: “Don’t worry. We have everything under control. Therefore, you can afford to be careful.”

Generally, the strategic moves that Schelling finds interesting are the ones that are “interesting” from a theoretical point of view, in particular threats made credible by more or less irrevocable commitments. And indeed there is something fascinating about the idea that it may be wise (or strategic — we might want to make the distinction) to reduce one’s own discretion in a conflict situation. You may want to use such tactics in, for example, an experimental game situation. They may work. On the other hand, they may not. Your opponent may not even notice or understand the ingenious way in which you have committed yourself — in which case you can run through the game again. In international politics in the nuclear age, however, one cannot conduct foreign policy in this experimental frame of mind. It is too risky; the scope, if not the probability, of potential disaster is too great.

In summary, the types of strategic moves to which Schelling gives most attention are not (necessarily) those that are most commonly employed in international politics, even — perhaps especially — in crises. Moreover, international political bargaining cannot be understood entirely in terms of strategic moves of any sort, because of the complex and ambiguous environment, the differing perceptions and perspectives, the differing restraints, resources, and alliances, the differing and imperfect decision-making processes, and all the other factors which combined make the conduct of foreign policy different from disciplining children or playing games on matrices. Thus Schelling is useful and perhaps necessary for a thoughtful analysis of the Cuban Crisis, but he is not sufficient. For example, the Cuban crisis does not demonstrate that “weakness is strength.” It demonstrates, if anything, the more obvious proposition.

*Note. The first paper includes a complete chronology (pp. 3-9) of the events of the Cuban Missile Crisis from Summer 1962 through October 28, 1962 that you might want to examine. The crisis is divided into three phases on the basis of the information available to the participants. The first two phases are “played” under conditions of imperfect information. In the first phase, the Soviet Union begins installing missiles in Cuba, but the United States does not know about this. In the second phase (beginning on October 14), the U.S. knows what the S.U. is doing but the S.U. does not know the U.S. has “found out” the S.U. actions. In these first two phases, events are placed in three columns: those events that are public knowledge, those that are known to the U.S. but not to the S.U., and those that are known to the S.U. but not the U.S. The third or “open phase” of the crisis (October 22-28) was a game of (close to) perfect information, in that the sequential moves of each side became public knowledge as soon as they are made.*