Cuban Missile Crisis: Applying Strategic Culture to Game Theory

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CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS:
APPLYING STRATEGIC CULTURE TO GAMETHEORY

by
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A Plan B Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
of
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Introduction

Game theory applied to political situations offers a unique approach to analyzing and understanding international relations. Yet the rigid structure that lends itself so well to mathematics is not practical in the real world. It lacks a built-in mechanism for determining a player's preferences, which is a key part of an international "game" or situation. Strategic culture, another international relations theory, is quite the opposite. Critics claim it suffers from a lack of structure, but it captures the spirit of international actors and what makes them tick. This paper explores the idea of pairing the two otherwise unrelated theories to bolster both in the areas where they are lacking in order to provide a more complete understanding of international states' behavior and motivations.

Brief Summary of Major Theories

The theories presented in the following pages are drawn from distinct schools of thought; consequently it is necessary to provide some background information. Both theories will be explored in depth in other sections of the paper. Here I offer only a brief overview to orient the reader.

Strategic Culture

Strategic culture as an international relations theory posits that nations are fundamentally influenced by their culture and such influence carries over to strategic decisions and operations. Strategic culture, a theory which has garnered attention of late, is not strictly speaking, a new idea. Jack Snyder first
coined the phrase "strategic culture" in a RAND paper in 1977 and the concept has since seen three generations of scholarly refinement.

By nature, culture surrounds and influences often without the actor being aware of its presence. Colin Gray, one of the earliest contributors to the idea, goes as far as to say that one cannot act outside his strategic culture, that it is pervasive and because of its subconscious influence, inescapable (Gray 1999, p. 53). The theory is limited in its ability to predict exactly what course of action an individual or nation will take, instead it narrows the range of choices that person or state will chose from – "sets the agenda" if you will.

Borrowing from the theoretical framework offered by Jeannie Johnson, one may look at a nation's identity, values, norms, and perceptive lens to ascertain its strategic culture. These factors that make up strategic culture can be discovered by looking at different identifiers such as a nation's history, geography, communication (internal and external) etc. I will elaborate on these methods and on the theory of strategic culture itself in much greater detail and the "methodologies" section of this paper.

**Game Theory**

Game theory is a mathematical theory most often applied to economics but has applications in many areas including international relations. Game theory analyzes behavior in strategic situations and identifies the rational "best" possible choices. How the game is played depends on the choices of two or more players. Each player brings a set of ranked preferences on the outcome of the game to the bargaining table. "Game theory takes players' interests as given..."
and focuses on the logical implications that their satisfaction has on players’ choices. It does not inquire into their origins..." (Brams, 1975 pg. xv)

This paper will not attempt to validate or justify strategic culture as a viable international relations theory. That argument has been canvassed extensively elsewhere. Nor do I endeavor to explore game theory in any depth, as I am not a mathematician. Instead I simply evaluate the pairing of the two theories as an approach to looking at international events.

Game Theory

A Skeletal Theory

John von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern, considered by many to be the fathers of game theory, readily acknowledged the theory’s limitations. They posited that a static theory was necessary as a foundation, upon which to develop a more dynamic, usable theory, perhaps paired with social behavior theory (Deutsch, 1954, p. 80). Game theory is very limited in its predictive capacity. Many authors writing about the utility of the theory are also quick to point out its shortcomings.

Robert Jervis (1988) sees as a fundamental flaw in game theory, the fact that some of the most complex elements of politics and international relations are left to assumptions. Contributing factors such as beliefs, values, preferences and view of self are exogenous and to be included only in the rules of the game, but perform no role in the play of the game. Jervis counters that since nothing in international politics is so simple, these factors need to be explored and investigated, not simply taken as givens (p. 319).
Martin Shubik (1984), who has written extensively on game theory, also comments on game theory's inherent lack of ability to distinguish between players. Each parties' preference structure is to be incorporated into the rules, structure and description of the game itself, because once they come to the table, all are to be considered identical players (p. 16). Shubik does not treat this as a flaw but simply a limitation of the theory. Though he shuns "behaviorist theories" as a supplement to game theory, he concedes the fact that there is room for such theories and that they could eliminate some of the "lack of information" problems of game theory, if such a theory could "constrain or routinize" behavior (p. 17).

Furthering this discussion, Karl W. Deutsch (1954) notes that game theory is limited to dealing with objective strategies that are ranked as good, bad, better or worse. Players' personality and cultural characteristics are absent from the framework of the theory. However, Deutsch notes, the identification of "good" strategy as strictly objective helps one disentangle probabilities from personal preferences and identify departures from the theoretically "best" strategy (p. 78).

Snyder and Diesing (1977) echo other authors in their look at utility theory as a bargaining model and note that while it is useful, its deficiency lies in its neglect of cognitive factors. Theorists who apply this model instead consider such factors as a secondary issue, to be dealt with ad hoc. The authors counter this logic, noting that in international exchanges, cognitive factors are fundamental and inseparable. In crisis negotiations, both sides take into account the opponents preferences and intentions as well as how one's own preferences
and intentions will be interpreted by one's opponent and these judgments tend to be inaccurate (p. 71).

Deutsch, as well as Snyder and Diesing, call attention to game theory's inability to evolve. The theory has no built-in ability to address change in performance or other elements of game play. Rules are also to remain static. While such rigidity isn't an issue in games like chess, it does not provide the flexibility required for something as dynamic as politics. Deutsch warns against relying too heavily upon the static theory in international relations where it could do the analyst a great disservice (Deutsch, 1954, pp. 79-80). Snyder and Diesing note that the game structure can be changed during play. Preferences can change throughout the game or may not be settled on at the beginning of play because of lack of information or indecision in internal decision making. Players use the feedback of the opponent for clarification and then adjust. The bargaining process fills in the details. Thus, concepts of game theory are dynamic, rather than static processes, and the bargaining in some cases not only resolves the conflict but actually stabilizes it. Information gained through bargaining helps make the game structure known to the players (Snyder & Diesing, 1977, p. 416).

Another game theory limitation is its inability to make "explicit predictions" (Shubik, 1984, p. 94). The theory also lacks methods to gauge differences and intensities of preferences (as in a country preferring something three times more than the next ranked outcome). This limitation becomes problematic particularly
when dealing with international actors who see winning and losing in a long term context (Shubik, 1984, p. 99).

Another problem Deutsch canvasses is the divergence of value considerations between game theory and human nature. Game theory assumes values are defined from the outside, are unchanging, and are independent from the results of the game. Values are related to the rules of the specific and isolated game. In reality, human actors are expected to act in concert with the values of their society and culture while also choosing the strategy that is objectively expected to yield the greatest likelihood of survival. Values are derived from a myriad of sources and are not confined to a single game (Deutsch, 1954, p. 80).

Deutsch (1954) concludes that game theory is often found lacking by political scientists because of its present limitations. "If its potentialities are to be fulfilled, game theory must obtain from political scientists concepts and data which are sufficiently well defined and measured to be amenable to its treatment" (p. 79).

One Size Fits All

As discussed in the previous section, game theory takes a blind approach to its analysis of unique players in the game. In game theory, all players are considered equal. However, in real life it is very apparent that no person or country is identical and, as several authors point out, it is a substantial limitation of the theory. Game theory goes further, treating an entire country as a unified body acting as one. Such an idea seems a bit naïve.
Snyder and Diesing (1977) look at game theory and the assumption of a united bargainer with stable preferences. They note that most governments are fraught with competing and opposing factions, each with their own agenda, all of which come into play in a decision making or bargaining scenario. Thus, "crisis bargaining is as much a struggle within governments as between them" (pp. 74-75). Shubik (1984) adds that, with regard to players, game theory assumes that those players which make up a group of people (as in international politics) are unified and all internal issues are resolved. Shubik notes that this presents a fundamental difficulty and can be misleading, as the individual is not comparable to a nation with regards to decision making and psychology (p. 18).

**Time Vacuum**

The idea of time is strikingly absent from game theory. It is an important element in the real world but does not translate onto the oft used 2x2 matrix. Such a factor is crucial because (1) the situation often deteriorates as time passes. (In the Cuban Missile Crisis, the missiles were becoming operational and rapidly made the consequences increasingly dire while the Kennedy administration deliberated) (Snyder & Diesing, 1977, p. 77). (2) International actors take into account the long term as well as the short term in their bargaining. (Snyder & Diesing, 1977, p. 185) A nation may be willing to lose the current battle if it will somehow aid them in the long run. The aforementioned limitations of the utility model cause the authors to call for a new model, one that addresses the cognitive elements of bargaining (Snyder & Diesing, 1977, p. 182).
On the same topic, Jervis (1989b) argues that history and background are involved in the very reason the event or crisis occurs, that is, each party arrived at this point through some historical path. Once faced with the situation, players are influenced by “beliefs, hopes, fears, and expectations which they bring to the situation.” He cites Britain's appeasement policy of the 1930s as a direct result of its experience in World War I. Knowing where a player has been and what they have done is fundamental in determining what they will do (p. 512).

**Game Theory – Suppemental Theories**

Arguing the gaps mentioned in the past section, Robert Jervis, Glenn H. Snyder and Paul Diesing offer up theories of their own to either supplement or supplant game theory as a decision making model. Jervis looks at the international relations theory of realism and Snyder and Diesing craft their own theory.

Realism is evaluated by Jervis (1988) as a possible supplement to game theory, albeit with a critical approach. Realism, like game theory, is “structural, strategic and rational” (p. 318). It is difficult, however, to deduce preferences of players from the structure of realism (p. 325). Jervis states that preferences are fluid, changing with new decision makers. (p. 326). Realism theory is bound to the state and its position in the international system and thus does not allow for any preference changes due to a decision making “changing of the guard” (p. 327). Jervis concludes that both game theory and realism are totally lacking or inadequate (respectively) with regard to understanding and determining preferences (p. 329).
Snyder and Diesing (1977) construct an original rational bargaining model as an alternative to game theory. The model looks at a rational bargainer who is presented with imperfect information. His initial judgment may be mistaken, which he takes into account, but corrects it quickly as the process proceeds and new information becomes available, constantly testing specific points (pp. 333-336). Conversely, an irrational bargainer begins with a "rigid belief system" that influences all his behavior. He "knows" what his opponent will do from the information he has studied regarding the opponent's ultimate aims, bargaining style, preferences and internal political problems. This leads to one strategy that he is convinced is the only road to success. If it does not succeed, he concludes that success is not possible (p. 337). The authors posit that if the irrational bargainer's strategy does happen to be successful it is due to luck. If he makes a mistake and his assessment is wrong, it will be too late to change anything (p. 338).

**Toward a Working Theory**

Game theory as an international relations model is incomplete in some fundamental areas as noted by several authors in the previous section. Steven J. Brams who has written several books on politics and game theory, looks at a case study of the Cuban Missile Crisis and, like others remarks on game theory's inadequacies. Brams buttresses the gaps in game theory with an analysis of the actors' preferences and the result is a more dynamic and realistic approach.
Brams (1984) reviews the oft-used Chicken analogy as a model to explain the Cuban Missile Crisis. Brams is quick to note its shortcomings; it is an oversimplification of the options considered by the decision makers, it assumes all actions were taken by each side simultaneously, and finally, there is no way to verify the values or preference rankings of the players as being consistent with the game of Chicken (p. 50). Brams muses that perhaps the Soviets installed the offensive missiles in Cuba with the assumption that any retaliation would be minor, thus making their provocation rational (p. 51).

Brams (2003) next outlines the preferences of the United States and Soviet Union and their divergent interpretations of the outcome, divined through the words of Kennedy and Khrushchev. It is this dialogue and analysis that is indicative of the players' strategic culture and affects the entire "game". For instance, Brams quotes a letter from Kennedy to Khrushchev that shows the United States' willingness to remove the quarantine and provide assurances against a Cuban invasion in return for a Soviet withdrawal of the missiles. This concession is not consistent with the game theoretic model of Chicken which is often used to describe the conflict (as being on a collision course) (p. 106).

With this in mind, Brams (2003) goes back to the drawing board. In determining which game to apply to the Crisis, Brams outlines three different models. Looking at the validity of each he determines the best model. The first is

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1 The game of Chicken is an oft-referred to game theory model. In a figurative scenario, two drives are on a course coming at each other. Ultimately each side must choose to between continuing on course or swerving. Obviously if both push on it means certain death but swerving first means being labeled the "chicken". Neither side wants to yield to each other but if both sides choose this option, it equals the worst scenario for both. However, both sides are tempted to stray from cooperation, rendering that outcome as unstable.
modeled after the game of Chicken, shown below. Withdrawal refers to the Soviet removal of weapons from Cuba; maintenance would be leaving them there. The blockade and air strike are the two options that the U.S. most seriously considered.

**Figure 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>United States</th>
<th>Soviet Union</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blockade (B)</strong></td>
<td>Withdrawal (W)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3,3) Compromise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Air Strike (A)</strong></td>
<td>(4,2) US victory, Soviet defeat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: 
- (x,y) = (rank of the US, rank of Soviet Union); 4 = best; 3 = next best; 2 = next worst; 1 = worst.

In this model, the best strategy for each player would be (4,2) for the U.S. and (2,4) for the Soviet Union. However, each player risks that the other will also choose their best strategy, resulting in (1,1) or nuclear war. Since each player's choice relies on the other's choice, it gives each the incentive to threaten not to cooperate and hope the other concedes, resulting in the best outcome for the given player. The compromise option is unappealing because it is unstable, meaning both would be tempted to depart from it to improve their situation. Brams notes that this model is inadequate because it shows only two options (both sides considered more than two alternatives) and it assumes the players chose their actions simultaneously (p. 106).
Figure 2 demonstrates an alternate "payoff" model that takes into account a set of preference rankings based on comments of the Kennedy administration and Khrushchev.

**Figure 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Withdrawal ((W))</th>
<th>Maintenance ((M))</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>United States</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blockade ((B))</td>
<td>((3,3)) Compromise</td>
<td>((1,4)) Soviet victory, U.S. capitulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air Strike ((A))</td>
<td>((2,2)) &quot;Dishonorable&quot; U.S. action, Soviets thwarted</td>
<td>((4,1)) &quot;Honorable,&quot; U.S. action, Soviets thwarted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: \((x,y) = \text{rank of the U.S., rank of Soviet Union}\); 4 = best; 3 = next best; 2 = next worst; 1 = worst.

In this situation the compromise option remains the same \((BW 3,3)\). The next outcome \((BM)\) is a scenario where the U.S. would impose a blockade and be ignored by the Soviets (the Soviet's best outcome \([1,4]\) and the worst outcome for the U.S.). Next, \((AM)\) a U.S. air strike would destroy the missiles and thwart the Soviets (the Soviet's worst outcome and the best outcome for the U.S.). Finally, \((AW)\) an air strike would destroy missiles that the Soviets were withdrawing, a "dishonorable" action on the part of the U.S. (second to worst outcome) which thwarts the Soviets (also their next to worst outcome). While this model is more helpful in considering preferences, it, too, assumes the choices were made simultaneously.

Brams final model is a tree diagram of sequential choices, outlined in
The first option available to the U.S. after learning of the missiles was to enact a blockade or to commence with an air strike. Why did the U.S. choose the former? The air strike certainly could have brought a quick, decisive resolution of the problem (based on incomplete knowledge the U.S. had to work with). But Brams notes that Kennedy was showing sensitivity to "American ideals and values," and referred to the country's identity in the U.S. preference rankings.

Several of Kennedy's advisors felt very reluctant about initiating an attack against Cuba without exhausting less belligerent courses of action that might bring about the removal of the missiles with less risk and greater sensitivity to American ideals and values. As Robert Kennedy put it, an immediate attack would be looked upon as "a Pearl Harbor in reverse, and it would blacken the name of the United States in the pages of history" (Brams, 2003 p. 109).
In Brams' extended models, he uses the fluid concepts of "honorable" and "dishonorable" actions to describe U.S. preference rankings. He neglects to discuss in detail how an observer might systemically determine what a player considers honorable or not, other than to offer some quotations of Nikita Krushchev and John F. Kennedy to support his alternate model (Brams, 1984, pp. 52-53).

After examining the Cuban Missile Crisis and the 1973 Alert Crisis, Brams concludes that preferences surface as a very important, but difficult to divine, element of real world games. As evidenced in the aforementioned incidents, perceptions need to be explored as do the players' true preferences. (Brams, 1984, p. 84) A method of determining those perceptions and preferences is needed to render game theory as a more complete and useful international relations theory.

**Preferences: the heart of game theory**

Throughout literature on game theory, scholars stress the fundamental importance of preferences to game theory (Brams, 1984, p. 84). Robert Jervis goes as far as to say that "preferences are very likely the most important part of the game" (Jervis, 1988, p. 322, italics added). As defined by Steven J. Brams (1984), preferences are the player's ranking of outcomes from best to worst (p. 157). The formation of preference is where most of the information about the players and the subsequent game are revealed (Jervis, 1988, p. 322). Preference rankings determine the very game that is played, as demonstrated in

In the case of the 1973 "Alert Crisis" involving the Yom Kippur War, Brams (one of the foremost scholars on game theory and politics) sets up a model that demonstrates the extent to which preference rankings can change the entire game. Egypt and Syria launched a surprise attack on Israel which drew both superpowers into the situation with efforts to prop up their allies. When the United Nations call for a cease fire proved ineffective, the Soviets approached the U.S. with an offer to send in a joint peace-keeping force. The U.S., fearing a confrontation with the Soviets, declined and then responded by putting its military on rare alert (Brams, 1984, pp. 62-63).

According to accounts by President Richard Nixon and others, the U.S. believed that the Soviet Union perceived the U.S. preference rankings to be as follows, from best to worst: Israeli victory, cooperation with Soviets, Soviet victory/intervention, and superpower confrontation. Nixon believed that the Watergate scandal led the Soviets to assume the U.S. would be entangled in domestic affairs and thus weak on foreign political will (Brams, 1984, p. 64).

Nixon made clear to the Soviets with the alert that the U.S. would come to the aid of Israel rather than allow a unilateral Soviet intervention, revealing the true order of preferences. Without the alert, the Soviet intervention is the theoretically stable outcome; it is the Soviet's first choice and the U.S. second to worst choice (as perceived by the Soviets) with the only departure option the perceived worst choice. With the alert, and accompanying shift to true
preferences, the game changes to Prisoner's Dilemma. The Prisoner's Dilemma model however, theoretically yields the same stable outcome, which wasn't the outcome in the actual incident. By adopting a sequential game, which Brams argues is more real-to-life and takes into account the long term view, the rational strategy for the U.S. would be to assume a cooperative position and the Soviet's only other option, Israeli victory, would be its worst preference. Brams concludes that without the alert the logical choice for the Soviets is military intervention, a dramatic action with serious consequences based on misperceptions. The clarification of preferences led to a peaceful, cooperative and rational outcome (Brams, 1984, pp. 74-76).

The problem understanding preferences

Brams and Zagare have established the importance of preferences, however, they remain the hardest element of game theory to gauge and understand. Preferences, at first blush, seem to be a subjective, seemingly irrational part of what is otherwise a scientific, largely objective theory. They are often misunderstood and miscalculated and the consequences can be far reaching.

Zagare discounts the usefulness of game theory as a model, saying that it can not be the final "arbiter" in policy disputes or competing explanations.

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2 Prisoners dilemma refers to the classic game theory model where two suspects in a crime are arrested and then separated. Lacking sufficient information to convict, the police propose a deal to each prisoner. If one cooperates with the prosecution and his partner in crime remains silent, the betrayer is set free, and the silent prisoner is sentenced to a 10-year prison term. If both prisoners "squeal" then they both receive a sentence of only 5 years. If both remain silent, each serves 6 months for a minor charge.
because the preferences and perceptions of the players are based on outside and inexact assumptions (Zagare, 1983, pp. 84-85).

In an international incident there is almost always at least an attempt by each side to understand their opponents' preferences and to gain the upper hand with such knowledge. However, as Robert Jervis, Steven Brams and others will show, interpretations and conjectures made by one nation about another almost take on a game of their own and therefore need to be explored as much as preferences.

Discovering preferences

Divining the true preferences of a player in game theory is an inexact science at best and, according to Zagare and others, merely random guesswork. Snyder and Diesing (1977), in their assessment on world conflict, offer little hope that any understanding of others' preferences is possible (p. 336). However, other scholars like Robert Jervis disagree, noting that a decision maker's views are molded from their beliefs regarding their domestic political system, their previous experiences and international history – all observable or qualitative attributes (Jervis, 1968, p. 467). The literature on game theory provides some indicators of preferences. I have identified these indicators as identity, values/beliefs, norms, and perception.

Identity

Identity is essentially how a country sees itself and its perceived role in the global scheme. Thus preferences, in a very basic sense, emanate from a country's identity. Like Brams, Zagare examines game theory using the Alert
Crisis. In his examination of preferences, he looks at the response of both sides in terms of how they perceived the situation and how each viewed the opponent's preference ranking. America's preferences, for example, were a result of a complex balancing act of historical loyalty and continuing support of Israel and the delicate nature of the relationship with Arab oil-producing nations, upon which the U.S. had become dependent (Zagare, 1983, pg. 76). The conflicting nature of U.S. interests in the situation presented a type of identity crisis for the U.S. The U.S. reaction however, managed to satisfy both elements of its identity.

Values

The primary factor that influences bargaining is the belief system, particularly the difference between the belief systems of the two parties involved. It affects initial expectations, which influence initial strategy, which in turn, influence any adjustments then made to the strategy throughout the negotiating process. A player's belief system contributes to and amplifies misinterpretations of an adversary's message as well as mistaken estimates of how the adversary is interpreting one's own messages. If each side had perfect information about the other's abilities and resolve then "there would be little to bargain about" (Snyder & Diesing, 1977, p. 290).

Snyder and Diesing (1977) note that values and interests make up a central context in which bargaining takes place. They are both inherent to the situation and not fully known to both parties at the beginning of negotiations. Interests are strategic, reputational and intrinsic (interests valued for their own sake; self-respect, prestige, etc.) Values can also encompass a nation's military
power and the degree of risk taken, expectations of whether a party will win or lose and the value of what would be won or lost, as well as the value of settling the dispute. Values can add perceived legitimacy or justice to a country’s actions. For instance, the Monroe Doctrine lent the U.S. a platform on which to stand in the Cuban Missile Crisis negotiations when it demanded the Soviet missiles be withdrawn. Such legitimacy can strengthen the position of one side and weaken the other’s (pp.183-84).

The value placed on other actors in the game is another defining element of preferences that cannot be overlooked. Jervis (1988) suggests looking at relationships not with regard to geographical location but rather at their shared values. He contends that the reason the U.S. has never attempted to conquer Canada is evidence of shared values (p. 342). He lists three reasons (based on values) for U.S. restraint: 1) use of force is negatively valued by most Americans -- unless it is to remove some menace to security or to establish a democratic regime, 2) shared values between U.S. and Canada (Canada exhibits all the attributes the U.S. likes to see in a country), and 3) Americans prize the well-being of Canadians (p. 343). These values would decrease the utility of domination instead of increase it. Values further explain who a state will choose to protect and whom it will oppose and further extends to alliances and special ties that security considerations do not always explain. Such relationships would likely sour quickly if an ally to the U.S., for instance, were to turn to fascism (p. 343). In Realism theory, values are constant and game theory takes them as givens. The formation, continuity and evolution of values are important elements
in international relations and are not addressed in the aforementioned theories (p. 344).

Norms

Preferences are guided by norms—behavior that is considered acceptable by a player. Snyder and Diesing (1977) discuss norms in terms of constraints to behavior. Along with the central objective being bargained for in a negotiation, there are secondary constraints which act as boundaries. If crossed, such a boundary would create an intolerable situation; for instance, war, domestic opposition, surprise attacks, etc. These consequential situations are unacceptable and to be avoided (p. 363-366). Constraints vary in stringency, some yielding to more important considerations (i.e. blockade risked for elimination of missiles). These are unique to each player; however the authors do not discuss how they materialize or how one can decipher what that would be for a particular player (p. 366).

Applying this concept to the Cuban Missile Crisis, the secret installation of Soviet missiles in Cuba was the initial intolerable action. The Soviets had assured Kennedy they would not take such an action and they disregarded his warnings against doing so. They ignored the long standing Monroe Doctrine and also shifted the military balance. Thus the primary objective was that the missiles had to be removed before they became operational. Along with that was a time constraint. Secondary constraints were: minimum risk of escalation and war, consistency with alliance or U.N. obligations, and no tolerance for immoral acts (the last qualifier not accepted by all involved in the decision making
process) (Snyder & Diesing, 1977, p. 382). Snyder and Diesing attribute the success of the chosen strategy not to adequate information about the situation (particularly with regard to Soviet strategy and intentions), but instead to the varied opinions, the internal bargaining process, and chance. They also note that Kennedy and some advisors also had an unusual degree of knowledge on the Soviet government structure, empathy for the Soviets, education on international diplomatic history and the humility to correct strategy when it seemed off course (Snyder & Diesing, 1977, p. 384).

**Perception**

Snyder and Diesing (1977), whose study looks not only at game theory, but at international conflict and negotiation in general, explain that interpretation of preferences is based on a nation's own belief system. That belief system includes both a nation's theories about international politics and a set of images or beliefs about the nature and characteristic behavior the nation has of itself and the other players (p. 286). Robert Jervis writes that decision makers tend to fit incoming information into existing theories and images. Images play a large role in determining what gets noticed (Jervis, 1968, p. 455). Decision makers become so set in their views and theories that they ignore new and incongruent information (Jervis, 1968, p. 459).

Expounding on the "image" discussion, the well known security dilemma provides a prime example of the concept. When states consider each other opponents, the build up of arms tends to produce the notion that the opponent is acting aggressively and one's own state is acting in self defense. Often one does
not understand that it goes both ways – that one's own security guarantees might be seen as aggressive by another and may actually be the cause of the adversary's moves. "The image of the peaceful, defensive self reinforces the image of the aggressive opponent, for if we are 'obviously' only defending ourselves, why else is he doing all these threatening things?" (Snyder & Diesing, 1977, p. 293) It is natural to consider one's own motives as good and sincere (we have endless empathy for ourselves) and reduce that of an opponent's to immoral, depraved and illegitimate. Images may be invented but the conflicts they produce are quite real (Snyder & Diesing, 1977, p. 293). Robert Jervis (1989) considers this to be directly related to nationalism; people seldom like to believe that their country has acted immorally. It becomes more difficult to have empathy and creates an added degree of passion (and perhaps even irrationality) to crises. Such feelings affect not only the public, but the leaders as well (p. 489).

The Cold War is a fine example of this phenomenon. The bipolarity dynamic of the era amplified a U.S. and Soviet Union rivalry. The security dilemma heightened fears aggravated by differences in ideology (Snyder & Diesing, 1977, p. 294). These tendencies result in a self-fulfilling prophecy. Jervis argues that solutions to conflict may be difficult to achieve, sometimes simply because some parties find the very idea of compromise with an enemy repulsive (Jervis, 1989a, p. 489).

The literature on preferences establishes variables such as identity and values as key components of a country's preferences. The theory of strategic
culture and particularly the methodological approach offered by Jeannie L. Johnson in *Strategic Culture and Weapons of Mass Destruction* (Johnson, Kartchner, Larsen, 2009) provides a method for systematically culling a nation's identity, values, norms and perceptions. The variables that make up strategic culture seem to be a natural fit and an organized way of divining preferences. When preferences are plugged into game theory they fill the gaps in information and allow one to then understand and potentially predict the behavior of international actors.

**Research Design**

**Theoretical Framework**

As previously mentioned, I will attempt to marry two disparate theories, using strategic culture to supplement game theory. I will rely largely on the edited volume *Strategic Culture and Weapons of Mass Destruction* (Johnson, et al., 2009) as my methodological basis for looking at strategic culture. I will confine this analysis to the Cuban Missile Crisis, using it as a real world case study. I chose this particular example because it is a classic example of game theory; it is well documented, with two major players with distinct agendas and cultures. I will look at literature on the crisis that focuses specifically on the deliberations that took place within the Kennedy administration.

**Hypothesis**

After reviewing the relevant literature, I hypothesize that in game theoretic situations, a country's strategic culture plays a dominant role in how a nation plays the game, ranks its preferences, and reacts to the other player's decisions.
Pairing these two international relations theories will provide a more complete picture of the motivations and expected behavior of nations engaged in strategic situations. The case of the Cuban Missile Crisis is a real life game theory model that I will look to for evidence to support or discredit this conjecture.

**Concepts and Variables**

I will focus my research on the Cuban Missile Crisis (sometimes referred to as the October Crisis or Caribbean Crisis), specifically the thirteen day period in October 1962, from when the United States first identified missile installation in Cuba to the time, two weeks later, when the crisis was diffused. Being limited by lack of time and resources, I will limit my study to look only at the United States’ perspective in the crisis.

Though strategic culture is largely thought to be static, scholars on the subject have noted that it does evolve, though slowly. Thus, in an effort to be as accurate as possible in my study, I will paint my portrait of United States’ strategic culture by drawing largely from information during the time period just prior to the Crisis and the beginning of the Kennedy administration. Historical influences, however, must be taken into account, as they are a huge determining factor in a nation’s strategic culture. History as a factor in strategic culture will thus be limited to defining events in the United States history in general, and specifically from references taken from the rhetoric, conversations and commentary immediately prior to, during and after the Crisis. I will look at political rhetoric of government leaders contrasted against what was said in closed-door meetings, media commentary, public reactions, use of symbols and
symbolism, and areas in which the U.S. concentrated time, money and manpower. I will limit the scope of the United States' strategic culture to those aspects concerning nuclear policy and Soviet relations. I will also take from some of the literature already written about U.S. strategic culture where it is appropriate to the time period to round out my assessment.

My methodological framework for studying the strategic culture of the United States will come from the model laid out by Jeannie Johnson in the paper written for the Defense Threat Reduction Agency Strategic Culture: Refining the Theoretical Construct (2006) and the edited volume Strategic Culture and Weapons of Mass Destruction (2009). Johnson identifies four variables of national culture that are most likely to have an effect on security policy. These are identity, values, norms and perceptive lens (Johnson, Kartchner, Larsen, 2009, pg. 245).

**Identity** is basically a nation's view of itself and its role in the region and the world. In Johnson's (2009) words, "...strategic culture analysis assumes that states form their interests, and their views of other actors, based on a normative understanding of who they are, and what role they should be playing" (pg. 246).

The concept of **values** is self-explanatory; it is defined as simply what a nation values most, both material and ideational. When faced with a cost/benefit analysis, the factors a nation deem a priority and select over other factors are situations in which values become apparent. (Johnson, 2006, pg. 12)

**Norms** are accepted and expected modes of behavior. It is easiest to identify norms in contradistinction to what a nation does *not* choose, when
presented with a palette of options. Norms are elucidated by the types of behaviors a country will reject or consider unacceptable in contrast to those they will adopt, when the rejected alternatives would offer a more convenient or efficient means to an end (Johnson, et al., 2009, pg. 249-49).

A nation’s **perceptive lens** is the hypothetical lens through which the world is viewed, with the bias of a country’s beliefs and experience. It is a country’s perception of reality, which is, like with people, not strictly reality, just their version of it (which is real to them). It is how history is uniquely remembered, capabilities are believed to be and how other nations’ behavior is interpreted. There is typically an element of egotism and ethnocentricity to how a nation views itself; it is an important element to recognize in strategic culture and international relations (Johnson, et al., 2009).

I define **game theory** as a theory of strategy that lays out “optimal choices in interdependent decision situations, wherein the outcome depends on the choices of two or more actors or players” (Brams, 1985, p. 155). Preference is defined as the player’s “ranking of outcomes from best to worst” (Brams, 1985, p. 157).

**Methodologies**

Establishing a methodology to test for strategic culture influence presents some unique problems. The topic prompted heated back-and-forth debate between two of the heavyweights in the field, Colin Gray and Alistair Ian Johnston. Johnston (1995) took aim at the thin framework that had heretofore been applied to the theory, charging that the definition of strategic culture was
too broad and deterministic. By encompassing everything, the theory left little "conceptual space" for a competing explanation to state behavior (p. 37). Gray counters that since culture influences a nation to its very core, there is no action outside of culture, it is virtually impossible to isolate the concept and test against it (Gray, 1999, p. 53).

The theory presents some unique problems for any student wishing to gauge its impact and one must be extra careful to avoid these methodological pitfalls. Again, I endeavor not to prove that strategic culture itself is a viable theory, but to discover if it can effectively supplement game theory. To test my hypothesis I will rely heavily on written accounts and assessments of others to avoid injecting bias and, due to the historical nature, determinism.

First, I will compile and outline the strategic culture of the United States in the early 1960s using the four variables that make up a nation's culture. From that baseline I will analyze what that strategic culture meant for United States predispositions, supported by other scholars' assessments. I will then compare U.S. strategic culture to the discussions surrounding the Cuban Missile Crisis, laying out the actual choices, optimal and otherwise, the actual preferences that emerged, those that were rejected, and the basis for the choices made. I will analyze whether or not strategic culture elements swayed the decision making and if the preferences that emerged were grounded in culture or were motivated purely by security or some other reason. I can then conclude whether or not strategic culture does impact preferences in an international exchange.
United States Strategic Culture 1962

Identity

The identity of the United States is derived in large part from its geographical location. The U.S. faces no substantial threat from its neighbors, enjoys the luxury of a large ocean on two sides and has abundant natural resources. Early in its history this geography sponsored a feeling of isolation from the rest of the world and foreign entanglements. These factors beget a feeling of entitlement to certain freedoms and rights (Kincade, 1990, p. 11).

The U.S. considers itself a "melting pot" of diversity and maintains a spirit of tolerance (even if it does not exist in reality). The U.S. has a sense of moral superiority that likely stems from its founding on religious freedom, the "city upon a hill" (Gray, 1986, pg. 42). The country's political system is considered by most to have divine origins and democracy is considered the ideal form of government, one to be emulated (Kincade, 1990, pg. 13). The U.S. tends to enter into moral crusades to combat "evil" and fight for just causes. Fighting for such a cause carries a sense of absolutism and no surrender (Johnson et al., 2009, 71-72).

Another element of American identity is its standing and membership in the global community and particularly democratic nations. The U.S., a member of several international bodies, tries to at least project the appearance of operating within the confines of the law and seeks to justify its actions to and gain the sympathies of the world. Alliances with nations that have similar values carry great weight (Risse-Kappen, 1996, 393). Americans prefer to enter negotiations
with an advantage, on a higher moral footing than their opponent (Kincade, 1990, 27).

**Norms**

Though generally peace loving, the U.S. defends its interests and allies worldwide. When the United States is provoked, it tends to mobilize all its resources and put all of its will and effort into the operation. Once involved, the United States leaves little room for a negotiated settlement, demanding unconditional surrender (Johnson et al., 2009, p.72). When the immediate threat passes, however, the country resumes a sense of complacency (Kincade, 1990, pg. 11). Technology is emphasized and often distinguishes the U.S. from its enemies. "Technology played an important role in America's conduct of the Cold War...as the United States sought to use its qualitative advantage to counterbalance the numerical superiority of the Soviet Union and its allies" (Johnson et al., 2009, pg. 74).

Another notable norm of the U.S. is its nuclear weapons taboo. Richard Price and Nina Tannenwald outline the history of U.S. nuclear policy. Since dropping the atomic bomb on Japan to bring World War II to a close, the U.S. has adopted a norm of non-use. The nuclear weapon has been given a special status since President Truman. Though in many conflicts the U.S. enjoyed superiority regarding this capability, it refrained from using the technology. Price and Tannenwald attribute this to the United States' identity as a moral country that "took seriously the traditional laws of armed conflict, such as proportion in
the use of force and the avoidance of killing noncombatants" (Price & Tannenwald, 1996, pg. 138).

**Values**

Many of the values of the United States are immortalized in its Constitution. The idea that political authority is derived from the people, placed in the hands of elected officials is paramount in the country's value system. Individual freedoms are important for citizens of the country and in principle, although such a philosophy doesn't always extend to situations regarding other nationalities (Kincade, 1990, pg. 12). The United States government answers to the people, so care is taken to explain and justify actions to the domestic audience. Transparency and openness are valued.

Dictatorships and totalitarian regimes are viewed as the antithesis of freedom and thus its greatest enemy. With regard to war, the United States values peace through "deterrence and compellence" (Kincade, 1990, pg. 20). When war is unavoidable, America seeks to fight as quickly and easily as possible with the smallest amount of casualties and "domestic inconvenience (Kincade, 1990, pg. 23)." As William Kincade notes, to Americans, "the purpose of war is a better peace" (Kincade, 1990, pg. 23). Often the U.S. sees such international skirmishes as a way to export its own values and interests to the world.

As the government canonizes individual rights and freedoms, on a fundamental level, human life is valued very highly. Reliance on technology and heavy firepower are a testament to this value (Johnson et al., 2009, 74; Kincade,
The United States does not tolerate high casualties of its military or innocent civilian lives of its enemies (Gray, 1986, pg. 44).

**Perceptive Lens**

As previously mentioned, the U.S. often views conflicts and situations in terms of good versus evil, and as a nation, the U.S. sees itself as on the "good" side of that polarity. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union and communism were framed as being "evil" and many conflicts began and continued around defeating this ideology. The fervour surrounding the McCarthyism of the 1950s was a good example of the paranoia and intolerance associated with this supposed "evil." Communism was seen as a direct threat to freedom and democratic ideals. Good tends to triumph over evil and historically the United States tended to triumph in its causes (Gray, 1986, pg. 42-44).

The United States has an unflagging sense of optimism and Americans see themselves as exceptional. The challenges faced in the country's infancy required ingenuity and resolve to overcome and the U.S. often triumphed in adversity. Thus, Americans have come to believe that they can accomplish almost anything (Gray, 1986, pg. 42-43).

**Analysis of Strategic Culture**

Now that the strategic culture of the United States has been laid out, I can make assumptions about how the U.S. would react to the placement of missiles in Cuba by the Soviet Union based on game theory. I have condensed the United States' strategic culture into twelve points that I will analyze. From this
analysis I can test my hypothesis against the choices made and preferences ranked through the deliberations surrounding the crisis.


1. The U.S. dominates the region and is obliged to protect its dominance and national security.

The United States culture would bristle at the placement of missiles in its backyard. The Monroe Doctrine set a precedent for intolerance of foreign meddling in the region. The United States would see the missiles as a direct affront and a possible threat to its freedoms.

2. The United States sees itself as the most powerful nation in the world.

The U.S. valued its role as a superpower. In most regards, most notably nuclear arms, the United States had more resources and the upper hand in the Cold War compared to the Soviet Union. Strategically, the U.S. would act responsibly to maintain its status internationally but would not back down from a fight or show weakness. It would not allow for the Soviets to maintain the missiles in Cuba.
3. The U.S. sees itself as morally superior.

The U.S. would want to maintain its image as a moral actor. Thus, diplomatic resolutions would be preferred. The U.S. would shun any action that would require excessive use of force or open its government to criticism. In the court of world opinion, the Cold War was more of an ideological war rather than a military conflict (as evidenced by the proxy wars that took place in Vietnam and elsewhere where the two enemies didn’t engage each other directly.) “Winning” on the moral front was crucial to the “winning” the Cold War to the U.S.

4. The U.S. often views conflict in terms of crusades to combat evil.

In the history of the Cold War and U.S. and Soviet relations the Soviet Union was often referred to in terms denoting evil and as such, a conflict involving the Soviet Union fits with this element of U.S. strategic culture. This worldview leaves little room for partial surrender or negotiations, ruling out most diplomatic options, at least in terms of requiring any sort of concession by the U.S. and opens the door for escalation.

5. The U.S. operates (or appears to operate) within international law.

The U.S. would involve, to some degree, international governing bodies, such as the U.N. Rules of engagement would be followed if the conflict came to that.

6. The U.S. prizes its alliances.

The U.S. would consult its closest allies and those that were directly affected by the crisis. It would seek the approval of those nations in its chosen course of action and avoid jeopardizing an allies’ safety.

7. The U.S. dedicates all its resources to any conflict it’s engaged in.
This norm would dictate that the U.S. would see through to the end whatever course of action it chose and use maximum efforts toward that end. It would be expected if an air strike option was selected; an invasion would follow to assure the job was done.

8. The U.S. prizes and relies heavily upon technology.

The United States’ main goal is to limit casualties, losses and inconvenience with technology. A reliance on technology would probably point the administration to an air strike or use of nuclear weapons. However, if the reason that the U.S. prizes technology is to save lives, then the more peaceful options would be equally preferred.

9. Use of nuclear weapons is deemed unacceptable along with other disproportionate or excessive use of force.

The U.S. would likely avoid escalating the conflict to avoid using nuclear weapons or anything that required unnecessary casualties.

10. The United States government answers to its citizens.

The U.S. would have to justify any chosen course of action to its domestic audience. Any option that would be unpopular at home would have consequences for elected officials. Use of nuclear weapons, invasion of Cuba, and taking no action were all polarizing avenues that would approached with careful consideration and justification. One could expect the administration to appeal and refer to its culture to rationalize its chosen course of action.

11. The U.S. often seeks to export or impose its values to other nations.
The U.S. could best accomplish this through an invasion, and to take it further, the overthrow of Fidel Castro's government. The placement of the missiles in Cuba offers an ideal excuse for a means to this end.

12. The U.S. is optimistic and sees itself as exceptional. The U.S. would probably be willing to take more risks, feeling assured that it will work out in its favor. This would most likely widen the range of choices rather than restrict them and doesn't point to a particular course of action; only allowing for riskier actions that may otherwise be passed over because of the gamble such as the blockade or the invasion.

The research will now examine the actual deliberations that occurred in the Kennedy administration. I will look very specifically for the reasons given why some options were immediately eliminated, others were hotly debated and why the final preference rankings emerged. I will then revisit this analysis of strategic culture and identify if and how strategic culture influenced the process.

**Choices and Decisions**

Game theory identifies the optimal choices in a given strategic situation. To understand what the optimal choices were, it is useful to examine all of the options that were available to the Kennedy administration as it faced the placement of offensive missiles in Cuba. Some of these options were immediately dismissed or never seriously considered, but were options nonetheless. President John F. Kennedy and his advisors also considered acting on two or more of the options combined or in a series, and the options
therefore should not be looked at in isolation. However, as the discussions and
debates played out, a very clear set of preference rankings emerged.

1. Take no action

Though argued by some then and now (see May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 120; Kennedy, 1971, pg. 25; Blight & Welch, 1990, pp. 23-25, 121) that the
missiles in Cuba actually had little effect on the strategic balance as a whole,
from the moment the President John F. Kennedy became aware of the missiles
placed in Cuba, the thought of accepting the Soviet's provocative move was
hardly taken into consideration at all. National Security Advisor McGeorge
Bundy (who often played the devil's advocate) was the only advisor to seriously
recommend this path (May & Zelikow, 1997, pp. 171-72).

The reasons given for taking action are best articulated and encapsulated
in President Kennedy's broadcast to the nation.

... [T]his 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 the country if our
courage and our commitments are ever to be trusted again by either friend
or foe (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 278).

As has been discussed, politicians' public communication is a useful
source of information on a nation's strategic culture because the logic used to
appeal to the domestic audience often invokes its culture; references the
audience can understand and sympathize with. This statement provides valuable
insight to the reasons the United States decided to not sit idly by while offensive weapons became operational in her backyard.

A. Throughout the course of the crisis dialogue, Kennedy and his advisors were incensed by the deliberate deception and secrecy surrounding the installation of the missiles almost as much as the missiles themselves (Sorensen, 1965, pg. 683 and Blight & Welch, 1990, pp. 25, 120). After Kennedy's statements made only a month earlier that the U.S. would not abide by the placement of offensive missiles in Cuba and receiving assurances from Soviet Nikita Khrushchev that he would not introduce any issues for Kennedy during the campaign season, Kennedy felt betrayed (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 127 and Sorensen, 1965, pg. 683).

B. It was also because of the remarks made a month before, clearly drawing a line in the sand, that Kennedy felt that the U.S. had to respond to this provocation. Its ability to deter Soviet was in jeopardy, along with its prestige in the world, if the missiles were simply tolerated. The Soviets would take this as a sign that the U.S. was weak and exploit that weakness in Berlin or even against the U.S. itself (May & Zelikow, 1997, pp. 127 -128, 229). Khrushchev had formed an opinion of Kennedy as inexperienced at the Vienna Summit, and the Bay of Pigs crisis served to affirm that idea in Khrushchev's mind (Blight & Welch, 1990, pg. 81).

C. The President alluded to the Monroe Doctrine in his address, a historical understanding that the outside world should not meddle in the Western Hemisphere. McGeorge Bundy referred to the Monroe Doctrine as a "powerful
fact of our political consciousness” and “how we perceived our national interest” (Blight & Welch, 1990, pg. 244, pg. 247). The thought of nuclear weapons in such close proximity was enough to compel the group to act.

D. President Kennedy and his group of advisors were also concerned about the opinion of both the domestic audience and the United States’ allies abroad. The President was confident that doing nothing would have so inflamed the United States’ public that he would have been impeached had he not acted (Blight & Welch, 1990, pg. 190). The U.S., with its involvement in NATO, had strong reason to consider the security of its allies, particularly Berlin (Kennedy, 1971 pg. 29). Narrating the days’ events to a recording device, President Kennedy said, “Everyone else [referring to advisors except Bundy] felt that for us to fail to respond [to the missiles in Cuba] would throw into question our willingness to respond over Berlin [and] would divide our allies and our country” (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 172).

Analysis
The option to do nothing in response to the missiles was so quickly dismissed because it so clearly flew in the face of the United States’ culture. Security was a factor to be sure, but United States’ nuclear capability far exceeded that of the Soviet Union and as the advisors later admit, did little to change the strategic balance. Allowing the missiles to remain would have adversely affected U.S. dominance in the region and the world and was a direct affront to the tradition of the Monroe Doctrine. The security and unity of U.S. alliances was a primary consideration here as well as the opinion of the domestic audience. The idea that
the Soviet Union would so blatantly deceive U.S. fit well with the "good versus evil" characterization and provided righteous justification, appealing to that aspect of strategic culture. Moral action here is not turning a blind eye but dealing with the issue before it becomes explosive and claims lives and property. Taking no action was contrary to every element of strategic culture that is relevant here and thus relegates this option as dead last in the preference rankings.

2. Diplomacy

The argument for a diplomatic approach to the crisis was often drowned out by those pushing for an air strike. Aside from Adlai Stevenson, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, few strongly advocated this alternative by itself. However, Kennedy was anxious to settle the conflict in the most peaceful way possible, adopting a policy of "patience and restraint, as befits a peaceful and powerful nation, which leads a worldwide alliance" (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 278).

A. Approaching Khrushchev directly regarding the missiles was an idea that surfaced in the initial phase of discussions. The team considered an advance warning followed almost immediately by an air strike. George Ball (Under Secretary of State) reasoned that giving Khrushchev warning would tip world opinion in the United States' favor whereas the opposite would elicit comparisons with the sneak attack on Pearl Harbor. Simultaneously he demonstrates the groups desire to appear as the good guy while demonizing the Soviet Union by saying, "it's the kind of conduct that one might expect of the Soviet Union. It is not conduct that one expects of the United States" (May &
Zelikow, 1997, pg. 143). Ball expressed his doubts that advance notice would deter the Soviets and admitted that it was really only the appearance of such a gesture that mattered (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 93). They concluded that any sort of early warning to the Soviets would reduce the element of surprise and wouldn't likely change the outcome (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 143). It would give the Soviets a chance to hide the missiles and manipulate world opinion in their favor. The idea felt like an ultimatum which would force Khrushchev into a defensive position that no government would reasonably accept (Sorensen, 1965, pg. 685).

The Kennedy team also discussed sending an emissary to request an immediate cessation of work on the missiles, opening diplomatic channels. Kennedy and his team felt that such an approach would lead to drawn-out negotiations which would preclude the U.S. from being able to act militarily while running the risk that while the nations talked the missiles would become operational (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 86). Kennedy expected that any negotiations would include discussion of the obsolete missiles in Turkey as a trade for those in Cuba (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 142). Finally, they did not want to give their allies or the Soviets the impression that in answer to such a brazen move the United States puts would not only back down but offer to make concessions of its own to get the missiles removed. Some advisors feared any weakness from the U.S. would lead to a breakup of United States-led international alliances and the destruction of its world position (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 211).
The idea of approaching Fidel Castro was also floated (Sorensen, 1965, pg. 682). The idea was to try and convince Castro, through an intermediary, that Cuba was being used as Khrushchev's pawn in a wider scheme to gain ground in Berlin (May & Zelikow, 1997, 55). Kennedy's advisors estimated the chance of Castro breaking with Moscow at "one chance in a hundred" and they were concerned with giving Castro any kind of advance notice of any impending strike (May & Zelikow, 1997, 82).

B. The Kennedy administration worked with and under the U.N. and other international organizations as the crisis materialized. The very first discussions following the revelation of offensive missile installations in Cuba focused on operating within the bounds of international law and the necessity and involvement of international organizations. Secretary of State Dean Rusk immediately ruled out unilateral action by the United States and invoked the Rio Pact as the legal basis for U.S. action (May & Zelikow, 1997 pg. 55 and Kennedy, 1971, pp. 36, 40). The U.N. Charter, the Rio Pact and the "traditions of this nation and Hemisphere" were all employed to make the case to the world in President Kennedy's broadcast address (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 276). It was apparent that the U.S. would not risk its security and leave it solely in the hands of the U.N., but the appearance of cooperation to the world was significant indeed (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 415, 465).

C. Even after the quarantine was selected as a course of action and put into effect, Kennedy expected to have to decide between diplomacy and force. "...Our quarantine itself isn't going to remove the weapons. So we've only got
two ways of removing the weapons. One is to negotiate them out, or we trade them out. And the other is to go over and just take them out” (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 464). A missile swap (the United States-owned nuclear missiles in Turkey for the missiles in Cuba) became a real possibility as the crisis reached its climax. An encouraging private letter from Khrushchev offering to withdraw missiles for a promise not to invade Cuba was followed abruptly by a public missile swap proposal.

President Kennedy emphasized that the U.S. should require that work on the missile sites cease before any talks could proceed. But beyond that, he felt like the trade would be viewed by many in the world as reasonable. He made it clear that he preferred to discuss a missile trade rather than risk Berlin and general war over missiles that were useless (May & Zelikow, 1997, pp. 512-513, 518).

Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara worried that if the U.S. proceeded with a strike on Cuba, the missiles in Turkey would become a target for the Soviets and therefore a liability and suggested dismantling them before a strike/invasion to protect Turkey. John McCone (CIA) and Vice President Lyndon Johnson preferred to spare the lives a strike and/or invasion would claim and instead take Khrushchev’s offer of a trade, as it amounted to the same action. McCone said, “Day and night we’ve talked about this. And we said we’d be delighted to trade those missiles for the same in Cuba...What we were afraid of was he would never offer this, and what he would want to do is trade Berlin” (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 582).
As the advisors fleshed out the issue and were confronted with the news of the U2 reconnaissance plane shot down over Cuba, they decided that the trade would be a form of defeat. It would require the U.S. to concede something in Turkey for every missile, plane, technician etc. that the Soviet's withdrew in Cuba, and that was unacceptable and dangerous (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 592 and Blight & Welch, 1990, pg. 191).

A small subset of Kennedy's advisors finally settled on the idea of ignoring the second, public letter and agreeing to the terms of the first (no invasion guarantee in exchange for the removal of the Cuban missiles). Dean Rusk came up with idea of offering an off-the-record proposal to dismantle the missiles in Turkey with the non-invasion pledge. The group felt it was very important to keep this part of the bargain secret and not appear to be betraying an allies' security for the interests of the U.S. Rusk noted, "it would allow us to respond to Khrushchev's second proposal in a way that he might as well regard as helpful, while at the same time it did not require us to engage NATO or the Turks in a public trade of 'their' interests for 'ours'" (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 606).

**Analysis**

The argument that approaching Khrushchev or Castro would have eliminated the important element of surprise and further limited options was a largely strategic concern. Yet the desire to win the psychological Cold War was a factor that appealed to the good versus evil thinking. The desire not to show weakness was both a strategic one and a cultural one. Apart from those strategic reservations
3. Blockade

Ultimately the option that President Kennedy chose, a blockade (or quarantine) was a decision that evolved over the course of the group's discussions. It was settled on largely because the other, even less favorable options were eliminated one-by-one for being either too drastic or too benign. It was an acceptable option for what it wasn't; it wasn't a surprise attack, it wasn't impotent diplomacy. It was envisioned as only a first move; the team fully expected to follow up with either negotiations or an air strike, and even possibly an invasion, depending on Khrushchev's response.

The Joint Chiefs were insistent that a blockade amounted to a declaration of war and all the gravity that accompanied that path, but without the certainty of
success the other military options assured (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 177). A blockade did not remove the missiles and was the slowest method for working toward their removal. McNamara also voiced the concern that U.S. perception of power might diminish in world opinion (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 194).

Once the general consensus supported the blockade there was still a great debate on the subsequent approach. Three avenues of action were discussed; a blockade as an ultimatum that would be followed with more severe action such as a strike if the Soviets did not respond favorably, a blockade to freeze Soviet action and then decide the next move, or to use the blockade as an opening to negotiations (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 191). There was also confusion as to whether such a move was illegal without a declaration of war.

The reasons for adopting an initial blockade are summarized by Theodore Sorensen (1965) in his book *Kennedy*. The move was a “limited, low-key action” compared to an air strike and hopes were that the Soviet response would be reflected in kind. A blockade was the only military solution that didn’t require the killing of Cubans or Soviets. As such, the action would appeal to other nations and allies. The location was ideal and the strength of the American Navy was unquestioned. The blockade itself was within the control of the U.S.; it could increase or decrease the pressure as the situation warranted (Sorensen, 1965, pg. 688). But the paramount reason for choosing the blockade over the other options was because it was the “moral” decision, and fit with what the advisors saw as the U.S. tradition of taking the high road.
A. In a meeting with members of Congress, Secretary Dean Rusk articulated the blockade as a “first step” to allow for a brief pause and allow the Soviet Union to contemplate the stakes and its next move (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 258). It provided Khrushchev a way to back down without humiliating him and forcing his hand (Sorensen, 1965, pg. 688). It left open the all the options available to the U.S. while sending a strong message to the Kremlin. It allowed for both sides to step back and contemplate the dangers of a direct entanglement.

B. Paul Nitze, a member of ExComm, reflecting back on the crisis said, “It was perfectly clear that what you needed to do policy-wise was to use the minimum force necessary to accomplish the result. What you wanted was the result. You didn’t want to have violence for violence’s sake, you wanted to get the result and the result was to get rid of these damn missiles” (Blight & Welch, 1990, pg. 145) Secretary McNamara framed the blockade as the only military course of action consistent with the United States’ position as leader of the free world (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 194).

Most importantly, the blockade allowed both sides to avoid confrontation on a nuclear scale. President Kennedy’s primary aim beyond the removal of the missiles was to prevent the situation from spiraling out of control and into war. Khrushchev may have miscalculated the strong U.S. response, but once the installations were discovered, he took pains to avoid crisis. The blockade communicated to the Soviets that the U.S. would respond to provocation with a military response but one that could be implemented without a shot and allowed
for a controlled escalation (Sorensen, 1965, pg. 688). If an option was available to avoid a rapid buildup to war, Kennedy wanted to take it (Kennedy, 1971, pgs 42-43).

C. The group felt that the action would be sufficient to assuage U.S. allies concern that appropriate action be taken but restrained enough to avoid inflaming Latin American countries (May & Zelikow, 1997, pp. 127-28, 170, 175-6). They concluded the act would be legal under the Rio Treaty and a support of the measure by the Organization of American States (OAS) would provide the legitimacy in world opinion (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 257). Had the U.S. failed to get the necessary two-thirds vote from the OAS supporting the blockade, it is clear the U.S. would have proceeded without it, but it was important to demonstrate the administration had made the effort and attempt to secure the support of Latin America and other allies (May & Zelikow, 1997, pp. 129, 266). The group knew that the OAS would not support an air strike and this factored into the decision making. Working within the bounds of international law was especially important to the team of advisors. Tommy Thompson, who had recently served as U.S. Ambassador in Moscow, noted that the Soviets would be more apt to acknowledge any act by the U.S. that was enacted under legal auspices (Blight & Welch, 1990, pg. 53). It is of interest to note that several advisors were convinced that a blockade would cripple Castro and possibly lead to his demise, but this does not appear to have swayed Kennedy or influenced his decision (May & Zelikow, 1997, pp. 121, 147, 163, 165-66, 200).
D. The blockade was limited to weapons; petroleum, oil and lubricants could be added to increase the pressure, if necessary. The limited nature of the blockade fit the punishment to the crime and avoided transferring the burden to innocent Cubans (Sorensen, 1965, pg. 689). They adopted the euphemism “quarantine” over the more loaded term “blockade” to avoid parallels to the Soviet blockade of Berlin in 1948 (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 209).

The morality of the blockade was largely debated in opposition to the air strike, the most popular alternative to the blockade. As such, I will flesh out this idea fully in the next section. The U.S. never completely closed the door on either the invasion or air strike options by adopting the blockade. As the group discussed likely scenarios and possible Soviet reactions, U.S. preferences became apparent. U.S. forces were preparing throughout the crisis for any contingency and the administration was prepared to proceed with an air strike or even invasion had the situation turned sour (Blight & Welch, 1990, pg. 175). The preference was to solve the situation without escalation, if possible.

Analysis

The blockade argument again highlights the dilemma with dueling strategic culture. The advisors worried the U.S. would be perceived as weak and some felt the move was illegal without a declaration of war. Again here, a greater number of strategic culture attributes tipped Kennedy’s hand in favor of the blockade. The blockade was a forceful action that demonstrated U.S. strength. It employed use of the powerful Navy (strategic culture reliance on technology and implementing full use of available resources). With the Rio Pact, the action was
made lawful, it appeased allies, it was less likely than other military options to involve casualties and lead to conventional or nuclear conflict and, most importantly, it was the morally superior choice. Add a dash of optimism that it would succeed and you can see why this choice was clearly favored.

4. Air Strike

The air strike was favored at first by the majority of Kennedy's advisors, though there was little consensus on the intensity of the strike. Robert McNamara (Secretary of Defense) presented Kennedy with a spectrum of options starting with a very limited, surgical air strike targeting only the missile sites, up to a full strike taking out all aircraft and followed by an invasion. The idea of a surgical strike (note the euphemism) appealed to many including Kennedy because it was effective, quick, clean and provided a "we mean business" warning to the Soviets and a "fait accompli" to the world.

Had the air strike option truly been "quick and clean" history may have played out differently, but it soon became apparent to President Kennedy that the idea of a surgical strike was illusory. General Maxwell Taylor of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said to Kennedy, "Mr. President, I should say that the Chiefs and the commanders feel so strongly about the dangers inherent in the limited strike that they would prefer taking no military action rather than to take that limited strike" (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 96). Taylor repeatedly reminded Kennedy that an air strike would never be 100% and recommended an invasion to follow to ensure all the missiles were removed (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 85, 97).
Time was not on President Kennedy's side as the administration debated. If the administration did not act quickly, the missiles would become operational and make any military move much more dangerous (Sorensen, 1965, pg. 686). Choices made at various junctions throughout the crisis restricted the options available later on. Once Kennedy appeared on national television announcing the blockade, the air strike option was still available (and threatened if the missiles were not removed) but lacked the critical element of surprise. If the Soviet Union chose to ignore the blockade, the U.S. would be in a much more dangerous situation than if President Kennedy had ordered an air strike originally.

Any strike, limited or full scale, would involve Russian and Cuban casualties and it would likely require a follow-up invasion. The idea of a surprise attack (the most effective course) conjured up images of Pearl Harbor and repulsed many members of Kennedy's team because of its moral failings. Finally, the air strike increased the likelihood that the Soviet Union would be provoked into starting a general or even nuclear war with the United States.

A. The Joint Chiefs felt that the U.S. could not risk a minimal strike that would potentially leave any missiles intact. The preference of the Joint Chiefs was a full scale strike which included a strike on the three known missile bases, the airfields and SAM (surface to air missiles) sites, potential nuclear storage sites and radar installations. Secretary McNamara noted that even a limited strike would be very extensive, involving several hundred sorties (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 86). President Kennedy, McNamara and others feared that the as the scope of the air strikes grew, so did the consequences, and the U.S. might find itself in
a position where there was no choice but to invade or face Soviet action in Berlin or elsewhere in the world (pp. 97-98). Leaving the bombers and fighter planes intact, however, would open the possibility of reprisal (Sorensen, 1965, pg. 684).

B. It is apparent the team had strong reservations about inflicting casualties which were inevitable with an air strike and played even more strongly into the invasion debate. Douglas Dillon, a member of ExComm reflecting on the crisis in an interview, still felt that an air strike would have been the best approach noted, "...even in a surgical air strike you might have killed a lot of Cubans. I know this bothered the doves" (Blight & Welch, 1990, pg. 167). They disliked the idea themselves and were also concerned about world opinion (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 66). McNamara predicted that an air strike could lead to an uprising against the government within Cuba and result in even more bloodshed (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 67 & 87).

C. The primary reason that surfaced in discussion began with a comment by George Ball. Ball felt that a surprise air strike and/or invasion of the tiny island of Cuba would be likened to the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 115). In The Kennedy Tapes, (1997) transcribed discussion, which do not even include the many of the ExComm meetings, the term "Pearl Harbor" itself is used 13 times. In the ExComm meetings, they spent more time on this issue than any other (Kennedy, 1971, pg. 30). The moral question elicits some of the most passionate and evocative discourse of the deliberations. Robert Kennedy termed such an attack as "a Pearl Harbor in reverse" that would "blacken the name of the United States in the pages of history" (Sorensen, 1965,
pg. 684). It would weaken the United States’ moral position, he argued (Kennedy, 1971, pg. 39). RFK alludes to the values and norms of U.S., saying “[o]ur struggle against Communism throughout the world was far more than physical survival – it had as its essence our heritage and our ideals, and these we must not destroy” (Kennedy, 1971, pg. 30). In a memo, Undersecretary Ball uses strong words to make the point that a surprise air strike would alienate the world, counter everything the U.S. historically stood for and brand them as hypocrites (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 121). In a reference to the Old Testament, Secretary of State Dean Rusk illustrates the consequences to the air strike plan as akin to “carrying the mark of Cain on your brow” (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 149). The action was one which the Soviets might stoop to, but not the United States (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 143).

An air strike with advance warning was a dangerous proposition. The Soviets would likely have hidden the arsenal in response and made the task of destroying them subsequently difficult or impossible. An invasion following the strike would have been absolutely necessary if advance warning was given, to ensure the complete elimination of all missiles.

D. An air attack on the missile sites would be a direct affront to Khruschev and it is very likely he would have retaliated in some fashion. He had to maintain face at home and abroad and to back down would have been too humiliating. Some doubted Khrushchev would let the situation escalate to general war over Cuba, but they acknowledged how quickly forces could get out of control (May &
It was the unpredictability that was unnerving in a game where nuclear weapons were involved.

The air strike was never completely off the table. It was the preferred action of many of Kennedy's advisors. Choosing the blockade did not render the air strike impracticable and U.S. forces were always ready to carry out the orders, though it would have lacked the crucial element of surprise. A discussion of the invasion option will offer a more complete picture of why the air strike route was shunned, since they likely would have been inseparable.

Analysis

Though this option was very tempting to Kennedy and his advisors because it established U.S. might and employed superior U.S. technology, its drawbacks overcame its advantages. In the war of good versus evil, it was not the fitting choice for a world leader to attack a much smaller nation without warning. It conjured up images of David and Goliath as is evidenced with Secretary Rusk's references to the "mark of Cain." The nation had not forgotten the devastation of Pearl Harbor and the advisors recoiled at instigating their own. Overwhelmingly the argument against this path refers to the immorality of such an act. If the U.S. indeed dedicates its full resources to a given situation, then this option would be passed over for the air strike plus invasion. Strategic concerns played into this as well; an attack with advance warning was foolhardy and counterproductive.
5. Invasion

Though the invasion option was attractive because it provided the guarantee of complete removal of the missiles that the Kennedy administration would not tolerate, it ranked very low on the group's shortlist of available options. The invasion option was usually paired with an air strike and not often discussed as a stand-alone plan. The military was prepared to act on this option at any point during the crisis had Kennedy given the go-ahead. General Taylor of the Joint Chiefs initially shunned the idea because of "the degree it shackles us", but later embraced it as the crisis deepened (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 98, 122).

Surprisingly, in the discussions the group demonstrates little appetite for taking out Fidel Castro, though the opportunity was as close to ideal as it likely could get. The political pressure on Kennedy to rid Cuba of Castro was intense in the fall of 1962, with the topic a central issue of the upcoming midterm election campaign. Americans were wary of Communist influence cropping up so close to home (Sorensen, 1965, pg. 670). There was an obvious dislike of Castro on the part of the President Kennedy and his brother, Robert. In One Minute to Midnight (2008), Michael Dobbs paints a picture of Robert Kennedy hell-bent on deposing Castro (pgs. 17-18). "Operation Mongoose", a clandestine operation to support internal rebellion in Cuba with the ultimate goal of bringing down the government was underway and personally overseen by the President's brother with the President's blessing (pg. 15, 18). Meetings regarding this covert operation were ongoing during the crisis, as was Operation ORTSAC (Castro spelled backwards), a Marine exercise to storm a fictional island and depose the dictator.
Arthur Schleslinger, Jr.'s forward to *Thirteen Days* (1971) paints a much more moderate attitude toward Fidel Castro, dismissing any kind of “obsession.” (Schleslinger, 1971, pg. 11). Robert McNamara insists that there was no intent in 1962 to remove Castro by force, though there were military plans in place (Blight & Welch, 1990, pgs. 249-250).

The idea that the Kennedy administration was out to destroy the Castro regime, whatever the true intent, was pervasive enough to have prompted the placement of missiles in Cuba in the first place. There are several theories to explain Nikita Khrushchev’s motivations for installing the missiles in the Caribbean but documentation from the Soviet Union is scarce. Yet, there is strong evidence that the Soviet Union was responding to supposed American aggression toward Castro that began with the Bay of Pigs fiasco. At an academic conference to discuss the crisis, McNamara conceded that U.S. actions at the time were very likely viewed as ominous from the outside and the Russians present agreed (Blight & Welch, 1990, pgs. 29, 249-250).

As Arthur Schleslinger, Jr. points out in the foreword to *Thirteen Days* (1971), the Cuban Missile Crisis would have been a perfect excuse to invade Cuba and oust Fidel Castro (Schleslinger, 1971, pg. 11). Kennedy vocally acknowledged that a better excuse to invade Cuba (and depose Castro) would likely never materialize (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 207). Yet undermining Castro didn’t emerge as an objective in the discussions surrounding the crisis, nor was it seriously entertained – only mentioned as a possible bonus if the U.S. had to invade. The group was sensitive to the idea of casualties and world opinion; they
didn't like the looks of Goliath going after David. They also expected an invasion of Cuba would be matched with an invasion of Berlin.

A. Though the allure of using an invasion to remove Fidel Castro and the weapons, maintaining the United States' standing in world opinion was the transcendent concern. In fact, Kennedy was sensitive to the fact that regardless of the motivations for invasion (the removal of the weapons), the world (primarily U.S. allies) would perceive the move as a U.S. preoccupation with Castro which would threaten the security of Turkey and Berlin and this weighed heavily on his mind (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 134). Kennedy repeatedly assured both allies and the Russians that the U.S. had no plans to invade Cuba (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 168, 283-284). The primary focus was the removal of the missiles in Cuba and everything else, even strong, long-held desires were relegated to the periphery (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 461, Sorensen, 1965, pg. 700).

B. The advisors were very reluctant to inflict casualties on the Cubans, Russians and American soldiers, an inevitable cost of invasion. They seem to have a genuine distaste for "collateral damage", but in discussions they are equally concerned with international reprobation. Just prior to the breakthrough that ended the crisis, when the situation was the most tense, the President Kennedy appears to prefer a missile trade to a bloody invasion of Cuba because of the inevitable international disapproval (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 602). Secretary Rusk, reflecting back on the crisis, noted that most of the Latin American countries, though opposed to Castro, would have strongly opposed an invasion precisely because of the Cuban casualties and such a move would
leave "scars on the hemisphere that would take generations to heal" (Blight & Welch, 1990, pg. 175). Theodore Sorensen (1965) in his biography of John F. Kennedy, said that this path would have resulted in an "indictment of history for our aggression" (Sorensen, 1965, pg. 683).

C. Although a tit-for-tat involving Berlin was likely with any move, an invasion was the most likely to spur a direct confrontation and spiral into an even greater conflict. Invasion was the most provocative move seriously considered, one that could have easily led to war, a war between two nuclear armed nations (Sorensen, 1965, pg. 683, Blight & Welch, 1990, pg. 175). Berlin was very important to the U.S. in terms of the Cold War. Any move by the Soviet Union that threatened Berlin, as stated in Kennedy televised speech, would be answered in kind (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 280). The stakes were high and on this point, the U.S. was committed. Kennedy, in a conversation to British Prime Minister Macmillan explained, "Now, we may come to this invasion by the end of the week, but we are assembling our forces in preparation for it. By what we are attempting to do is to begin this escalation in a way that lessens the chance of a seizure of Berlin or World War III" (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 285). Kennedy took great pains to avoid putting the Soviets in a position where action in Berlin would be a natural or equivocal response.

Analysis

Again this option pits some elements of strategic culture directly against each other. The U.S. dominance of the region and the desire to export its democratic values lend themselves to the selection of this option. However these
inclinations are dwarfed by the magnitude of others. All the reasons the U.S. was disinclined to choose the air strike option apply to the invasion, only to an even greater extent. In addition, the U.S. felt that its allies would conclude the U.S. was acting in its own interest to satisfy its quarrel with Castro and an invasion would put ally Berlin at grave risk. This action also risked nuclear war, which is taboo in U.S. strategic culture.

6. Use of nuclear weapons on the Soviet Union

United States' nuclear capability at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis far exceeded that of the Soviet Union. The presence of nuclear weapons in Cuba actually had very little effect on the strategic balance; the threat was largely political and psychological. The reasons "why" this option was not chosen are very obvious. Though clearly the U.S. would have fared better in a nuclear exchange, and the missiles would have certainly been eliminated from the Caribbean that way, as Kennedy put it in his speech to the nation, "...the fruits of victory would be ashes in our mouth" (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 278). To Kennedy, it was tantamount to failure (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 145). It was, however, the closest the world came to a nuclear clash during the Cold War and the threat was real and distressing to the group of advisors. President Kennedy and others were concerned it might result no matter what move they made.

A. There was no serious discussion about a first strike by the United States against Cuba or Russia. Robert Kennedy mentions only one instance where one member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff purports the use of nuclear weapons because "our adversaries would use theirs against us in an attack"
(Kennedy, 1971, pg. 38). Robert Kennedy questions and dismisses his logic. The President and his advisors also doubted that Khrushchev would be so irrational as to let the situation deteriorate to that degree (Blight & Welch, 1990, pg. 87).

The group feared unfettered appeasement, an inadvertent action or rapid escalation (resulting from a USSR move in Berlin or possibly a reaction to an American invasion in Cuba) as scenarios where a nuclear horror was plausible.

B. The idea of appeasement hit a nerve with Kennedy in particular; his father Joseph Kennedy, an ambassador to Great Britain in the Franklin Roosevelt administration, was an advocate of the appeasement idea. President Kennedy, observing the Second World War that resulted from such policies, wrote a thesis (later published into a best-selling book) criticizing the policy as weak (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 2). In the television broadcast Kennedy said, "The 1930s taught us a clear lesson: Aggressive conduct, if allowed to grow unchecked ultimately leads to war" (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 278). Maxwell Taylor of the Joint Chiefs asserted that the risk of missiles being used on the United States was greater if they remained there than if an operation was mounted to remove them (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 194). Allowing the missiles to remain meant likely moving the conflict to a later date in a different locale, but facing it still the same. Khrushchev might continue to push the U.S. until it involved something the U.S. would not compromise, like Berlin (Blight & Welch, 1990, pg. 193).

C. President Kennedy feared a situation described in a book Guns of August where two nations find themselves in a war brought on by an accident,
misunderstanding and/or miscalculation (Blight & Welch, 1990, pg. 92). Robert McNamara, in discussing the lessons learned from the crisis and the problem of inadvertence noted, "Managing' a crises is the wrong term; you don't 'manage' them because you can't 'manage' them" (Blight & Welch, 1990, pg. 100).

Dramatically portrayed in the film Thirteen Days (2000) based on Robert Kennedy's book by the same name, Robert McNamara clashed with Admiral George Anderson of the Navy regarding the execution of the blockade, because he feared that the Navy's standard operating procedures for hailing ships may not translate into Russian as intended (Blight & Welch, 1990, pg. 64).

As the crisis played out, many such "accidents" played out that perilously increased tensions. An American plane wandered into Soviet airspace while engaging in "routine air sampling operations" but veered off course due to an instrument failure (Dobbs, 2008, pg. 304). In a letter to Kennedy, Khrushchev questioned the United States' motives and emphasized that the aircraft during such an anxious time could have been mistaken for a nuclear bomber which "might push us to a fateful step" (Kennedy, 1971, pg. 167). The news of a U-2 surveillance plane shot down over Cuba shook the group of presidential advisors. Retaliation on the SAM site was discussed. Paul Nitze noted that the other side had taken the first shot (Dobbs, 2008, pg. 309). In a conference regarding the crisis, the Soviet Union representatives indicated the order to shoot down the plane had not originated in Moscow but conceded that commanders on the ground could have easily acted without orders or the Cubans could have been responsible (Blight & Welch, 1990, pgs. 271-273). The U.S. conducted a
hydrogen bomb test, codenamed CALAMITY on Saturday, October 27 (Dobbs, 2008, pg. 269). We now have information indicating that if communication with Moscow had been disrupted, Soviet military commanders were authorized to use nuclear weapons against an American invasion (Kennedy, 1971, pg. 8). Secretary of State Dean Rusk also noted that Chairman Khrushchev could have lost control over the Politburo and been pushed into escalation (Blight & Welch, 1990, pg. 178).

D. Kennedy and others worried that the crisis could escalate quickly with a series of tit-for-tat moves and countermoves and the two nations would find themselves at the point of no return. This was more likely if the Khrushchev felt cornered and had nothing to lose, as discussed in the section on invasion. The point of contention that was most volatile was Berlin. President Kennedy asserted on several occasions that he believed Berlin was the reason the missiles were placed in Cuba to begin with and Rusk referred to Khrushchev's obsession with it (Allison & Zelikow, 1999, pg. 100). Soviet rhetoric on Berlin had been intensifying leading up to the crisis and it was clear that a showdown was likely in the future. Kennedy expected that a move in Cuba would be answered in Berlin and the stakes there were high. The U.S. was prepared to stand its ground on Berlin even up to the point of nuclear war. Berlin was significant politically in terms of the Cold War and crucial to U.S. allegiances internationally. The war plan on the books at the time of the crisis called for use of nuclear weapons in response to Soviet action in Berlin (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 264). Kennedy assures the public and its allies that the threat to the "safety and
freedom" of the people of West Berlin "will be met by whatever action is needed" (May & Zelikow, 1997, pg. 280, italics added). Conventional war was also a possible outcome. Looking back on the crisis, Ball and McNamara were concerned that conventional war could have spiraled out of control and the leap from conventional to nuclear was plausible (Blight & Welch, 1990, pg. 88-89).

**Analysis**

Nuclear weapons are the pinnacle of U.S. technology and using nuclear arms as a means of dedicating full resources to a conflict and demonstrating power is an understatement. However, these characteristics of U.S. strategic culture bowed to the nuclear taboo which itself held a great deal of history and sensitivities. Then going down the list, using nuclear weapons is morally difficult to justify, it would paint the U.S. in a very bad light and put its people in great danger and could not end well for either side. For this reason, the U.S. had to avoid nuclear war or actions that could lead to it.

**Conclusion**

An examination of the decision making process surrounding the crisis suggests that security and military strength alone does not adequately explain the United States' preferences. Strategic culture offers a compelling alternative explanation for preferences, when paired with game theory. Security was a strong motivation and it is clear that the Kennedy administration ultimately would not have abided presence of missiles so close to U.S. shores. The U.S. military capabilities far exceeded that of the USSR during this period and both sides were aware of this fact. Yet concerns such as maintaining relationships with allies and
the desire to act honorably were immensely influential factors in the decision making process and directly affected the choices made. Such considerations only indirectly affect security (if at all) and suggest that other influences are at play. The primary reason for choosing the blockade (over an air strike) appears to be the moral consideration. Choosing the high road doesn’t immediately or directly impact U.S. security. Yet it was a strong cultural consideration. When faced with choosing one over the other, the moral choice was selected and for that reason.

At some point during the discussions, the Kennedy administration weighed each and every palatable option. Nothing was truly off the table. It’s important to note that rankings aren’t an issue of what a state will or will not do, but what is preferred. This makes careful analysis important because one must flesh out the “why” in a deliberation to get an idea of preferences. The preference rankings that emerged in the Cuban Missile Crisis are in ascending order: do nothing, utilize nuclear weapons, diplomacy, invasion, air strike and blockade.

Based on my analysis and review of the deliberations that took place over the thirteen days in October 1962, I fail to reject my hypothesis. In the Cuban Missile Crisis the United States’ culture and history molded its preferences and directly affected its strategy. When such preferences are plugged into a game model such as the ones Steven J. Brams presents, one can gain a more complete understanding of a nation’s motivations and aid in projecting nations’ likely choices and actions.
The research here was limited in scope and resources. The analysis leaves out significant theories and concepts that merit further study. The research also opens up many more questions that require further investigation. The idea needs testing against many varied international situations and conflicts over time and over different cultures and states. Had John F. Kennedy not been the President at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis, would the preferences have differed? The administration was split between the doves like Adlai Stevenson and the hawks (the Joint Chiefs of Staff) and their personal preferences differed from the President's. Yet the team more or less unified behind the President's decision. The forces of domestic and international opinion were big factors and were more amplified for the person with whom the decision rests. These questions warrant further analysis.

Strategic culture could be extended to the Rational Actor model and the Organizational Behavior Model, both of which have been applied to an analysis of the Cuban Missile Crisis by Graham Allison (1999). The Rational Actor model underlies game theory with preference rankings at the core and much of the same arguments apply. Organizations and bureaucracies bring their own unique and often competing cultures to the table and become a beast of their own. Organizational culture also contributes to a nation’s strategic culture.

The Cold War never saw a confrontation on a physical battlefield, though that prospect loomed large throughout the crisis. The battles of the Cold War were waged in the court of world opinion between two countries with vastly different cultures and governments. In this theater, it was of paramount
importance for the United States to distinguish itself as morally superior in contrast to the Soviet system. It is obvious that the primary consideration of the United States, besides fundamental security, was its allies and along with that, its reputation. It is what we term today as “winning the hearts and minds” and doing so by working within the bounds of morality and international law. This was the preoccupation of the United States even under a state of considerable threat and with technological and militarily strength far superior to that of the Soviet Union.

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