

Operation Anadyr: the bear's footprints in America


Operación Anadyr: las huellas del oso en América

Abstract: The Cuban Missile Crisis, which took place 60 years ago, situated the world on the brink of a nuclear war; its resolution had direct participation of the president of the United States of America (USA), John Fitzgerald Kennedy, and of the Secretary General of the Communist Party of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), Nikita Khrushchev. The complex operation for the strategic displacement of a Soviet contingent with strategic and tactical nuclear capabilities to Cuba, which received the military designation of Operation Anadyr, had more than 44 thousand military personnel and required about 80 ships for transport, constituting the first and only time that an effective of this scale of the USSR was deployed in the Americas, and is considered the spark of the conflict. In this sense, to better understand the Cuban Missile Crisis and identify possible lessons learned for the current moment, this article sought to recall the events of October 1962, shedding light on lesser-known aspects of the decision-making process, strategy development, and the preparation, deployment, and execution of Operation Anadyr, in addition to seeking to identify US actions developed to counter Soviet threats, as they were perceived at the time.

Keywords: military history; military strategy; Cuban Missile Crisis; nuclear threats.

Resumen: La crisis de los misiles en Cuba, que ocurrió hace sesenta años, casi lleva a una guerra nuclear y su desenlace contó con la participación directa del Presidente de Estados Unidos John Fitzgerald Kennedy y del Secretario General del Partido Comunista de la Unión de Repúblicas Socialistas Soviéticas (URSS), Nikita Jrushchov. La compleja operación de desplazamiento estratégico de un contingente soviético con capacidades nucleares estratégicas y tácticas para Cuba, el cual recibió la designación militar de operación Anadyr, contó con más de 44.000 militares y demandó cerca de 80 buques en el transporte, y esto fue la primera y única vez que un efectivo tan elevado de la URSS estuvo desplegado en las Américas, lo que se consideró el detonante de la crisis. En este sentido, con el propósito de obtener un mejor entendimiento sobre la crisis de los misiles en Cuba e identificar posibles lecciones aprendidas para el momento actual, este artículo buscó recordar los acontecimientos de octubre de 1962, arrojando luces sobre los aspectos menos conocidos del proceso decisorio, de la elaboración de estrategias, así como de la preparación, desdoblamiento y ejecución de la operación Anadyr, además de buscar identificar acciones norteamericanas desarrolladas para contraponerse a las amenazas soviéticas y su recepción en la época.

Palabras clave: historia militar; estrategia militar; Crisis de los Misiles en Cuba; amenazas nucleares.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Cuban missile crisis, an event that took place 60 years ago, situated the world on the brink of a third world war, with direct participation of personalities such as the President of the United States of America (USA), John Fitzgerald Kennedy; his brother, Robert Kennedy; the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), Nikita Khrushchev; Cuban leader, Fidel Castro; and US Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, among other world-recognized leaders.

Important actors left personal records on how the complex negotiations were conducted and, even more, on how they dealt with the enormous weight of the responsibility that was on their shoulders, which can be found, particularly, in the memoirs of Robert Kennedy (1969) and Khrushchev (2007). The Missile Crisis would also have contributed to the establishment of the rules of coexistence that would be followed by the US and the USSR throughout the Cold War. In this regard, Narang and Sagan (2022) say that the Cuban Missile Crisis constituted a milestone in the learning process in the relationship between the US and the USSR, while questioning whether the world would need a new post-cold war crisis to “socialize” the leaders of nations that also came to have nuclear weapons.

In fact, several authors have discussed the naval blockade established by Kennedy against the Soviet fleet heading to Cuba, as well as the other strategies adopted by the USA, such as Allison and Zelikow (1999), Rasemberger (2012) and, more recently, the exceptional research carried out by Ploky (2021).

In addition, online databases provide numerous top-secret files prepared by the US government that help to understand the decision-making process established by President Kennedy and his secretary of defense, Robert McNamara. Such documents provide information not only on the planned conventional actions, such as the naval blockade, but particularly on the extent of hybrid or covert actions carried out by the US, which would warrant a more in-depth study that is not carried out within the scope of this work.

As for those who wish to delve into the subject, I recommend consulting the memorandum of the Secretary of Defense, dated March 13, 1962 (The Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1962c), the transcript notes of meetings of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (The Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1962d), the guidelines for Operation Plan (OPLAN) 316-62 (The Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1962e) and, no less important, the details of the covert (hybrid) action program, called Cuba Project (United States of America, 1962c).

But what would have been the actions planned by the Soviets? What military resources, as to personnel and material, did the USSR deploy or plan to deploy in Cuba? What would be the Soviets' political objectives in installing nuclear weapon systems on Cuban territory? How did the US leadership perceive the existing threats?

This article seeks to answer these questions by analyzing documents available in the literature of the Russian Federation, some of which were originally highly confidential, but have been made available for consultation in recent years.

The research on the then imminent nuclear conflict between the USA and the USSR is justified in the context of the reviewing this important historical event, as currently the world again sees nuclear powers adopting strategies that seem to lead them on a collision course, as observed in the scope of the armed conflict developing in Ukraine.

Despite the technological development of weapon systems since the 1960s, including nuclear systems, the informational component and the characteristics of the leaders involved continue to be important aspects for any decision-making process.

Accordingly, in order to better understand the Cuban missile crisis, seeking to trace lessons that are applicable to the complex time currently experienced within the international system, this article aimed to look back into the events of October 1962, shedding light on less known aspects of the decision-making process, planning and execution of Operation Anadyr, carried out by the USSR, and to trace the American actions conducted to counter Soviet threats, as they were perceived at the time.

2 BACKGROUND TO THE 1962 CUBAN CRISIS

As early as 1820, Thomas Jefferson had already expressed his conviction that Cuba should be treated as a potential American state. The Spanish-American War ended with a victory of the USA, which came to control the Cuban territory, as well as that of Puerto Rico through the treaty of 1898. In 1901, the USA imposed on the independent government of Cuba an Amendment to the new Constitution, following a proposal drafted by Senator Orville H. Platt that granted Cuba limited sovereignty, since it authorized the U.S. government to install military bases on the island, which was effectively executed through the deployment of a Naval Base at Guantánamo Bay (Duncan; Stein, 2021).

However, this situation began to change in July 1953, when a group of young revolutionaries took up arms against the lack of elections and the widespread corruption promoted by Fulgencio Batista, a ruler supported by the USA. That month would see the notorious attack of the revolutionaries, led by Fidel Castro, against the headquarters of the Cuban army of Moncada. After a strong reaction from government troops, the revolutionaries were arrested and then exiled to Mexico. In 1956, Fidel returned to the island leading a new group of revolutionaries, establishing a guerrilla force in the *Sierra Maestra* region, until December 1958 when Batista's government collapsed, with Fulgencio Batista fleeing the country. In January 1959, Fidel Castro installed a new regime in Cuba (Plokhy, 2021).

For the first time in its history, the USA found itself in a position similar to those of the former European colonial powers, which were increasingly involved in independence movements in their Asian and African possessions, most of which tended to adopt pro-communist movements and seek pragmatic alignments with the USSR. And this soon happened in Cuba as well.

In the mid-1960s, after a Cuban land reform program confiscated land from U.S. companies, then-President Eisenhower decided to begin planning to establish a regime change in Cuba. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was in charge of developing a plan based on

supporting the formation of a popular movement to be created through Cuban exiles living abroad (Plokhy, 2021).

The plan, aimed at achieving the political objective of changing the regime in Cuba, began to be developed in March 1960, still in the administration of President Eisenhower, having received the designation of A Program of Covert Action Against the Castro Regime¹, or simply The Cuba Project. The project would involve both military and paramilitary actions (United States of America, 1960).

However, Eisenhower had no time (nor political will) to execute it, passing it on to newly elected President John F. Kennedy in January 1961.

The development of the Cuba Project would be triggered by phases, the first of which would involve the infiltration of agents to collect intelligence, the mobilization of the opposition to the Cuban regime, the execution of propaganda through radio, concluding with the landing on the island of a guerrilla force composed of Cuban exiles (Plokhy, 2021).

Such task force was trained in CIA camps in Guatemala and its mission would be to establish a beachhead, occupy an airstrip and organize a base of operations on the island, from where the offensive actions to overthrow the Cuban regime would be deployed. This would be the paramilitary segment of the Cuba Project, the planning of which was conducted under the guidance of the CIA Director of Operations, Richard Bissell and General D. W. Gray, representative of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS)² of the Department of Defense. The planning of this first phase received the military designation of Operation Zapata (United States of America, 1961).

A second phase would involve political-diplomatic management aimed at the creation of a multinational peacekeeping force, approved and led by the Organization of American States (OAS). The Cuba Project would also involve the plan to send a US rapid intervention military force if the first or second phases were not successful. (Plokhy, 2021).

This latter, essentially military variant of the plan, would involve, among other actions, a *false flag* attack by Cuban forces against the ammunition depot at the Guantánamo base and against an American ship anchored in that port, which would provide the justification for a US intervention (Duncan; Stein, 2021).

However, Kennedy was afraid about the possibility of direct US action in Cuba, particularly if it was carried out without the approval of the OAS, a possibility that could not be ruled out (Plokhy, 2021).

Military support, however, would be essential, even for the execution of the first phase. The landing of a force with an effective calculated for six to eight thousand guerrillas would require heavy US air and naval support, without which the troop of free Cubans would have great difficulties moving, disembarking, and staying on the island. This force received the designation of “Brigade 2506” (Plokhy, 2021, p. 49).

Kennedy approved the plan, with the caveat that the landing should be at night, in order to hide the involvement of US Navy ships, and that the aircraft employed should be

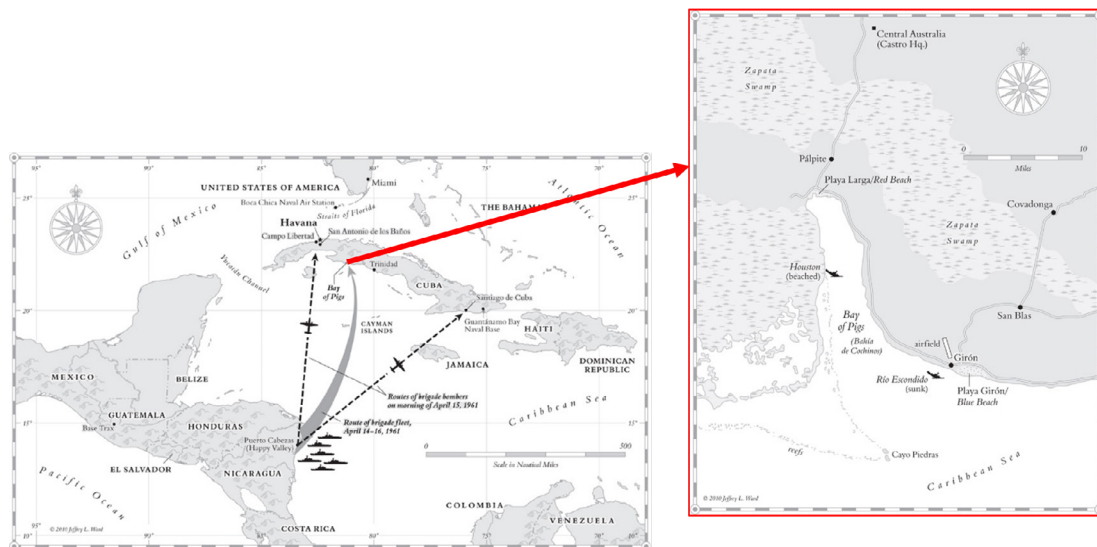
1 In the original: *A Program of Covert Action Against the Castro Regime*.

2 JCS: *Joint Chiefs of Staff*.

characterized as belonging to the Cuban Air Force, since it had models supplied to the regime of Fulgencio Batista by the Americans. Every effort should be made to try to misrepresent the US military involvement as much as possible. The place chosen was the Bay of Pigs, which would meet all the requirements established in the plan, and its execution would take place between April 14 and 17, 1961 (Plokhy, 2021).

The changes in the original plan in order to comply with Kennedy's directives eventually led to an endless series of errors, causing the complete failure of the operation, as Brigade 2506 was left without air support, naval support, and, above all, without supplies, thus being surrounded and decimated by Fidel Castro's troops. The civilian ships *Houston* and *Río Escondido*, leased by the CIA for the Brigade 2506 transport and landing action, were sunk by Cuban planes during combat. Figure 1 presents an illustration of the Bay of Pigs area. <figura>

Figure 1 – Diagram of the attempted invasion of the Bay of Pigs



Source: Rasenberger, 2012

The clumsy action of the USA in April 1961 had immediate political repercussions in Cuba and the USSR. In a speech delivered on May 1, 1961 (Labor Day), Fidel Castro finally declared overtly that the Cuban revolution was communist and that he had asked his advisors to draft a new Socialist Constitution for the country. Castro ended the speech with a phrase that would be incorporated into Cuban discourse for decades: “Long live our socialist revolution” (Plokhy, 2021, p. 44). And the USSR soon entered into a military-technical cooperation agreement with Cuba, which provided for the supply of Soviet weapons and military systems.

Fidel Castro's announcement was a red flag for the US government and Kennedy ordered the immediate review of the Cuba Project, in order to establish a more detailed plan than the prior ones. The new general plan was prepared by the Pentagon and no longer by the CIA, and was called Operation Mongoose, and would involve paramilitary actions, information operations, and intelligence operations. The military portion of the plan, which provided

for a large-scale invasion, was given the designation of OPLAN 316-62 and the name of "Operation Northwoods" (The Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1962d, p. 2).

The invasion plan, contained in OPLAN 316-62 (The Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1962e), involved a massive deployment of resources, including the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions (respectively, Fort Bragg and Fort Campbell), the 1st and 2nd Infantry Divisions (respectively, Fort Riley and Fort Benning), as well as the 1st Armored Division (Fort Stewart) and Marine Corps troops (5th Marine Expeditionary Brigade).

Subsequently, the plan readjusted the effective necessary for the ground invasion according to new intelligence data collected on the enemy forces, which would now have an expanded number of Soviet troops. To this end, the 5th Infantry Division, a Task Force of the 2nd Armored Division, and an additional Marine force were added to OPLAN 316-62 (Department Of State, 1962).

As already stipulated in the previous plan, Operation Northwoods would be preceded by *False Flag* actions, as a justification for carrying out the American attack (The Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1962d, p. 7-11).

3 THE SOVIET DECISION-MAKING PROCESS IN RELATION TO THE CUBAN ISSUE

Cuba's position at that time was unique. The international context was tense between the US and the USSR in one of the most sensitive phases of the Cold War. The world underwent the Berlin Wall crisis and the crisis resulting from the installation of atomic missiles in Turkey (United States of America, 1962b).

Cuba, in turn, a Caribbean country constitutionally granted limited sovereignty in relation to the USA and located a few hundred kilometers from the US territory, was now under an openly communist revolutionary government. This factor, in addition to the conflicting international situation, led that nation to be at the center of military-political disputes between the superpowers.

In fact, Cuban internal issues had attracted the attention of Soviet leaders since the beginning of the revolution led by Fidel Castro in 1956, still at the time of the attack on the Moncada Barracks. However, as Nikita Khrushchev himself reports in his biography, only a few communist leaders participated in the movement, which raised doubts as to the direction that the Cuban revolution could take (Khrushchev, 2007).

But, after Fidel's speech on May 1, 1961, Khrushchev says that the first Soviet delegations began to be sent to Cuba, one of them headed by an important member of the Supreme Soviet, Anastas Mikoyan, who entered into an agreement with Fidel Castro to establish a Soviet embassy in Havana, supply oil to the country (the US imposed an embargo on the supply of fuel to the country), and to begin a robust military-technical cooperation program (Khrushchev, 2007).

From May 1961 to March 1962, Soviet ships reportedly landed in Cuba about 400 armored vehicles, 40 MiG-15 and MiG-19 fighters, radar installations and other military equipment. They also sent 300 Soviet military advisors, who began to develop

an extensive military training program. The Cubans were also trained in military bases in the USSR. After this period, a new shipment sent all the material to equip four battalions with S-75 air defense missile launchers, in addition to ten Il-28 bombing aircraft, four P-15 conventional tactical cruise missile launchers, as well as an additional 650 military advisors (Rossiiskaia Federatsia, 2023).

Such effort was not without purpose, as the Soviet leaders already had intelligence that indicated the U.S. would not easily forgo the idea of ousting Castro from power, particularly after his Labor Day speech. A new invasion could occur at any time.

In his memoirs, Khrushchev reports that his greatest concern at that time began to be the Cuban issue, and explained his reasons:

The loss of Cuba, a country that had been plundered by the United States, and the first Latin American country to take the revolutionary path, would undermine the will to revolution among the peoples of other countries. (Khrushchev, 2007, p. 322)

Some Western sources attribute greater weight to the crisis in Berlin, which began in June 1961, as being the decisive factor in leading to the Soviet decision to send troops and nuclear weapons to Cuba. In this sense, Allison and Zelikow (1999) would have even conceived a hypothesis based on this possibility. According to them, “For Kennedy, at least, a more plausible answer dawned on him shortly afterward. It must be Berlin. Khrushchev would use the missiles to solve the Berlin problem.” (Allison; Zelikow, 1999, p. 116)³.

However, according to Khrushchev’s own account, the causes were different. Although the crisis in Berlin required much negotiation, Khrushchev considered that President Kennedy had taken some steps towards an acceptable agreement (Khrushchev, 2007). What had Khrushchev concerned were two other points: the fate of Cuba (Khrushchev, 2007) and the US missiles deployed in Europe (Khrushchev, 2007).

As for this latter concern, Khrushchev had intelligence showing that the Americans had, in 1962, about 60 Thor nuclear missile launchers in Britain, as well as up to 30 Jupiter nuclear missile launchers in Italy and another 15 in Turkey (Rossiiskaia Federatsia, 2023).

According to the USSR Minister of Defense, Marshal Malinovsky, the Jupiter missiles installed in Turkey raised the greatest concern, as they could reach the USSR’s vital centers in just ten minutes. Meanwhile, Soviet intercontinental missiles would need 25 minutes to reach US territory, showing a significant strategic disadvantage for the Soviets (Yesin, 2007a, p. 37).

Upon receiving Malinovsky’s report on the US nuclear deployment in Europe, Khrushchev reportedly became convinced that the USSR faced an existential threat. After several days trying to devise a strategy to deal with this issue, he finally concluded that the only possible solution would be to enter into a secret agreement with Cuba, which would enable the installation of missiles with nuclear warheads on that Caribbean island. Only after such

³ In the original: *For Kennedy, at least, a more plausible answer dawned on him shortly afterward. It must be Berlin. Khrushchev would use the missiles to solve the Berlin problem.*

systems were installed and at operational level would this fact be made known to the Americans. Thus, this would ensure an essential parity for nuclear deterrence; if not in terms of quantity, but mainly in terms of reaction time. And, at the same time, it would guarantee restraint as to a possible US invasion of Cuba's territory. This strategy would enable him to solve two problems with a single action.

Even in the event that most of the missiles installed in Cuba were destroyed in a US attack, a single Soviet missile could cause unprecedented destruction in that country. According to Khrushchev:

The atom bomb that the United States dropped on Hiroshima had an explosive force equivalent to 20,000 tons of TNT. But our warhead had an explosive force equivalent to one million tons⁴ (2007, p. 326, our translation).

The recipe of the balance of fear, which had been applied by the US around the USSR, would be used against themselves. Upon returning to Moscow, Khrushchev presents the idea to the top leadership of the USSR. Only Mikoyan added a caveat, and no less important: the US reaction could give rise to a nuclear war. Mikoyan also warned that such operation could be detected early by the US means of surveillance and observation, which could put everything in jeopardy. And, finally, he questioned whether such action would be approved by Fidel Castro, who would place his country as a priority target for a US nuclear response (Khrushchev, 2007).

Should they decide to deploy nuclear missiles near the US borders, the USSR's political leaders were perfectly aware of the possible reaction of the Americans to this measure. In this sense, the strategy adopted was to prepare a plan for the deployment of nuclear weapons in Cuba, a work that would be under the highest degree of secrecy and shared by a minimum number of people, so the feasibility of its execution could be evaluated. Only after validated by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet would the proposal be formally submitted for approval by the Cuban government.

However, Khrushchev already demonstrated clearly that he had made his personal decision.

4 THE GENESIS OF OPERATION ANADYR

The detailed account of how the General Staff of the USSR Armed Forces conceived and implemented Khrushchev's decision is contained in the book edited by Reserve General Yesin (2007a). Published only in Russian, the text presents the accounts of military personnel who were directly involved in the genesis of what would become the largest military operation carried out by the USSR since World War II.

At the end of May 1962, it was up to the Chief of the General Staff, General Ivanov, to designate those involved in the initial planning of what he designated as "Operation Anadyr." According to Yesin's accounts, no one was ever sure why he chose "Anadyr," which actually

⁴ In the original: *The atom bomb that the United States dropped on Hiroshima had an explosive force equivalent to 20,000 tons of TNT. But our warhead had an explosive force equivalent to one million tons.*

corresponds to the name of a river in Siberia. Perhaps it was already an attempt at dissimulation by General Ivanov (Yesin, 2007b).

The main person in charge of conducting the initial planning for the deployment of nuclear weapons systems to Cuba was General Anatoly Gribkov, then head of the Main Operations Department of the Soviet General Staff. Only he and two other general officers were authorized by Ivanov to participate in this planning phase, not even a typist could be used to help put it on paper. Only after the plan was approved by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet could the list of participants be expanded, but always with the maximum degree of secrecy (Gribkov, 2007).

The plan's initial directives were contained in a manuscript prepared by General Ivanov and established that the planning should contemplate the deployment in Cuba of a Group of Soviet Forces, with nuclear capacity. The estimation of how such a group should be constituted and what effective would be needed should be submitted as soon as possible, as well as the main obstacles to be faced in the task. The directive presented their political objective: only with the installation of missiles with nuclear warheads in Cuba could US aggression against that country be avoided, as determined by Defense Minister Mikoyan.

The Soviet Union had repeatedly warned the U.S. government of the inadmissibility of provocations against revolutionary Cuba, and of possible dangerous consequences. But all warnings were ignored. We would have to take retaliatory action. [...] In late April 1962, Khrushchev shared this thought with Mikoyan, emphasizing that this was the only way to guarantee Cuba's safety. (Gribkov, 2007, p. 38, our translation)⁵

Planning was completed in a short time, seeking to meet General Ivanov's demands. The Group of Forces to be deployed in Cuba would not only have troops of the Strategic Missile Force, but a wide range of means for self-defense (land, air, and naval), command and control and logistics, of all branches of the Soviet Armed Forces, that is, the Army, Navy, Air Force and Strategic Missile Force (Nuclear). Not even in World War II had such a large force moved so far from mainland USSR. The idea would be to—in coordination with the Cuban Armed Forces—transform the island into an impregnable fortress (Gribkov, 2007).

Regarding the main task received, that is, to install ballistic missiles with nuclear warheads in Cuba, the Group of Forces should have the capacity to retaliate against any US attack attempt and, upon Moscow's order, nuclear attacks would be carried out against the most important targets in the US territory. To this end, 3 Medium-Range Nuclear Missile Regiments were planned, equipped with a total of 24 R-12 launchers, as well as two Intermediate-range Missile Regiments, these equipped with a total of 16 R-14 launchers. This would provide the Group of Forces with capacity to hit targets located between 2,500 and 4,500 kilometers of distance, which would enable it to hit the main targets surveyed by Soviet intelligence on

5 In the original: Советский Союз неоднократно предупреждал правительство США о недопустимости провокаций против революционной Кубы, об их возможных опасных последствиях, но все предупреждения были проигнорированы. Нам пришлось принять ответные меры. [...] В конце апреля в 1962 году он поделился этой мыслью с Микояном, подчеркнув, что только таким образом, по его мнению, может быть гарантирована безопасность Кубы.

US territory. For example, the city of Los Angeles, California, would be within range of the R-14 launchers to be installed in Cuba.

According to the Russian Federation's Ministry of Defense Encyclopedia, the installation of these means in the Caribbean would have doubled the amount of Soviet missiles capable of reaching the US territory (Rossiiskaia Federatsia, 2023). It is interesting to consider how the US leadership assessed the situation as to the perceived threat. According to Allison and Zelikov (1999), Robert McNamara understood that the number of missiles the Soviets sent to Cuba would not affect the balance of nuclear forces.

However, thirty years later, returning from a conference held in Havana in 1992, in which US, Russian, and Cuban personalities discussed the historical circumstances related to the missile crisis, McNamara stated in an interview with the *Washington Post* (Oberdofer, 1992) that he was unaware at the time that the Russians had short-range missile systems with fully operational tactical nuclear warheads installed in Cuba during that crisis.

McNamara also said that he was surprised by the statement made at the event by General Anatoly Gribkov, also present at the meeting in Havana, who said that the Russian commander on the ground was authorized to use tactical nuclear weapons in the event of a US invasion of Cuban territory, without the need to receive authorization from Moscow to do so. McNamara concluded by stating that the two nations were much closer to a nuclear conflict than he had ever imagined, since the landing of a military force was foreseen in the existing plan and, in the event that such weapons were launched against US troops, a strategic US nuclear retaliation would have to be determined.

In terms of troops, the Group of Soviet Forces in Cuba would have 4 Mechanized Infantry Regiments to defend Cuba, each with the task of carrying out counterattacks in the event of an invasion. The Regiments would have a large area of responsibility for defense, and, thus, all four would have batteries with short-range (45 Km) Luna 3R10 missiles equipped with tactical nuclear warheads.

Figure 2 – Launch Unit of the Luna 3R10 System with Tactical Nuclear Warhead



Source: Butsikiy, 2007

In total, the estimated effective of the Group of Forces would reach the number of 44,000 military personnel, and a fleet of 70 to 80 ships of the Soviet Navy would be required to transport all the planned personnel and material. It would be a gigantic endeavor (Gribkov, 2007).

US planners were completely unaware of the actual number of Russian soldiers deployed on the Cuban island, estimated at a maximum of 10,000 by US military intelligence (Plokhly, 2021).

However, in compliance with General Ivanov's directive, some relevant obstacles were also raised by General Gribkov's small team, both related to the secrecy of the operation. The first one referred to the strategic deployment phase. How to disguise the deployment of such a large fleet of the Soviet Navy without attracting US attention?

The second obstacle referred to phase of deployment of missile regiments in Cuba: how to hide the installation of so many missile batteries from US aerial observation? This obstacle was justified by the fact that the available data indicated that the island of Cuba had little forest vegetation that provided a natural camouflage for large equipment, whose installation would also require considerable engineering work. Everything would be very visible to the ultra-accurate cameras of the U-2 aircraft of the Americans.

On June 10, 1962, the plan of Operation Anadyr was presented to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet. After Marshal Malinovsky made a detailed explanation of the plan, it was unanimously approved.

According to Gribkov (2007), Khrushchev, as Head of State and Supreme Commander, would have agreed to a very high risk forecast contained in the Anadyr Plan, that is, the prior authorization for the Commander of the Group of Forces to determine the use of Luna missiles for immediate defense of the island, at his personal discretion, with the exception that they should always be used in the last case, and only when timely communication with the upper echelons was not possible.

The Presidium had recommended that the obstacles raised in the planning should be submitted to careful analysis and coordination in order to reduce the risks raised.

5 STRATEGIC MOBILIZATION AND DEPLOYMENT

The first measure adopted by the General Staff was the creation of a specific department to devise the details of Operation Anadyr and coordinate its execution. It would include general officers and advisors from the most diverse levels of all individual forces, as well as representatives from the Personnel, Logistics, Engineering, Communications, Administration, and Finance Departments (Rossiiskaia Federatsia, 2023).

At the same time, they initiated the process for assigning the important position of Commander of the Group of Soviet Forces in Cuba. The initial idea would have been to appoint a General Officer of the Strategic Missile Force, but it was soon concluded that the constitution of the Group of Forces was too heterogeneous, and that it would be necessary to appoint a more experienced General Officer with greater seniority.

The General Staff decided to indicate to Secretary Khrushchev the name of Army General Issa Alexandrovich Pliev, mechanized cavalry officer, a World War II veteran. However, his undiplomatic profile had aroused some criticism regarding his appointment, as this characteristic could be essential in the relationship with the Cuban authorities in general and with Fidel Castro in particular. His total lack of knowledge about the use of nuclear weapons also raised doubts about his ability to decide on the use of these means.

According to Gribkov (2007), Khrushchev would have approved Pliev's name, and not one of his generals of the nuclear forces, precisely because he did not intend in any way to employ such weapons, but only to use them for deterrence purposes.

The General Staff of the Group of Forces was a joint structure, composed of a Subcommand, a Political Department, a Chief of Staff, an Air Defense Section, a Naval Section, a Personnel and Logistics Section, an Operations Section, and a Section for Coordination of the Military Advisors in Cuba, all headed by general officers.

In terms of troops and assets, the Group of Forces would be composed of the 51st Strategic Missile Division (R-12 and R-14 Systems), four Mechanized Infantry Regiments, two Anti-Aircraft Missile Groups, 1 Fighter Aviation Regiment (40 MiG-21 aircraft), one Transport Aviation Squadron (11 aircraft), one Helicopter Regiment (33 Mi-4 aircraft), two Tactical Missile Regiments (Luna System, capable of deploying 8 launchers in each Infantry Regiment), one Engineering Battalion and two Logistics Units. The naval portion would include a Submarine Brigade (11 units), a Surface Ship Squadron (2 cruisers, 2 destroyers, and 2 frigates), a squadron of anti-ship missile launching vessels (12 units), a Coastal Artillery Regiment (8 Soppa anti-ship missile launchers), a Naval Aviation Regiment (33 Il-28 aircraft), and a detachment of support vessels (2 oil tankers, 2 general cargo ships, and 2 workshop ship). All units would be equipped with the most modern versions of the armaments provided.

It was decided that the Luna tactical nuclear missile systems would be shipped with the respective Infantry Regiments, with which they would be expected to operate in Cuba.

A less classified documentation presented only the details of the mobilization, strategic concentration and preparations for the shipment and was called "Preparation and Conduct Plan for the Anadyr Event," which stated that the operation was only an exercise for strategic deployment of troops by sea to different areas of the USSR. The part of the movement to Cuba and the deployment on the Caribbean island was only in the top-secret part of the plan (Gribkov, 2007).

Gribkov described in detail the planning for strategic movement (Gribkov, 2007). Due to the high complexity involved in preparing such a large fleet, a special department had to be created within the Naval Force that was in charge of executing the plans for shipment of personnel and material. Liaison officers from all units were assigned to compose such department, taking with them all lists of personnel and material containing the description of all volumes to be shipped.

Orders were issued for each subordinate unit, with date, time, and place of shipment of each of them. Logistics troops would also receive the same information for preparing rail or road convoys for land movements, as the case may be. The time required for shipping each unit would be two to three days.

However, some unprecedented issues would need to be addressed. The major challenges would be related to the strategic missile systems. From the shipment of fuel for the missiles to the handling, transport, and shipment of a large quantity of nuclear warheads, nothing similar had been carried out until then. The solutions involved detailed engineering projects.

Shipping the missiles would also involve special preparations. In order to prevent US aerial reconnaissance from identifying them if they were arranged on the upper decks of the ships, the missiles had to be placed in the holds, requiring significant adaptations in access to the ships' cargo compartments. And effectively US intelligence carried out photographic reconnaissance on the Soviet ships, but they were never able to determine that the missiles were being transported. This detail would eventually lead the Americans to make wrong decisions throughout the crisis, and in fact, increased the probability of a nuclear conflict. As noted above, such unawareness was revealed by the former US Secretary of Defense, Robert S. McNamara, only in 1992.

As for the preparations for the strategic movement, it was determined that all communications should be carried out via secure means. No order or coordination could be communicated by telephone, requiring that the documentation issued did not give rise to any doubt. The plan provided for a four-month schedule for all scheduled shipments to Cuba, starting on July 12, 1962, and concluding by October of that year.

While the preparation measures were underway, a special reconnaissance group was moving to Cuba by air. Considering that the aircraft would have to make a refueling stop in the city of Conakry (Republic of Guinea), on its route to Cuba, all its passengers received fake passports and names, with the pretext that it was the first commercial flight between the USSR and Cuba. And the delegation, headed by General Pliev himself (Figure 3), would be under the guise of a commission of agriculture and irrigation specialists, who would start a major project on the Caribbean island. Such news would circulate in the Cuban press and in the media of the Soviet press. One of the main tasks of this group would be to recognize possible locations where the vegetation cover would enable the deployment of the R-12 and R-14 missile launchers.

Figure 3 – Arrival of the commission led by General Pliev (center) in Havana, received by Raul Castro (on the right in the photo)



Source: Gribkov, 2007

The first troops to embark would be those of air defense and the Mechanized Infantry Regiments (which would have already incorporated the Luna tactical nuclear missile batteries), as well as the supports, so that the later arrival of the Strategic Missile Regiments would enable this more sensitive operation to already have a defensive scheme, should a US attack be carried out in the meantime.

The details of Operation Anadyr were first presented to Cuban authorities in late June 1962. A Cuban delegation headed by Raul Castro, Minister of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Cuba, was invited by General Pliev to a meeting with Secretary Khrushchev in Moscow. According to Khrushchev (2007), Raul Castro was a central figure in addressing the issue since he was known to be a gung-ho communist.

All negotiations were conducted in absolute secrecy. The drafting of the terms of a military agreement involving the sending of the Group of Forces to Cuba led to in-depth negotiations, which continued for 5 days. A preliminary document was drafted but still pending Fidel Castro's approval. Upon receiving it, Fidel determined some changes, and the name of the document was defined as "Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Cuba and the Government of the USSR on Military Cooperation for Protection of the National Territory of Cuba in the Event of Aggression"⁶. The terms met the expectations of both signatories. In a letter sent by Fidel Castro, he had appointed Ernesto Che Guevara as his authorized representative to sign the document (Gribkov, 2007).

The strategic movement would start on the established date. On July 12, 1962, the shipments began at the ports of Kronstadt, Liepaja, Baltic Ska, Sevastopol, Fedosia, Nikolaev, Poti, and Murmansk. Once the troop had arrived at its designated port, no one else could leave. KGB troops would garrison all boarding locations, so the rules were followed precisely. All communications between the ports and the outside world were cut off. Letters, telegrams, and phone calls were strictly forbidden.

Each ship would receive two sealed envelopes. One to be opened by its Commander moments before the time scheduled for suspension, and which presented the coordinates of a point to be targeted. There the political officer would hand the Commander the second sealed envelope, which would direct them to a port designated for disembarkation in Cuba.

6 THE UNFOLDING AND THE OBSTACLES FACED

Eleven ports were designated in Cuba for the disembarkation of troops and equipment. The main ones were those in Havana, Cabañas, Casilda, Bahía Honda, Matanzas, La Isabela, and Mariel. On July 19, the first disembarkations would take place. In a short time, there was a congestion of ships in the main Cuban ports, which did not have adequate equipment for unloading in sufficient quantity, causing excessive delay in planned disembarkation operations and need for unscheduled rerouting of ships to alternative ports.

⁶ In the original: Соглашение между Правительством Республики Куба и правительством СССР о военном сотрудничестве для защиты национальной территории Кубы в случае агрессии.

Figure 4 – Preparations for disembarkation at the Mariel port



Source: Yesin, 2007a

From the designated ports, the units were to move to their muster zones. The ballistic missile units were to deploy in the western region of the island, in the area of the locality of San Cristobal, and in the central region, in the area of the Casilda Port. Most of the Infantry Regiments also deployed in these areas, but some were planned for the eastern region. One of them was deployed just 100 km away from the US Naval Base located in Guantánamo. The US base would be one of the initial targets should US forces attempt an invasion. The organic units of the Soviet Air Force were already training to attack it.

Figure 5 shows a diagram of the deployment of units of the Group of Soviet Forces in Cuba.

Figure 5 – Deployment of the Group of Soviet Forces in Cuba



Source: adapted by the author from Stacenko, 2007

The arrival of the first strategic nuclear warheads occurred only on September 16, requiring extra care for the organic safety and counterintelligence. Just at that time, Soviet counterintelligence, in coordination with the Cuban security agency, found that CIA cells were actively operating on the island, requiring an operation to deactivate them. A subversive organization, sponsored by the Americans and called the Narciso Lopez Division, would have been identified and neutralized, with the arrest of a US citizen and 237 members, with the seizure of large sums of US dollars, Cuban pesos, and gold.

The troops that arrived in Cuba were deployed in all six provinces, all with geographical conditions significantly different from one another. These differences also implied consequences for the nature and scope of the engineering work required. In most areas of concentration there were not enough accommodations for so many military personnel. The road network was non-existent or extremely precarious and, in some cases, even sources of water supply were unavailable. The Regiments' organic Engineering Platoons and the only available Engineering Battalion were totally overburdened. Even with the concurrence of the scarce engineering resources of the Cuban troops and, also, of mobilized Cuban civil resources, little was possible to gather for the solution of the enormous demands.

Most troops remained lodged in campaign tents, and officers in modular lodging structures (Figure 6). All military personnel would remain during the entire deployment phase in civilian apparel, and uniforms should only be used upon order. A special uniform, called South, was provided for all members of the Group of Forces and was tailored to meet the characteristics of the operation in tropical weather.

Figure 6 – Lodging for officers in modular structures



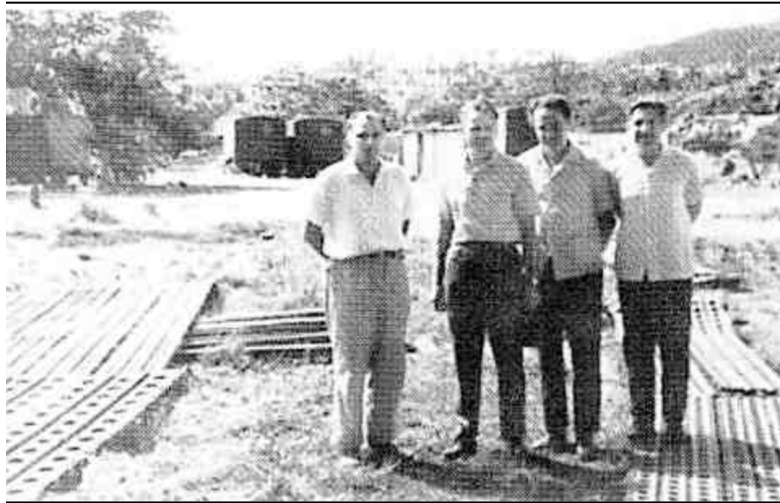
Source: Burlov, 2007

However, the secrecy of the operation and the limited number of people authorized to implement the plan established for Operation Anadyr had several negative consequences for its implementation, which Gribkov (2007) described in detail.

Conditions on board most ships were not suitable for transporting personnel. The lodging places were precarious and the temperatures in the basements reached 50°C. Many foods deteriorated in a few days due to the heat, causing diseases in the troops and overloading the limited wards.

Issues as important as the prior selection of deployment sites for combat readiness of missile regiments had been completely neglected. The reality of the terrain demonstrated that the absence of vegetation cover greatly limited the ability to maintain the deployment of forces under the necessary camouflage.

Figure 7 – Group of Russian military personnel, in civilian clothes, in one of the occupied deployment areas



Source: Gribkov, 2007

The influence of climatic conditions (heavy tropical rains) was not correctly evaluated for the engineering work necessary for the preparation of combat positions. The P-12 missile systems did not require much engineering work for their deployment, and their installation would proceed smoothly. However, the R-14 missile system required concreting in an area under the launch pad, as well as concreting in the site for the rocket fuel refueling station. Rain led to significant increase in the time allotted to engineering works, making it virtually impossible to perform them in a manner that U.S. aerial reconnaissance did not identify them. Also, the characteristics of the soil, very stony, made the engineering equipment inefficient.

The fact is that, at the date scheduled for the R-14 batteries to be in combat readiness (October 23, 1962), there was not a single fully prepared position for the most important systems of the Soviet strategic nuclear device to be fully operational.

The issue of transporting and handling missile fuel was another relevant operational difficulty. The fuel for the R-12 and R-14 missiles was liquid, composed of an extremely aggressive oxidizer, fuel, and hydrogen peroxide. Special reservoirs had to be installed on tankers so as to enable its transport to Cuba. Disembarkation should be carried out at the Bahía Honda port, where specialized equipment was installed to pump the components to specialized tank trucks, and so from there they could be transported to their destination units.

Other factors had a significant impact on the actions of missile units, such as: the excessively prolonged concentration process for the strategic missile units, which were the last to embark; the movement of missiles on ships other than their control and operation levels, causing a lack of coordination in disembarkation; the difficult climatic conditions in Cuba, either due to heat (reaching 40°C) and, particularly, humidity, affecting the operability of the missiles; and, finally, the US actions in the naval blockade of the island of Cuba, which from October 22, 1962 began to interfere directly with the strategic movement operation.

7 THE PEAK OF THE CRISIS AND THE DEMOBILIZATION

In the early morning hours of October 14, 1962, Lieutenant Colonel Richard Heyser was conducting a surveillance mission over the island of Cuba, employing a sophisticated U-2 spy aircraft. The hundreds of photos captured through the lens of his camera would reveal the greatest threat to US national security until then and would form a set of unequivocal evidence of the existence of launch positions for Soviet medium-range missiles in Cuba (Rasenberger, 2012).

It was the beginning of the Cuban Missile Crisis, as the Americans call it, or the Caribbean Crisis, as the Soviets call it (Khrushchev, 2007).

The information literally dropped like a bomb on Washington. American intelligence had failed to identify the preparation for such action in a timely manner and, consequently, the US leadership was completely surprised.

The *Chairman* of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Maxwell Taylor, already had all the planning prepared for the mass airstrike against targets in Cuba. It is estimated that OPLAN 312-62 (the plan that regulated this air attack) provided for the employment of about a thousand aircraft of all types, half of which would be tactical fighters. In case Cuba did not surrender after this air attack, Maxwell would be in a position to trigger OPLAN 316-62, as already seen, the large-scale land invasion (Department of State, 1962).

US intelligence had contributed to these plans with some incorrect data: they estimated the presence of about 10,000 Soviet soldiers on the island, when the USSR had four times more effective than that amount. It was not believed that there would be medium-range ballistic missiles in operational conditions; however, as we have seen, at least the R-12s were already ready for combat. It was completely unknown that there were tactical nuclear missile systems deployed in Cuba. And not only were there—in this case, Luna systems—but they were already in a state of readiness and with authorization already granted to the Commander of the Group of Soviet Forces for their use in the event of an invasion (Rasenberger, 2012)

Maxwell, a hardline military man, and World War II veteran, had already decided that immediately executing OPLAN 312-62 (a massive air strike) would be the most likely option to succeed. Having participated in the planning of the Bay of Pigs operation, its failure still stained his resume, even though he understood that the previous failure had not been his exclusive fault.

October 27, 1962, would mark the peak of the crisis, when several high-risk events would happen almost simultaneously, in a perfect storm. The first of these would take place at a meeting of President Kennedy with his top military advisors, at which time he would have been

advised to authorize the execution of Operation Northwoods, according to General Maxwell. This plan involved the start of a pre-emptive airstrike against Cuba on October 29. It would be the triggering of OPLAN 312-62. (Department of State, 1962).

Maxwell's suggestion was still that, after said airstrike, an assessment should be carried out to determine the need for a ground invasion, and this would involve the authorization of OPLAN 316-62 (The Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1962d).

However, Kennedy was not only reticent, but quite firm that he would not take any direct action, be it an air or ground attack. His intention would be to employ a combination of naval blockade and intensified diplomatic efforts as the most appropriate course of action, in order to avoid, as much as possible, the risk of causing the outbreak of a nuclear war (Rasenberger, 2012).

However, that same day, a series of highly severe incidents would still take place. The Soviet Nuclear Submarine B-59, sailing in the Caribbean Sea, was identified and surrounded by 11 US Navy destroyers, which launched PDCs⁷ to force it to surface. The B-59 Commander had no direct communication with Moscow and was about to give the command to fire a nuclear torpedo against the US Navy, having been stopped at the last minute by the commander of his flotilla (Duncan; Stein, 2021).

Concurrently, a U-2 reconnaissance plane, flying at an altitude of more than 20 km over the island of Cuba, was shot down by ground-deployed anti-aircraft defenses. The garrison that shot it down was Russian, and the decision would have been made by the command of the Group of Soviet Forces, after detecting the aircraft with available radar devices (Duncan; Stein, 2021).

Cuban troops collected the remains of the U-2 pilot, Major Rudolf Anderson, who would come to be the only fatal victim of the crisis experienced in those fateful days of October 1962.

Finally, Fidel Castro reportedly sent a message to Khrushchev, informing him that he had intelligence indicating that the US invasion would take place in the next few hours. Everything indicated an irremediable escalation of the crisis.

Amid all this uncertainty, Khrushchev would have sent two letters to Kennedy. The first conditioned the removal of the missiles to the guarantee that Cuba would not be invaded. However, in the second, Khrushchev demanded that the US also removed its missiles from Turkey. Kennedy decided to send a response ignoring the possibility of a missile exchange, only assuring that Cuba would not be invaded (Duncan; Stein, 2021).

Khrushchev would have received Kennedy's response and, after assessing the situation with the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, he decided on his final answer:

As a result of all our correspondence through official and unofficial channels, we have reached the following decision and made it known to the President of the United States. We said that we would speak publicly and insist on the following: to avoid a military conflict, we were establishing the condition that

⁷ *Practice Depth Charges* or Signaling Depth Charges, with no explosive capacity.

President Kennedy must make a commitment not to invade Cuba if we remove our missiles and other weapons and equipment, except conventional weapons. The Americans themselves did not demand that we removed conventional weapons. (Khrushchev, 2007, p. 341)

Figure 8 – Wreckage of the U-2 spy aircraft surrounded by Cuban people



Source: Gribkov, 2007

Although the issue of the removal of missiles in Turkey was not included in the agreement, Kennedy would have decided to remove them, as well as those deployed in Italy, but only because they were already considered obsolete (Duncan; Stein, 2021).

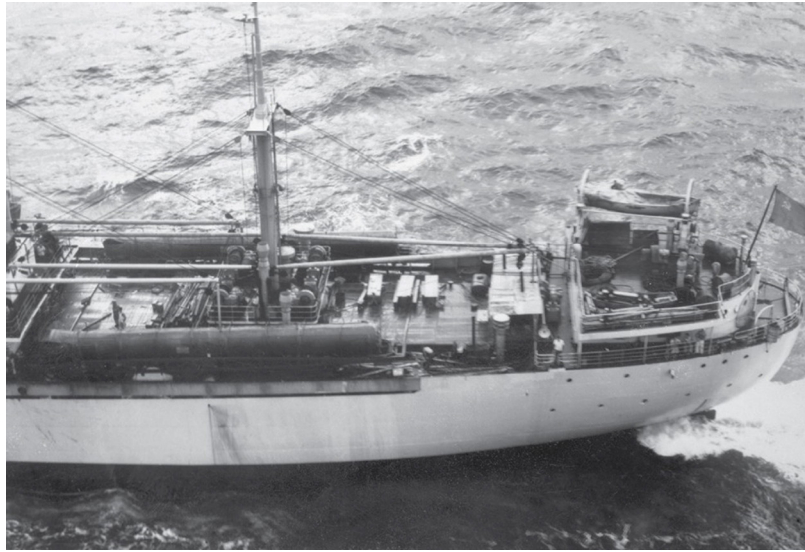
For relief of all humanity, the crisis ended with an informal agreement. Except for Fidel Castro, who for a long time had considered Khrushchev's attitude as a defeat, as he had not resigned himself to the loss of the nuclear arsenal installed in his country. In a letter addressed to Khrushchev, Fidel stated:

Countless eyes of Cuban and Soviet men who were willing to die with supreme dignity shed tears upon learning of the astonishing, sudden, and virtually unconditional decision to remove the weapons. (Duncan; Stein, 2021, p. 100)

The United Nations (UN) reportedly asked the organization's inspectors to inspect the complete removal of nuclear weapons from Cuba, which was denied by Fidel Castro. The Russians communicated to the Americans that they would place the missiles on the decks of the ships, so they could be photographed by the US surveillance devices, which was carried out.

On November 9, 1962, the last ship carrying nuclear missiles left the island of Cuba (Duncan; Stein, 2021).

Figure 9 – Last shipment of Soviet missiles leaves Cuba headed to the USSR



Source: Duncan; Stein, 2021, p. 82.

8 CONCLUSION

This work presented the actions conducted by the USSR to try to contain a threat of American invasion against the communist regime of Cuba, but which also sought to establish a better positioning of its ballistic missiles in relation to its priority target, the USA.

To this end, the USSR planned and executed Operation Anadyr, which can be defined as the largest, most complex, and perhaps the only real strategic nuclear operation ever carried out. Nothing of this magnitude had ever been attempted before, and it is very likely that it will never happen again. Under current conditions, highly sophisticated spatial remote sensing systems, which are available for major powers, would certainly detect a strategic movement of this magnitude.

We found that sending the Group of Soviet Forces to Cuba effectively proved a gigantic challenge. However, the movement of troops provided for in the Operation Anadyr plan also had another characteristic: it involved the largest deployment of extracontinental forces in the Americas since the establishment of the Monroe Doctrine by the US. And, no less relevant, conducting a formidable nuclear arsenal.

We note that the Soviet decision-making process that led to the triggering of Operation Anadyr was greatly influenced by the personal view of Khrushchev, who weighed the threats and risks very individually. This demonstrates the high risk involved in the decision to employ nuclear weapons in an authoritarian country. And, today, the world has some authoritarian countries, such as North Korea, which is much more authoritarian than the USSR ever was. In the case in question, the prior authorization granted by Khrushchev so the Russian military commander on the ground could decide on the use of tactical nuclear weapons would have been absolutely temerarious.

The operation was carried out with high operational and logistical difficulties due to the unprecedented challenge of transporting nuclear warheads and missiles over such long distances, with 44,000 men, as well as a large amount of conventional weapons.

In this sense, we observed that the deployment of the Group of Soviet Forces in Cuba would not have occurred without mistakes and difficulties of all kinds, since the decision to adopt a maximum degree of secrecy implied an immense difficulty for coordination at all levels.

In the diplomatic field, negotiations with the Cuban regime were sensitive and demonstrate that the formation of an alliance for collective defense is not always something simple to implement. The peaceful outcome of the crisis was not well received by Fidel Castro, leaving some marks on his relationship with the USSR.

On the American side, there are also many lessons. Considering that the gigantic strategic deployment of the Group of Soviet Forces had begun on July 12, 1962, and that it would only have been detected by American intelligence on October 14, we note that the beginning of the decision-making process of the American leadership proved absolutely late and untimely for a correct assessment of the risks involved.

Nevertheless, even when US intelligence identified the deployment, the information passed to US leadership proved misleading. The total unawareness of the existence of Russian tactical and strategic nuclear weapons systems in a state of operational readiness on Cuban soil in those days of October 1962 was one of the greatest known failures of the US intelligence system, as it involved an existential threat to the country.

Such lack of intel led to assessments and indications that proved incorrect by not considering the existence of tactical nuclear weapons on Cuban soil. Another incorrect assessment referred to the Soviet effective deployed in Cuba, which was actually four times larger than had been reported to President Kennedy.

A series of actions based on mistaken assessments, on both sides, reached its peak on October 27, 1962, when several very serious incidents led to the deployment of nuclear-capable devices of the USA and the USSR. The attack on a Soviet nuclear submarine, by the USA, and the shooting down of the U-2 aircraft, by the Russians, constituted actions on the brink of war.

Everything could have led to a tragic outcome for humanity had it not been for the direct understandings established between Kennedy and Khrushchev. Kennedy disagreed with the views of his top military advisers, who were pushing for a massive airstrike against the Cuban island. However, he relied fully on a solution based on negotiation and personal contact with his Soviet counterpart. This clearly demonstrated that, in a similar crisis, the decision needs to remain at the highest political level.

In assessing the general conjuncture, and the war in Ukraine in particular, we note some concerning points: global leaders have disregarded negotiation at a higher level, diplomacy is paralyzed, and the United Nations Security Council proves inactive.

Apparently, the world is already facing a very relevant crisis to handle. However, according to the abovementioned statement of Narang and Sagan (2022), what is required is a process of socialization of the main leaders involved.

Accordingly, the lessons arising from the personal actions of Kennedy and Khrushchev in the developments of Operation Anadyr should serve as examples to all governments in these times of reconfiguration of the world order. The refusal of leaders of nuclear powers to seek personal understandings with their counterparts, in these difficult times, constitutes a major difference of the current times in relation to the Cuban crisis of the 1960s.

Thus, decisions are eventually no longer taken as a result of negotiations at the highest level, as would require a situation that would involve the fate of humanity. A gesture of relinquishing interests for the greater good of peace could prove essential so as to establish lost connections and thus contain dangerous spirals of conflict. Kennedy and Khrushchev chose the path of negotiation in 1962 to end a standoff resulting from Operation Anadyr. Unfortunately, this is not what is seen in this crisis in Ukraine.

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