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Inside Story

**THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS OF 1962:
PRESENTING THE PHOTOGRAPHIC
EVIDENCE ABROAD**

Sherman Kent

It was 0737 in the morning of Sunday 14 October 1962 when Major Richard Heyser began the crossing of Cuba in his U-2. He flew almost due north—on a course some 60 miles to the west of Havana—and passed over the northerly beaches six minutes later. In that brief timespan he took 928 pictures, which covered a swath 75 miles wide. The resolution of his best shots was a matter of three feet.

Once past the target, he headed for McCoy Air Force Base near Orlando, Florida. There the exposed film was transferred to special shipping containers, loaded into a courier aircraft, and flown with all deliberate speed to the Naval Photographic Interpretation Center at Suitland, Maryland. It was late in the day when the film arrived; from then on and through the night the Center developed the original negatives and began making duplicate positives—not the usual kind of photoprints on opaque paper, as we amateurs might think, but a special kind of print on clear acetate that the pro's could study over a light table.

The first of these duplicates reached the National Photographic Interpretation Center (NPIC) just before 1000 on the morning of 15 October. By 1600 that afternoon the photointerpreters (PI's) were almost certain that they had identified large surface-to-surface missiles; in another hour or so they were sure enough for Arthur Lundahl, the Director of NPIC, to pass the word to CIA Headquarters. Headquarters, in turn, reached McGeorge Bundy about 2100 that evening. It was his decision to give the President a night's rest and the PI's a night's more labor before putting the earth-shaking evidence before his chief.

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The President and his principal advisors were informed the next morning.¹ This left the question of what to do—a matter which was resolved after five days of debate and deliberation in favor of a “strict quarantine on all offensive military equipment under shipment to Cuba.” Once the President reached this basic decision, he had a myriad of second-line but still important decisions to make. Just to touch on one—and incidentally the one that triggered the subject of this essay—consider that word “quarantine.” The President used it to avoid the more provocative word “blockade,” but no matter what he called it, the other man was free to take grave offense. Neither would go down easily with the USSR. In fact it was possible that the quarantine and its enforcement would lead to that well-known series of actions and reactions so often cited in intelligence papers as the unintentioned stairway to general conflict. Though the odds favoring this progress of events were small, they were by no means negligible. Even if events stopped a long way short of the cataclysm, there was still room for a thundering crisis, the outcome of which would depend in significant measure upon the way in which our allies would respond—whether they would support us or back away.

During the seven days between the President’s learning of the Soviet’s emplacement of medium- and intermediate-range ballistic missiles in Cuba and his speech announcing it, a few score principal officers of the Executive Branch worked endlessly and in unpenetrated secrecy. Except for the President, the members of the so-called Ex Comm (the ad hoc executive committee of the NSC), and the top echelon of the intelligence community, few indeed of our fellow countrymen knew what was going on and why, and practically no one in the governments of our allies. Until the President was ready to act, the Russians must not know that we knew their secret, and, when we were ready to act, our allies should know our chosen course before our adversaries. It was to this end that the Ex Comm drafted for the President’s approval a time-table of consecutive actions which included the briefings of the chiefs of government of our principal allies.

¹ A good bit has been written on the subject of the missile crisis. The best full account is still Elie Abel, *The Missile Crisis* (Philadelphia and New York, 1966). Mr. Abel’s material comes in very large part from oral testimony—taken while events were still fresh in mind—from most of the major American policy officers and a few of the British. Robert Kennedy’s *Thirteen Days* (New York, 1969) is an important first-hand account.

At A hour of D day (a time which became 1900 EDST Monday 22 October) the President was to tell publicly what was wrong in Cuba and what the US government proposed to do about it. At about A minus 12, the British were to receive formal advance notice, about four hours later the French and the Germans, and later still the Canadians.² Our ambassadors were to call upon the chiefs of government, deliver personal letters from the President and a copy of the speech to be delivered that night, and make whatever oral comment was appropriate. Each of them was also to have copies of the air photos and (for the presentations to the British, French, Germans, and Canadians) an intelligence officer from CIA headquarters to brief and answer questions as necessary.

Of our ambassadors to the UK, France, the Federal Republic, and Canada, only Mr. Bruce was at his post in London. Mr. Dowling was not in Bonn; he was in Georgia on compassionate leave. Mr. Bohlen, our ambassador-designate to Paris, was on his way on a boat in mid-Atlantic,³ and Mr. Butterworth, the ambassador-designate to Ottawa, was not to assume his functions until after the New Year.

In Mr. Dowling's case there was a remedy, a speedy termination of his leave; as for Mr. Bohlen and Mr. Butterworth, there was no remedy but that of finding worthy substitutes. For the group heading for Europe there was to be a presidential aircraft (Air Force One) which would transport Mr. Dowling, Mr. Acheson (the substitute for Mr. Bohlen), the documents, the pictures and their CIA security courier Edward Enck, and the three CIA men to do the intelligence briefing. Chester Cooper, who had had a tour of duty in London, was to be with Mr. Bruce; R. Jack Smith (who was AD/CI at the time) was to go on to Bonn with Mr. Dowling; and I had the honor to be with Mr. Acheson. In place of the absent Mr. Butterworth, the President called from private life Mr. Livingston Merchant (who a few months earlier had resigned as our ambassador to Canada and left the Foreign Service). He and William Tidwell, his CIA intelligence briefer, made their separate ways to Ottawa.

There is some evidence that first planning in the Ex Comm did not envisage that the intelligence briefing of the chiefs of government

² The Turks and Italians were also to receive advance notice.

³ Between ambassadorial assignments Mr. Bohlen had been keeping Soviet matters under special scrutiny for the benefit of the President and Secretary of State. His appointment to Paris had come only shortly before the discovery of the missiles in Cuba. After this turn of events, President Kennedy was torn between keeping Bohlen at his side in Washington or releasing him to take up his duties in France. The result was some temporizing which led to Mr. Bohlen's late departure.

would take place simultaneously with the ambassadors' presentations of the case. Rather the technical intelligence colloquy was to take place on a service-to-service basis soon after the principals had met. I mention this to indicate that the Ex Comm did consider the intelligence aspects of the multi-national maneuver and came to attach a high importance to it.

Whether the Ex Comm worried about the credibility of photographic evidence (it was the only solid evidence there was) I do not know, but I do know that a few very important officers of the Agency did. Accordingly, Cooper, Smith, Tidwell, and I were urged to pay particular attention to the way in which our audiences responded to the photographs and to record these reactions in our memos for the record. We were also urged to make these memos as full and detailed as other demands on our time would permit.

Cooper and I did find the time to write up our experiences at length. Smith, who did not, spent some time last June (1971) giving me the benefit of his remembrance of the events almost nine years back. Tidwell wrote only a short memo, of which more later, since the magisterial Memorandum of Conversation which Mr. Merchant filed with the Department of State covered the subject with depth and thoroughness. In these communications there is much of interest to the intelligence calling. But let the memos speak for themselves.

First from a shortened version of Chester Cooper's "Memorandum for the Record" of 29 October 1962:

The Prime Minister

(On Monday, 22 October [1230 London time] I accompanied the Ambassador to the Admiralty to assist him in briefing Mr. Macmillan on the situation in Cuba. The letter from the President had been sent to the Prime Minister's office earlier in the day. We delayed our session with the Prime Minister for half an hour, hoping to bring with us an advance draft of the President's message.

The Prime Minister was alone except for his Private Secretary. It was evident that the Prime Minister had some advance general knowledge of the developing situation in Cuba (as indeed he should have since we had briefed various members of the British intelligence community several days before in Washington). However, Mr. Macmillan obviously had no idea of the extent or precise nature of Soviet offensive capabilities in Cuba. His first reaction, which he addressed more to himself than to the Ambassador, was to the effect that the British people, who had been

living in the shadow of annihilation for the past many years, had somehow been able to live more or less normal lives and he felt that the Americans, now confronted with a similar situation would, after the initial shock, make a similar adjustment. "Life goes on somehow."

The Prime Minister was obviously aware that this might be misinterpreted, and went to considerable length to explain to the Ambassador that this was more of a philosophical commentary on human nature than any indication on his part that he was not sympathetic with the US position or shocked at the news.

After my recitation of the present Soviet offensive strength in Cuba, Mr. Macmillan said that, if the President were convinced that a meaningful offensive capability were present, "That was good enough for him." He did not spend more than a few seconds on the photographs. Although the Prime Minister did not develop this theme in my presence in detail, he did indicate that he felt that a blockade would be difficult to enforce and that the US would have problems in getting solid UN support. He also ruminated about whether it would not have been better to have confronted Khrushchev privately with our evidence and given him a private ultimatum.

Lord Home then joined the Prime Minister and the Ambassador for a discussion of policy matters and I was excused. I was quickly followed by the Private Secretary who stressed the necessity for making our evidence as convincing as possible to the British public. . . .

Members of the Shadow Cabinet

Cooper also briefed Hugh Gaitskell and George Brown of the British Shadow Cabinet. He, Ambassador Bruce, and two embassy officers met with them on Tuesday evening. Cooper told the story and showed the photographs. Gaitskell, who up until that time had feared that the President was confusing the issue of the Soviet buildup by making it appear that surface-to-air missiles were offensive weapons, confessed his earlier apprehensions and acknowledged that they were ill-founded. He was visibly shaken by the evidence of the long-range missiles.

He made much of the analogy between Cuba and Turkey and brushed aside most of the standard arguments about the difference between the two. However, he seemed much impressed with the fact that the Cuban missiles were outside the BMEWS sys-

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Missile Crisis

tem. He felt that this did, in fact, represent a change in the *status quo* and in the "balance of terror" question.

George Brown was concerned as to whether the United States had deployed more or fewer Jupiter missiles in Turkey than the Soviets were putting into Cuba and as to the Soviets' capability for early warning of the firing of these missiles. Cooper said he would try to get enlightenment for Brown on both matters. Brown's point, and one to which Gaitskell assented, was that if the United States did indeed have fewer missiles in Turkey than the Soviets would have in Cuba and if the Soviets did have an early warning capability, the argument about the equivalence of the Turkish and Cuban bases would be weakened.

Gaitskell said that he had been with the Prime Minister just prior to our discussion and that the Prime Minister expressed annoyance about the lack of advance knowledge of US actions. I pointed out to Gaitskell in fairly strong terms that there were two aspects to the question of advanced knowledge: one was the developing situation in Cuba and the other was US intentions with respect to Cuba. In connection with the former, I told Gaitskell that we had occasion to discuss Cuba with several important people in the British intelligence community who happened to be in Washington during the week of 15 October, and that several of them had been given a formal briefing on Friday, 19 October. We could only assume that they notified their government of the developing situation in Cuba. With respect to US intentions, I noted that we had hoped to get an advanced copy of the President's statement to the Prime Minister 12 hours before the broadcast, but that this was not possible because the President himself had not decided on the precise language of his statement until fairly late in the day. . . . This was unfortunate, but in the nature of the circumstances, was all that could have been done. . . .

The British Intelligence Community

Ambassador Bruce and Cooper agreed that it would be wise to give the briefing to the British Joint Intelligence Committee, and [] [] got in touch with Sir Hugh Stephenson (the JIC Chairman), who set the time for 1000 Tuesday morning.

There was no evident skepticism of the validity of our evidence, but it was clear that the Air Ministry was anxious to get the photo take for analysis by their own PI's (a team of Air

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Ministry officers was provided an opportunity for closer examination of the photos later in the afternoon). There was, naturally, considerable speculation as to Soviet motives. To the extent that there was any consensus in the JIC, it was very much along the line propounded by Sir Dick [White] the previous evening... [Namely: that the Soviet aim was to confront the President late in November with a *fait accompli* in Cuba, a vantage point from which Khrushchev could bargain for a definitive settlement of the Berlin question and the question of US foreign bases in general.]

The Press

Because of the adverse or skeptical press reaction to US claims that the USSR had offensive missile bases in Cuba, the Ambassador and the Public Affairs Officer were anxious to have a press briefing as early as possible on Tuesday. At 5:00 p.m., Tuesday, a press conference was held for representatives of all the dailies, BBC, and ITV. The conference was chaired by Evans, the PAO, and attended by Minister Jones and myself. After indicating the ground rule ("backgrounder," no attribution, etc.), Mr. Evans briefly described the situation in Cuba and indicated that I, a Department of Defense consultant, would show the photographs and explain some of the background of the build-up. I did this, guided by the instructions I had received from Washington. The questions which followed were friendly and I had the feeling after the conference was over (it lasted about an hour) that the press representatives were genuinely convinced of the US case. I released the photographs, without the identification of their precise locations, to the press. (A fuller description of the circumstances of the release of the photographs is attached at Annex.)

Later Tuesday evening both the BBC and ITV had major programs dealing with the Cuban crises. The BBC broadcast the Foreign Minister's speech [which indicated strong support for the US position and a condemnation of the Soviet Union] and documented his remarks by the use of the photographs which I had supplied to the BBC.

*Annex—Release of Pictures to Press*⁴

The following consideration influenced my decision to release the photographs of the Soviet build-up to the British press:

Immediately following my briefing of the Prime Minister, Philip De Zuluetta, the Prime Minister's Private Secretary, expressed serious concern about the reception any strong Government statement would have in the absence of incontrovertible proof of the missile build-up.

On Tuesday morning (23 October) the British press was almost universally skeptical of the President's claim that the USSR had established offensive bases in Cuba. References were made to the forthcoming election and to the "failures" of past US intelligence efforts re Cuba.

On Tuesday morning, also, there was some uncertainty as to whether, at the DOD press conference following the President's broadcast, the press was *shown* the pictures or whether it was given the pictures.

After my briefing of key Embassy officers at noon on Tuesday, the PAO and the Minister urged the necessity of providing the British press with a clear and authoritative story on the build-up. I was asked to do this (the Ambassador subsequently expressed his own desire that this be done) and was also urged to show the pictures on a special BBC television program scheduled

⁴ Elie Abel (*op. cit.*, p. 138) has the following comment on the release of the pictures to the British press. The last line is in conflict with Cooper's testimony, as well as the fact that the London TV of Tuesday night showed the photographs, and the London press of Wednesday morning was loaded with them.

Sir David and Lady Ormsby Gore had received a pre-crisis invitation to join the Kennedys that evening [Tuesday 23 October] for a private dinner-dance. The dance, of course, had been canceled. But Mrs. Kennedy invited the Ormsby Gores to bring to dinner some Embassy guests who had arrived from New York too late to be forewarned of the cancellation. The British Ambassador found the President in no mood for social chatter. The two went off together for a talk about the day's events and what the morrow might bring. Sir David was worried about the skeptical British press reaction. Even the President's friend, Hugh Gaitskell, leader of the Labor Opposition, had talked of "so-called missiles" in Cuba. The Ambassador felt it was most important that the missile-site photographs be published, especially those that would most readily persuade laymen that the Soviet missiles were indeed installed. The President sent for the photographs and together the two re-examined them closely. Ormsby Gore's plea, reinforcing the direct appeal of Ambassador Bruce in London, helped the President decide to publish the pictures next day.

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for Tuesday night. I refused to appear on television, agreed to participate (but not sponsor a press briefing) and requested Headquarters' permission to have the pictures shown on BBC.

I received permission to have the pictures shown on television on the basis of the Ambassador's urgent request. The localities of the sites were to be removed and the press and the television audiences were to be told that these were *typical* sites but were not to be informed of the *number* of sites.

After consultation with Embassy officials, I agreed that since the pictures were going to be shown on television (it subsequently developed that ITV as well as BBC was going to have a special Cuba program) we could release sanitized versions of the photographs to the press for publication Wednesday morning.

I informed Headquarters at my first opportunity (which was after the Gaitskell briefing at 2100) of this release.

Sometime after midnight I was in telephone communication with the White House (Forrestal) and explained briefly the circumstances of release.

R. J. Smith in Bonn

Air Force One—which had left Cooper at Greenham Common Air Force Base in the United Kingdom and had left Mr. Acheson and me at Evreux, an air base in France used by the USAF—flew on to Cologne in the Federal Republic and disembarked Ambassador Dowling, Edward Enck the courier, and R. J. Smith. The time was well on towards Monday's dawn (22 October).

The meeting with the Chancellor, who had been electioneering in Hanover all day, did not take place until 1900. Herr Adenauer received Dowling and Smith in the Chancellor's official residence. He had provided the interpreter. As Smith remembers it, Ambassador Dowling gave the Chancellor the personal letter from President Kennedy, and with the reason for the meeting clear, introduced Mr. Smith of the CIA who was to show the evidence for the President's concern. The Chancellor's first response was characteristic: it showed perhaps his amused annoyance at the Gehlen organization's habit of using pseudonyms even within the official family and certainly something more than a trace of his legendary suspicion of everything. "Are you sure your name is Smith? Perhaps you have two names,"

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he said, just by way of getting things straight at the start.⁵ Unruffled, Smith said that his name was really Smith and began the briefing with the photographs, which were contained in an outsized carrying case. The Chancellor asked him if he slept in it, but Smith pushed on. They were seated at a low table, Smith and Herr Adenauer side by side, with Ambassador Dowling across. As the dramatically illustrated story unfolded, Adenauer was an attentive listener. Seemingly concerned to indicate his general familiarity with the sort of military intelligence being laid before him, he asked questions such as one regarding the state of readiness of the surface-to-surface missiles. (As it came through the interpreter, it was to the effect "were they warm or cold?")

There was no question but that he was impressed with the evidence. Far from showing any incredulity, he indicated that he was not at all surprised to hear of these Soviet doings. His tone was one of "this is what one must expect of them." Nor did he leave any doubt in Ambassador Dowling's mind that he would support the President's adopted course of action. "You may assure your President that I will be useful" is the way Smith remembers his reassuring comment.⁶

⁵ Some three weeks after the dialogue in Bonn the Chancellor and key members of the German government made a state visit to Washington. As R. J. Smith recounts the incident,

the White House decided that one of the features of the program for the Germans should be a briefing which would detail for Chancellor Adenauer precisely how the Russian missiles were removed from Cuba. Smith was asked to perform this chore, the venue for which was the Cabinet Room in full panoply. The German Chancellor sat on one side of the table, flanked with his defense and foreign ministers; President Kennedy sat across from him, flanked by Secretaries Rusk and McNamara. Smith sat behind the Chancellor and, on signal from the President to begin the briefing, stood up and placed the first briefing board on the table before Chancellor Adenauer. As he did so, he said, "Chancellor Adenauer, I am Mr. Smith." Adenauer looked up, his ancient face impassive, and said, "Immer," which the translator rendered as "still." This cracked Smith up and the Chancellor chuckled, whereupon Smith felt obliged to explain the joke to the distinguished group. The President smiled frostily and urged Smith to continue.

⁶ High officers of our government thought that there would be no harm in reinforcing the Chancellor's decision to be "helpful." Knowing of his warm personal friendship with Mr. Acheson and his high respect for General de Gaulle, they asked Mr. Acheson to pass through Bonn on his way home and discuss the situation anew and tell of de Gaulle's reaction to the President's chosen course of action. This is worth a footnote if for no other reason than to set a woefully confused chronology straight. Washington sent a night action cable to Mr. Acheson Monday night 22 October; it reached his attention in the small hours of Tuesday (23 October). He went to Bonn during that very day, and with Mr. Dowling saw the Chancellor for two hours late in the afternoon. Needless to say, the mission was a great success.

Neither the official memorandum of conversation, nor Mr. Acheson's memory of the interview -- as reported in C. L. Sulzberger, *The Last of the Giants* (New York, 1970), p. 931, mentions the photographic evidence.

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Paris—From My Memorandum ⁷

Mr. Acheson and I with Mr. Dowling and Smith flew on from our UK stop to Evreux where we were met by Cecil Lyon, the chargé in Paris, Ambassador to NATO Mr. Finletter, and Edward Ryan, [redacted] and an armed courier. It was then about 0130 local time. Mr. Acheson, with Messrs. Lyon and Finletter, proceeded directly to Lyon's residence. Ryan, the courier, and I went to the Embassy to put the materials in the vault.

About noon (Monday 22 October) there was an assembly at Mr. Lyon's house of high-ranking officers from the Embassy, from our delegation to the North Atlantic Council, and from among our military men in France. I gave the intelligence briefing using the photographs.

Meeting with President de Gaulle at the Elysée Palace

At 4:40 Laughlin Campbell, [redacted] and I again appeared at Mr. Lyon's residence where two modest automobiles from the Elysée Palace awaited us. Mr. Acheson and Mr. Lyon, with a presidential escort officer, took one; Campbell and I (with the photographs) the other. We entered the Elysée through the regular entrance on the Rue du Faubourg St. Honoré. Once within the first courtyard we followed a tortuous course from court to inner court to inner court and were finally brought up to an unprepossessing doorway under guard.⁸ We proceeded down small

⁷ The memo was dictated on 28 and 29 October 1962 and typed up a couple of weeks later.

⁸ In short, the French neglected nothing in assuring that Mr. Acheson—a recognizable man in almost any corner of the world—would not be recognized by a casual bystander. His meeting with the President had to be kept secret until "A" hour which would have been about midnight in Paris.

Mr. Acheson's well-known powers as a raconteur were stimulated by the route we took; I kept getting playbacks from third parties which became harder and harder to recognize. The penultimate version occurs in C. L. Sulzberger's book, already cited, p. 930. He says he got it from Paul Nitze, who said he got it from Mr. Acheson, and it involved "Acheson [being] smuggled into de Gaulle's office by an underground tunnel from across the street." Apparently so high was the credibility of this unlikely story that ace newsman Sulzberger who had lived in Paris some twenty years and knew the environs of the Elysée as well as those of the White House swallowed that secret tunnel without even a footnote.

If perchance the reader happens to be the studious sort who checks references, he may be disturbed to read Sulzberger's two sentences following the one about the tunnel. They go: "Acheson went in alone except for the Elysée interpreter. Not even Sherman (See footnote on following page.)"

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corridors, up small corridors, up small stairways, through more corridors and stairways until we finally arrived at a large room adjoining the President's private office. My guess is that if this were not the Cabinet Room it served some such purpose. There was a very large oval table which would have seated perhaps 20 people. The four Americans and the escort officer were here joined by another Frenchman who turned out to be an emergency interpreter. After a few minutes' wait—which would have been a minute or so after—Mr. Lyon and Mr. Acheson were ushered into the General's office. Mr. Lyon has reported by cable on what took place. Campbell and I waited for perhaps 20 minutes; then the two of us were invited in. After I had completed the first draft of this memorandum, I saw Mr. Acheson, who told me the following about his discussion with de Gaulle. When he had conveyed his message he told the General that there was an intelligence officer waiting outside to brief him on the evidence. General de Gaulle's response was that he needed no such evidence; he was satisfied with Mr. Acheson's account; after all, President Kennedy obviously would not have sent a man of Mr. Acheson's eminence to give him misinformation. Mr. Acheson said he thought the General would be interested.⁹

The presidential presence was awesome. I was prepared for the height but not for the bulk. At the moment of shock he seemed to be about twice the size of normal men. His eyes too were somewhat unnerving, shielded as they were behind the thick lenses made necessary by the removal of cataracts. I can recall a feeling of

(Footnote 8 continued)

Kent was allowed." May I assert that this is another error (either Nitze's or Sulzberger's—certainly not Mr. Acheson's); that I did go in; and that the memo for the record which you are now reading is not a self-serving fabrication.

The peak occurs in Kenneth Harris' write-up of an interview with Mr. Acheson (*Life*, 23 July 1971, p. 52). The operative passage runs thus:

"So he [General de Gaulle] sent two small French cars, and we drove down into the garage basement of the palace and were led up through the basement past the wine closets. There were all sorts of steel doors with little eyelet holes in them, and people would look through and give a password. I had a very amusing CIA friend along with the photographs. Halfway through this, he said: 'D'Artagnan, is that saber loose in the scabbard?' And I said, 'Aye, Porthos.' And he said: 'Be on the alert. The Cardinal's men may be waiting.' Finally, we were brought up into the cabinet room, where an old friend of ours, whose name was Lebel, greeted us..."

⁹ Elie Abel (*op. cit.*, p. 112) has a slightly different version whose primary source was almost certainly Mr. Acheson. It goes: "Then Acheson offered to show the photographs. De Gaulle swept them aside. 'A great government such as yours does not act without evidence.'"

despair that came with the realization that the evidence which we were about to present was wholly visual evidence. (As it turned out my fears were groundless.)

As Campbell and I entered, he rose from his small desk—not much larger than our photographs—and gravely shook hands. He gave me the nod to begin.

Campbell handed me the large photograph of the map of Cuba which I put before the General. Still standing, he bent over it as I began to talk about the defensive phase. I mentioned first the arrival of large numbers of Soviet personnel, quantities of transportation, communications and electronic equipment. Next I came to the SAM's, pointing out the SAM symbol on the map. To my great comfort he at once identified the symbol and with his own finger pointed to a number of the others. I then showed him the photograph of a SAM site which he seemingly identified at once. I passed on the photograph of Santa Clara airfield, pointing out the MIG-21's. There was a reading glass which he picked up and put into the proper position, looked at the swept-wing aircraft, and indicated that this was a remarkable photograph. I quickly showed him the Komars and the surface-to-surface cruise missiles. The word "cruise" was the only technical term [which the interpreter] did not cope with instantly. He snapped a finger in annoyance and then realized that salvation lay on the graphic itself for this photograph had as an inset a diagram of the little winged missile.

I then [took up] the offensive phase, showed him the IL-28 crates being carried as deck cargo, showed him the San Julian airfield, pointed out the crates, the assembled IL-28 and the two uncrated fuselages. Again he picked up the reading glass and examined the picture carefully. I then went to MR-1 [Medium Range Ballistic Missile site called number one] at San Cristobal and the MR site at Sagua la Grande. Next came the IR [Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile] site at Guanajay. Coming back to the map again I totted up the number of confirmed sites, the number of probables plus the possibles at Remedios. I then went over our estimates of degree of readiness and gave him a worst case estimate as of the moment of speaking and another worst case as of early 1963. I discussed briefly nuclear warheads, the fact that we could not positively identify any but noted the high degree of probability that they were in Cuba and the highly suspicious storage areas being readied. I called his attention to the storage site at Guanajay. I noted our estimate of the yield

of these warheads as two to three megatons for the MR's and three to five for the IR's. I closed with a reminder that as of early 1963 our worst case estimate could augment present Soviet first strike capabilities with missiles by some 50%.

Not once in the course of my briefing was there any hint of incredulity on the part of the General. If he was not perfectly satisfied that the pictures were scenes from Cuba and the weapons those which I asserted them to be, he gave me no inkling of doubt. Furthermore, if he had expressed doubts to Mr. Acheson and Mr. Lyon [after Campbell and I had left the room], I am sure they would have reported it. . . .

Meeting with the North Atlantic Council

During the day [] received the USIB-approved briefing note to be read to the NAC. Mr. Acheson got a copy and had read it. Meanwhile we hopefully awaited the full text of the speech which the President would deliver at midnight local time. The NAC meeting was scheduled for 10 PM. By the time I had to leave the Embassy only Part 1 of 4 had been received.

The Acting Chairman [of the North Atlantic Council] was Colonna of Italy. He introduced Mr. Acheson as needing no introduction to the group, noting that he was on a special mission for the President of the US. . . . Mr. Acheson began by briefly discussing the nature of [his] mission, read some excerpts from the portion of the President's speech that he had at hand and then indicating that he wished to read a statement, introduced me as Assistant Director, CIA, who was there to answer questions when he finished reading his prepared text. He then read the text. There were a few questions on the estimated performance of the MR's and IR's, a general question about their state of readiness, and after the meeting an aide of the German permanent representative followed us to Mr. Finletter's office to ask the estimated yield of the warheads. . . .

As per USIB instruction, I used no graphics whatever with one exception. I passed around an unclassified map. It showed what portions of North, Central, and South America the MR's and IR's could reach. Among the metropolitan areas of the US under the gun were New York, Philadelphia, the District of Columbia, Chicago, San Francisco, etc., and in this distinguished company, one found Oxford, Mississippi. It had been spotted on the map by a roguish CIA man to show Robert Kennedy, who had wondered out loud if Oxford (then

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much on Mr. Kennedy's mind as the place where bitter racial controversy had enveloped the state's university campus) was within range. I never recovered the map and have often wondered how some analyst of one of the NATO intelligence services explained how Oxford, Mississippi came to be listed among the great metropolises. From the council there were no questions about the sources of our information and no questions whatever to indicate any doubt that Mr. Acheson's story was not in fact a true story. The meeting adjourned just in time for the members to hear the President's speech which began at midnight Paris time.

Next day, Tuesday 23 October, under instructions from Headquarters, Campbell and I made the trip to the SDECE (the French secret intelligence service) and briefed the Director, General Jacquier, and a few of his principal officers. Our experience was much like Cooper's with the British JIC. There was great interest and no hint of doubt with respect to the genuineness of the photographs. There were no questions even about the pictures of the IR site and the surface-to-surface cruise missiles, the identification of which required a lot more faith than simple good eyesight.

The Briefing of the French Press

We returned to the Embassy by about 3:30 to find that USIB had authorized the briefing of the French Press, had supplied a briefing text and instructions with respect to the use of the graphics. John Mowinkle, the Public Affairs Officer, under instruction from the chargé called the press conference for 10:30 the next morning, Wednesday, 24 October. Mowinkle himself was not to do the briefing but was to entrust the job to an assistant who had a greater familiarity with military matters than Mowinkle himself. It was further decided, and this was entirely satisfactory with me, that I would make no appearance before the newspaper men but would confine my activities to reading the assistant in on the subject and making sure that the graphics were keyed into his spoken statement in fool-proof manner.

It will be recalled that USIB's instructions re this briefing were as follows: the briefer was to follow a USIB-approved text which was at hand. The briefer was to refer to certain stipulated graphics. The number was perhaps no more than half of the total number . . . in the kit. All place names, locational data, and numbers were to be removed from the graphics. Members of the press could study the graphics but could not reproduce them. Graphics were not to be allowed outside the Embassy building.

In the light of these instructions I personally selected the graphics as indicated, cut off the headings at the top of the prints, removed the little box in each photograph which contained the orientation map of Cuba with its designating arrow, the classification, and where indicated obliterated locational information and numbers.

Two graphics had to be improvised. These were a map of the Western Hemisphere showing approximate ranges of the MR's and IR's (the map I had not recovered from the NAC) and a map of Cuba showing what Cuban air space was under protection of the SAM's.

I went over the briefing notes carefully, patched up a needless obscurity in one paragraph and keyed the graphics to the text.

24 October

With my breakfast arrived a copy of the International edition of the *New York Herald Tribune*. To my very considerable surprise, smack in the middle of the top half of the front page and three or four columns wide, was the photograph of the SAM site referred to in the briefing note. A few minutes later, upon arrival at the Embassy, I was informed that the whole kit of photographs had been released to the British press the night before, that they were appearing in the London papers this morning and indeed had appeared on two British TV programs last night. A few minutes later I was shown two Paris morning papers, one of which carried the SAM site above mentioned, the other, the picture of the SAM support area which I had not been authorized even to show to the French Press.

I conferred with [redacted] as to the best procedure and we agreed that I should call Washington for permission to release reproductions of the graphics which were to be shown to the French Press at 10:30 this morning. There was some difficulty in getting through to Washington and it was not until about 9:50 AM local time that I reached the CIA Watch Office. Ten or fifteen minutes later they called back authorizing the release if satisfactory to the chargé. He agreed to the release of four pictures. An Embassy pressman accordingly scotch-taped the four pictures in question (MR-1, IR-1, the IL-28's at San Julian and the MIG's at Santa Clara) to the floor and photographed them. Enlarged prints of these shots went to the French press.

Briefing of André Fontaine of Le Monde

André Fontaine, one of the important feature writers of *Le Monde* (France's leading afternoon paper)

had had time to hear and study the President's speech of midnight, 22 October, and to write an unsympathetic front page column on US policy toward Cuba.¹⁰ His articles are usually signed; this one was not. The second paragraph banged into the credibility of the evidence. "One would like to be sure of the accuracy of the information" upon which the President has acted. "But unhappily, experience shows that the American intelligence services sometimes make mistakes." This set the tone. Later on he again obliquely challenged the evidence in the fourth paragraph which contains the sentence, "If the Russians have not really delivered and do not have the intention of delivering..." In short, M. Fontaine was from Missouri and had rather persuasively set forth his doubts about the evidence and his views—totally unsympathetic to the US—for the edification of France's best educated and probably most conservative reading elite.

Mowinkle who knew Fontaine well was most anxious that I see [him] and go over the script and graphics with him. The [chargé] agreed. I was presented to Fontaine under a pseudo as a Department of Defense civilian temporarily in Paris. Accordingly I gave him the word.

I began by calling his attention to the fact that neither he nor I were expert enough in the PI's art to identify the terrain as Cuban or some of the weapons and sites as to what they really were. I told him that if he thought that I was about to embark upon a snow job with fabricated graphics I was prepared to call it off right there; that if he were willing to take on faith the fact this countryside was Cuban and the weapons in fact were what I said they were, we would proceed. Interestingly, he then said, "No. I am prepared to believe you because Castro himself in a speech of yesterday proclaimed that American aircraft had been violating Cuban air space. This is good enough evidence for me to believe that you have been overflying Cuba and photographing it from the air." With these formalities over, I ran through the exercise with the sanitized pictures. Almost the only question he asked was the altitude from which the pictures were taken. He presumed that this was secret. I indicated that it was indeed secret and let it go at that. I left Paris before *Le Monde*, dated 26 October, was printed.

¹⁰ This appeared in *Le Monde* of Tuesday afternoon 23 October. For reasons best known to the publisher, the paper is dated one day ahead, thus this issue of *Le Monde* is one bearing the date 24 October 1962.

In this issue M. Fontaine grudgingly acknowledged that the missiles were in fact in Cuba, citing that both the British government and his colleagues of the British press believed the photographs and furthermore Castro himself had lent credence to the matter by denouncing American photo reconnaissance flights as violations of Cuban air space.

William Tidwell in Ottawa

Livingston Merchant, President Kennedy's special emissary to the Canadian government, William Tidwell, the Agency officer told off to do the intelligence briefing (with the photographs), along with our chargé d'affaires, and [redacted] met at 1700 (22 October) with Prime Minister Diefenbaker and his Secretaries for External Affairs and Defense, Messrs. Green and Harkness. Mr. Merchant described the situation in Cuba and handed the Prime Minister the text of the President's speech (to be delivered in two hours). Mr. Diefenbaker read it rapidly and passed it to these two cabinet colleagues. He then asked Mr. Merchant to summarize the main points, which Mr. Merchant did, and then he read the whole speech aloud. Apparently two matters bothered the Prime Minister. One was the use of two words "dishonest" and "dishonorable" which in the draft speech were applied to Gromyko's statements to the President when the two had met on 18 October; the other was the credibility of the evidence of the missiles in Cuba. He made an abbreviated note to remind himself of the two points which read "1. *Dishonest and dishonorable*/withdrawal of/Ambassador" [and] "2. How to present proof of/threat to/UN or OAS."¹¹

The first of these he straightway took up and with repetitions and some vehemence. They were unnecessary and provocative words; they might result, for example, in the Soviet Union's withdrawal of its ambassador in the United States, he thought. He hoped that they would not be used. The second he seems not to have got around to. Most likely the reason was his viewing of the photographs which

¹¹ Mr. Tidwell wrote a memo to the Curator, Historical Intelligence Collection which reads in part:

2. During the briefing session Mr. Diefenbaker made several notes as reminders to himself. At the conclusion of the briefing he tore up the notes and threw them on the floor. In the course of my security check of the room after the briefing, I picked up the fragments of his notes. They are forwarded with this memorandum for retention in the Historical Intelligence Collection.

The notes read as I have rendered them above.

25X1

Tidwell presented.¹² The three Canadians were clearly impressed and asked a range of questions which, far from indicating incredulity, were of the sort which showed a ready acceptance of the evidence. Indeed it seemed to the Americans that the photographs themselves may have had much to do with a lightening of the Prime Minister's mood, which at the beginning had been that of a worried and harassed man. At the end, he left Mr. Merchant with the impression that he would support the President and he complimented Tidwell on the quality of the intelligence briefing.

Tidwell stayed behind to give the briefing to half a dozen of the next most important officers of the Canadian government involved in the foreign affairs of the country. Like similar groups in other friendly states, they believed what they saw and they were impressed.

¹² It may be, as Mr. Tidwell himself suggests in the memo, that Mr. Diefenbaker's self-addressed query about "how to present proof of the threat to the UN or OAS" derived from his half-formulated thought to ask a group from among the eight unaligned members of the 18-nation disarmament committee to make an on-site inspection and to furnish "a full and complete understanding of what is taking place in Cuba." This thought, which he quite fully developed only a few minutes later to the Canadian House of Commons, he had not even hinted to the Americans. They noted that he had not said that he would support the President in the chosen course, but they were very considerably surprised at his presentation to the Commons.

It is perhaps noteworthy that his remarks to the Commons contained no mention of any special audience, UN, OAS, or other. Nor did his remarks to the Commons next day, when he did a little reconsidering:

In connection with the suggestion I made last evening that a group of nations might be given the opportunity of making an on-site inspection in Cuba, lest there be any doubt about my meaning in that connection, I was not, of course, casting any doubts on the facts of the situation as outlined by the President of the United States in his television address. The government had been informed of and it believes that there is ample evidence weapons have been constructed in Cuba and exist in sufficient quantities to threaten the security of this hemisphere.

The purpose I had in mind in suggesting a United Nations [his remarks of the previous day made no specific mention of the UN. The 18-nation disarmament committee did, however, have an association with the UN] on-site inspection was to be ready to put in motion steps which could be taken in the United Nations general assembly in the event of a Soviet veto, or if the Soviet Union denies the existence in Cuba of offensive ballistic missile bases. (Canada, Parliament, *House of Commons Debates*, 22 and 23 October 1962, pp. 805-6 and 821.)

In the light of these utterances, it seems to me that Diefenbaker's note about convincing the UN and OAS more likely derived from a certain incredulosity which possessed him before a look at the photographs dissipated it.

The Credibility of Photographic Evidence

As a source of information, overhead photography has always won high marks. From the nineteenth century, when daring men took cameras aloft in balloons, to our day with its more sophisticated approach, all who have worked at the intelligence calling or used its findings have recognized the extraordinary virtues of photographs taken from the air. The reception of the U-2's pictures of Cuba in 1962 was proof of more of the same.

Any viewer of an air photo is likely to bring with him some associative apparatus. For example, he has seen airfields from above and he can tell the difference between a picture of an airfield and one of a freight yard; he may even be able to tell a parked transport airplane from a puddle jumper. Some of the non-PI viewers of the Cuban pictures had had a fairly rich experience with, say, air photos of Soviet installations in East Germany and when they saw small aircraft known to be Soviet models on Santa Clara airfield in Cuba, they could tell the difference between the MIG-17's and the delta-wing MIG-21's. When they saw a bit of the Cuban landscape marked off in the design of a perfect six-pointed star, they instantly recognized the unmistakable signature of the Soviet SAM—the second-generation surface-to-air missile. All viewers, however, took on faith or on the say-so of the purveyors that the pictures were what they claimed to be: scenes from Cuba taken a few days past.

When it came to photos of less obvious things than the aircraft and the SAM's all viewers but those indispensable middlemen, the photo-interpreters, had to take virtually everything on faith. In the big glossy prints of the surface-to-surface missile sites, the privileged but nonetheless amateur viewer could discern a number of man-made objects—some looked like long cylindrical tanks, some like oil trucks. He could also see bits of equipment parked in or about what "appeared to be no more than the clearing of a field for a farm or the basement of a house."¹³ More than this even the witness who could tell one MIG from another could not possibly tell.

Of course, the PI could and did. To begin with, what he looked at were better pictures. He had the duplicate positives printed on clear acetate that carried what the camera lens had seen, minimally degraded by the processing. More, he could arrange these prints in stereoscopic pairs on a light table and study them in three dimensions through a multi-power stereoscopic viewer. When he found something whose exact dimensions he had to know, he could turn to sensitive and

¹³ Quoted in exactly this context from Robert Kennedy, *Thirteen Days*, p. 24.

complicated measuring devices and get the answer in feet and fractions of feet.

Much more important than all of these was his experience. At a glance he would know that some of the objects resembling commonplace things of everyday life just could not be what they seemed. Such objects would never occur in these numbers and in this particular constellation of physical surroundings. They had to be something else. He might remember a similar puzzle in other photographs of another time and place and the way it had been cracked. He might recall the process by which he had reduced several competing hypotheses to two and how the final solution had come, not with more photography, but with a wholly different sort of information. With this, he had made a confident estimate that the object in question was a large surface-to-surface missile with its carrier. If such an experience had not been his, perhaps one of his colleagues had a recollection that would help. And if not, he could begin from scratch, summoning from the vitals of a computer the vast wealth of its electronic memory. If in the course of the history of his organization's work it had met cognate puzzles, everything about them could be speedily put on the table.

With the deployment of the critical tools, the PI's moved from hypothesis to tentative estimate, and, as they became more confident that what they thought they might be seeing was indeed an all-but-dead certainty, they were ready to take their judgment to their chief, Arthur Lundahl. When they convinced him and he convinced himself, and when he could answer President Kennedy's question "Are you sure that these are offensive missile sites?" with "Mr. President, I am as sure of this as a photointerpreter can be sure of anything . . .," and when the President, reminded of the accuracy of past interpretations, accepted this one, that was it.

By their actions Mr. Macmillan and General de Gaulle underscored this fact. As Cooper noted, Macmillan "did not spend more than a few seconds on the photographs;" and except as Mr. Acheson urged him to have a look, General de Gaulle would not have given the photographs even the "few seconds." Their credibility was not at issue: what was was that of Ambassador Bruce and Mr. Acheson and especially that of the man who had sent them, President Kennedy himself. Obviously this elite audience did not think that the President was playing games with them.

From what we know of the reaction of civil officials a notch or two below the chiefs of government, they were much the same as those of their masters. For much the same reasons Ormsby Gore (the British Ambassador in Washington), Lord Home, and Sir Burke Trend,

Gaitskell, and Brown, and others in London, and Messrs. Green and Harkness in Ottawa accepted the photographs at face. We know nothing of the reactions of the officials in Paris and Bonn to whom de Gaulle and Adenauer confided.

With highly placed foreign intelligence professionals the case was much the same. They brought to the pictures a certain amount of critical expertise (but still well below that of a card-carrying PI), and practically to a man they were both amazed and convinced. Sir Kenneth Strong, long Britain's first intelligence officer, General Jacquier, Director of the French SDECE, Mr. McCardle, the Chairman of the Canadian Joint Intelligence Committee—none of them queried the validity of what they looked at. As Cooper notes in his memo, intelligence officers of the British Air Ministry apparently wanted copies of the photos for their own PI's to examine. But, Cooper assures us, there was nothing necessarily angular about their request.

How different the response of those who spoke for others. Mr. Zuluetta, the private secretary of Mr. Macmillan, according to Cooper's testimony, was worried about how a statement of the British government in support of the American decision would go down "without incontrovertible proof of the missile build-up." Next morning the skeptical tone of the British press showed him to have been on the right track. After the release of the first batch of pictures to British newsmen, an important British intelligence officer besought American officials in London to release more pictures and more information about the first ones. He said he was confronted by a great skepticism on the part of the press which was muttering about possible forgeries and expressing doubt that the terrain was in fact Cuba. He felt that the US government should release precise information about the location of the missiles and show a photo of a missile even if it were under canvas. All of this to make the case credible.

The Public Affairs officer in our embassy in Paris was worried about the French press and had very much in mind those snide sentences that André Fontaine had written in *Le Monde*. Mr. Diefenbaker seemed to have been concerned about how proof of the missiles could be demonstrated to the "world."¹⁴

How much beseeching the press did in its own behalf and how much in behalf of the "world," is another story. The press usually beseeches

¹⁴The operative sentence in Mr. Diefenbaker's remarks of 22 October was: "As to the presence of these offensive weapons, the only sure way that the world can secure the facts would be through an independent inspection." (Canada, Parliament, *House of Commons Debates*, p. 806.)

most eloquently when it senses good front-page copy, and there could be no doubt about the news appeal of this story.

The difference between what public relations men asked in behalf of the press and what the press asked in behalf of its readership—the difference between this and what it got, let alone what it gave—is of course well-nigh incalculable. In the first place, the very best prints of the most important installations in Cuba (those which chronicled the presence of the long-range surface-to-surface missiles) conveyed next to nothing in themselves. If you were to use a powerful reading glass you might be sure that you perceived some things common to your range of normal experience (the context might offer some passing difficulty, but only if you thought about it), but you would have no valid appreciation of their size, let alone their ominous function. Who, for example among the uninitiated, could have identified a thing resembling a big tent as the air-conditioned structure necessary for the complicated check-out of the missiles?

Such being the case, what do you think of the chances of the British subject who first got his information from his television set, a reproductive process which had robbed the original glossy prints of at least half their definition? Where do you rate the chances of the still less fortunate Frenchman? He was introduced to the Soviet secrets in Cuba via some half-tones in his morning paper. If you had made a half-tone from the original negative, the loss of definition would probably be as severe as that via TV. Still the Frenchman had no such luck. His was the opportunity to look at half-tones made from enlargements of 35 mm shots of the glossy prints. The amateur photographer who took the shots probably used a good camera with proper lens and film, but he took them in the natural light that filtered through an embassy window, and he did not use a tripod. In these circumstances the man who saw the pictures in next morning's *Figaro*, even if he were the country's leading photointerpreter, might have had trouble telling whether the camera had been pointed down at Cuba from a high-flying aircraft or pointed up a soundly-positioned proctoscope.

No one can ever know how many of the people whose acquaintance with the Cuban pictures was limited to television and press reproductions felt that they were being had. The one thing we do know is that if there were any such people, there were not enough of them to cause the slightest political ripple. All over the world the great majority of people who knew and cared about such things must have looked at the appallingly deficient copies of the original pictures and concluded that their chiefs of government had acted on the basis of incontrovert-

ible evidence. Those who disagreed with the course of action which the US had adopted, did so because of the risks which it involved, not because they did not believe the story that the pictures told.

Of the millions of people of many nations who saw the pictures that fourth week of October, only a handful, and these were PI's, knew exactly what it was that they were looking at. It was their testimony which convinced the high officers of their government, and from there on out the credibility of the photo evidence was established. What happened in October of 1962 had happened many times before and has happened many times since. To paraphrase once again a famous remark—never have so many taken so much on the say-so of so few.