Thirteen Days; a Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis Study Guide

Thirteen Days; a Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis by Robert F. Kennedy

Contents

Plot Summary

Thirteen Days by Robert F. Kennedy shows how individual prudence, considerable luck, and immense fortitude exhibited by fourteen eminent Americans and a Soviet Premier display spare the world nuclear obliteration when the super powers come nose-to-nose over Cuba in October 1962.

Thirteen Days is participant Robert F. Kennedy's memoir of the Cuban missile crisis that occurs from October 16 to October 28,1962. This even tis precipitated when Soviet offensive weapons are found in Cuba, contrary to public and private promises by Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev. President John F. Kennedy or JFK constitutes an Executive Committee of the National Security Council or "Ex Comm," whose members talk, argue, and fight their way to giving him recommendations to act on. One faction led by Defense Secretary McNamara favors quarantine and blockade options, while others advocate air strike and invasion. Everyone present agrees that time is running out. JFK decides on blockade, requests, and receives support from the Organization of American States or OAS and European allies. He then puts forces on maximum alert, briefs his Cabinet and leaders of Congress, and announces on television his reasons for quarantine and whatever additional military action might be needed.

JFK asks Khrushchev to observe the quarantine and control the situation, lest miscalculation or misjudgment cause a third World War. RFK visits the Russian Embassy personally to review how they have reached this point. As the quarantine goes into effect and Soviet ships steam forward, JFK is grim. It looks as though the first exchange will be with a Soviet submarine, until the ships stop dead in the water or turn back. At the U.N. Security Council Adelai Stevenson confronts V. A. Zorin with photographic evidence and has a "devastating effect." To give Khrushchev more time and not put him in an inescapable corner, JFK allows the tanker Bucharest to go on to Cuba, but intensifies photographic overflights. These show rapid construction.

JFK and Khrushchev correspond almost daily but it seems to have little effect until the Premier writes a long and emotional plea that they not succumb to "petty passions" or "transient things." Khrushchev has been in two wars and knows where it leads. Soviet missiles will not be used offensively and since Soviet ships do not carry no weapons. If JFK promises not to attack Cuba and lifts the blockade, the missiles can be removed or destroyed. A second, belligerent letter then arrives from the Kremlin. This plus the shooting down of a U-2 intensifies the situation, but JFK has Sorenson and RFK compose a response accepting Khrushchev's original "offer" and ignoring the second. RFK summons Dobrynin, reveals what the U.S. knows about activities in Cuba, and insists the U.S. needs a positive answer to the letter en route to Moscow. JFK wants peaceful relations and to move forward on controlling nuclear weapons -after the crisis is behind them.

Military confrontation seems likely when word comes the Soviets have agreed to withdraw their missiles. The final lesson of the Cuban missile crisis is the importance of putting oneself in another's shoes. Participants are forbidden to give interviews or claim

victory. JFK respects Khrushchev for doing his job and for looking out for the interests of mankind. It is a triumph for the next generation rather than for any particular government or people. Neustadt and Allison's Afterword analyses RFK's memoir on three levels. The questions that they bring to light include how humans control the power to destroy humankind, how the American presidency works in microcosm, andhow the roles of Congress and the Presidency relate in time of war.

Thirteen Days, to Page 34

Thirteen Days, to Page 34 Summary and Analysis

Shortly after 9 AM on Tuesday 16 October 1962, President John F. Kennedy, also known as JFK, summons the author, his brother and Attorney General, Robert F. Kennedy, also known as RFK, to the White House to tell him a U-2 spy plane has found proof of Russian missiles and atomic weapons in Cuba. The world stands on the brink of nuclear annihilation from then until Sunday, 28 Oct. At 11:45 AM, the Central Intelligence Agency or CIA briefs high officials in the Cabinet Room. Their charts and photographs are nearly unintelligible, but stunning and surprising.

Weeks earlier, RFK raises concerns about military equipment going to Cuba with Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin, who passes along Chairman Nikita S. Khrushchev's promise of no trouble preceding U.S. elections. RFK warns that the U.S. is watching and missiles in Cuba will bring the gravest consequences. RFK reports the conversation to JFK, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, voices personal skepticism, and advises a clear public statement that the U.S. will not tolerate offensive weapons in Cuba.

A week after the 4 Sep. warning, Moscow publicly denies any need for nuclear missiles outside the USSR and Khrushchev sends personal promises, so when the U-2 uncovers the "gigantic fabric of lies," U.S. officials are shocked at being deceived and fooled. Four times in 1962, National Estimates by the Intelligence Community conclude that the USSR will not use break precedent by using Cuba as a strategic base and risk retaliation. After the crisis, officials hear that agents on the ground in Cuba see missiles at this time, but their reports are too insubstantial to pass along or act on. It only matters that the missiles are uncovered and made public before they become operative and in time for the U.S. to act.

For the next twelve days and for six weeks thereafter, the so-call "Ex Comm" or Executive Committee of the National Security Council meets to talk, argue, fight, and ultimately present recommendations to JFK to act on. They are intelligent, industrious, courageous, and dedicated, but not a single member present is consistent in his opinion from start to finish. Unfettered minds are essential and the pressure is intense. Almost all agree in the beginning that some action is required. A few do not see any change in the balance of power. JFK intends to attend only some meetings to keep from inhibiting discussions and to detract media attention. That afternoon and evening, Ex Comm discusses quarantine and blockade options, with McNamara being a strong advocate for this, calling the effort flexible, dramatic, forceful, and controllable. Later he shows that "surgical air strikes" on missile bases alone are impractical, necessitating an invasion. Advocates of military strike say blockade does not remove existing missiles and focuses the confrontation on Soviet ships rather than Cuba and Castro. They argue that the USSR will retaliate in Berlin and demand reciprocity in removing missiles. Ex Comm agrees only that time is running out.

U-2 photographs taken 17 October show 16-32 1,000-mile missiles that will be operational in a week. Having half the power of the total Soviet arsenal, they can kill 80 million Americans in minutes. The JCS unanimously calls for immediate military action. Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Curtis LeMay argues vigorously that the Soviets will not respond. JFK is skeptical, saying they will certainly move at least on Berlin. After the meeting, McNamara disagrees with the JCS but tells the President men and materiel can be deployed by 23 Oct. Initial plans call for flying 500 sorties against military targets of all varieties. Former Secretary of State Dean Acheson, whose lucid, convincing arguments RFK admires, favors air strikes and invasion, declaring the President has the responsibility and obligation to provide security for the U.S. and the free world. With trepidation, RFK argues America's traditions will not allow an attack on a small nation; it will undermine U.S. moral position at home and around the world. During the first five days, the moral question predominates.

JFK keeps his appointment with Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko late afternoon Wednesday, hearing him out about Cuba and the USSR wanting "peaceful coexistence" and how the Russians are only assisting Cuban agriculture and providing a few defensive arms - but no offensive weapons. The U.S. should stop threatening Cuba. Astonished but admiring such boldness, JFK says firmly that the USSR is fomenting discord and making it harder for him to maintain in public that no action is required against Cuba. The President refers to the meetings between Dobrynin and RFK and reads aloud his September 4th statement about consequences. Gromyko assures him the U.S. need not be concerned. Kennedy is displeased.

By Thursday night, a majority in Ex-Comm favors blockade. Nine members crowd into RFK's car to slip surreptitiously into the White House at 9:15 PM. As JFK asks probing questions, minds change and they are sent back to continue their deliberations. JFK returns to the campaign trail to deflect suspicion. Strain shows during the morning session. Each gives his opinion, knowing the future of mankind hangs in the balance. There is no obvious or simple solution. They separate into groups to formulate comprehensive recommendations, then exchange and criticize these papers, and finally return to groups for final drafting. The blockade group wants the Organization of American States or OAS and U.N. involved and defines procedures for stopping ships and using other military force. The action group outlines targets, defends actions in the OAS and U.N., and communicates to Khrushchev the inadvisability of moving against the U.S. anywhere. All speak as equals, uninhibited and unrestricted, which is rare in the rank-conscious Executive Branch.

Ex Comm meets day and night Friday and RFK talks to the President several times about broadcasting a message Sunday night. JFK cancels Chicago appointments and returns to hear the reports Saturday. U.S. armed forces around the world are put on alert. They convene in the Oval Office at 2:30 as the National Security Council, including people who have not been part of deliberations. McNamara argues for blockade and others for military attack. As is typical in such situations, questionable truisms are accepted (like the validity of preemptive use of nuclear weapons). The President decides on blockade. Erosion of the U.S. moral position in the world is the strongest argument against a surprise military attack.

Adelai Stevenson suggests withdrawing missiles from Turkey and Italy and giving up the Guantánamo Bay base as a good faith gesture. JFK has long felt the obsolete Jupiter missiles should go, but Guantánamo Bay cannot be abandoned under threat. RFK disagrees with Stevenson's recommendation but feels it is courageous, sensical, and adds to the discussion. A detailed hour-to-hour schedule is prepared for informing allies, meeting with the OAS, briefing ambassadors, and releasing legal justification. As more officials are involved, word of an imminent crisis reaches the press, but JFK intervenes with several newspapers to concentrate stories on a major presidential speech.

The diplomatic effort is significant. The OAS unanimously supports quarantine. French President Charles de Gaulle says it is what he would do. Britain and West Germany are supportive. Canada worries about convincing the rest of the world. Simultaneously, missile crews go on maximum alert, troops are moved to the Southeast, Guantánamo is strengthened, the Navy deploys 180 ships to the Caribbean, the Strategic Air Command (SAC) is dispersed to lessen vulnerability, and nuclear-armed B-52 go airborne. An hour before JFK's speech, Rusk briefs - and shakes up - Dobrynin.

Monday afternoon, JFK formally constitutes the advisory group with himself as chairman, briefs his Cabinet and then leaders of Congress. Many members, including key senators Richard B. Russell, who is a Democrat from GA and J. William Fulbright (D-AR), think blockade is too weak a response but agree to maintain public silence. The president promises to take every step necessary to protect U.S. security and assures them U.S. forces are on alert, but millions of Americans could die in a Soviet retaliation. JFK leaves upset but later sees the congressmen are merely doing their job. Going on national television at 7 PM, JFK explains the situation and the reasons for quarantine. He emphasizes that blockade is an initial step and has ordered the Pentagon to prepare for any necessary military action. JFK goes to bed with trepidation, pride, strength, purposefulness, and courage, knowing the country is unified behind him.

The opening section portrays top U.S. officials scrambling to react to evidence of Soviet activities that threaten much of the United States with extinction. Advisors debate the pros and cons of blockade and invasion and President Kennedy decides on the former, while authorizing preparations for the latter. The Soviets are caught in duplicity so bold it almost has to be admired. Author RFK shows his brother as a profile in courage, akin to the title of JFK's famous book.

Thirteen Days, pgs. 35-61

Thirteen Days, pgs. 35-61 Summary and Analysis

At Tuesday's OAS meeting, the U.S. fears it will be hard to get the two-thirds needed to go along with quarantine, but Latin America rallies to give unanimous support and several countries contribute men and materiel. Ex Comm meets with JFK in the morning, in a relaxed mood, having survived the first step, but this mood soon vanishes, as John McCloy, an advisor on European affairs, reports that Soviet forces have not gone on alert and in Cuba, no non-Russian has entered the missile bases. JFK orders preparations to deal with a blockade of Berlin, retaliation for any verified U-2 downings, and anything necessary should the Russians opt to use force.

Meeting at 6 PM and learning of OAS support, JFK prepares to announce that quarantine goes into effect at 10 AM. Russian ships on course to Cuba receive an extraordinary number of coded messages. JFK writes Khrushchev asking him prudently to observe the OAS quarantine and keep the situation under control. To avoid a major military confrontation, the Navy is to disable vessels' rudders and propellers and hopefully not sink them. JFK anticipates violence and casualties if vessels must be boarded. Vessels obviously carrying military equipment must be intercepted, but merchant ships might carry only baby food. When McCone reports Soviet submarines are entering the Caribbean, JFK puts tracking them as the Navy's top priority.

After the meeting, JFK, RFK, Sorenson, and O'Donnell discuss the risk of miscalculation or judgment, as in the two world wars. They agree that both sides do not want war over Cuba, but security, pride, or "face" could force a response and counter response that escalates to armed conflict. JFK cannot afford for anyone to be able to say that the U.S. had not done all it could to preserve peace, so it will not push the Soviets into unintended or unanticipated action. Later, alone with his brother, RFK suggests a personal visit to Dobrynin.

RFK goes at 9:30 PM to the Russian Embassy and reviews the events that have led to confrontation, particularly Dobrynin's Sep. promises. JFK has been less belligerent than other politicians and assured Americans military action against Cuba is unnecessary. Now he knows he is deceived and the world is at risk. Dobrynin denies knowledge of missiles in Cuba, and wonders why JFK has not laid out the facts to Gromyko. RFK counters: why has Gromyko not said what he knows. Dobrynin is concerned as RFK leaves at 10:15, admitting the latest orders call for the ships to continue to Cuba. RFK finds JFK meeting with British Ambassador David Ormsby-Gore, an old and trusted friend, and relays the conversation. JFK considers and rejects an immediate summit with Khrushchev and tells Ormsby-Gore the line of interception 800 miles out is needed to keep ships out of range of MIG fighters.

Wednesday, as the quarantine goes into effect and Soviet ships steam forward, JFK is grim. Had he not acted, he knows he would be impeached. This morning and the

following Saturday are the most difficult and tense. As the Soviets reach 500 miles, it becomes now or never - the moment they hope never to reach. Reconnaissance shows work proceeding rapidly on launch pads nearly ready for war. Shortly after 10 AM, McNamara reports the Gagarin and Komiles will be stopped and boarded within the hour, but a Soviet submarine is positioned between them. The aircraft carrier Essex is dispatched to signal the submarine to surface or be depth charged. In his moment of gravest concern and doubt, JFK stares at his brother. RFK recalls times of family distress, hearing voices drone, but paying no attention until JFK asks if there is not some way to avoid having the first exchange be with a submarine. McNamara says the risk to U.S. warships is too grave. JFK orders preparations finalized for dealing with a blockade of Berlin. JFK has initiated a course in the Atlantic that cannot be controlled. They can only wait, tensely.

At 10:25, McCone receives a note saying the Soviet ships appear to be dead in the water. Confirmation comes at 10:32 that six ships have stopped or turned back. Shortly afterwards, and official report shows 20 ships no longer advancing. JFK is relieved and orders the Navy to interfere in no way with the Soviet retreat. The meeting drones on with details, but everyone looks different, realizing the world is still going around.

The danger is not over, for tankers continue forward. The Bucharest has identified itself as a tanker and been allowed to pass, but some Ex Comm members feel she should be boarded to demonstrate American will. Others object that letting her pass gives Khrushchev time to consider his next move. JFK recognizes that a tanker will have to be boarded eventually to check for contraband. The world grows alarmed and many offer official and unofficial advice and opinions. Bertrand Russell congratulates Soviet conciliation and castigates U.S. belligerence. Acting U.N. Secretary General U Thant suggests lifting the quarantine in exchange for a Soviet promise not to send missiles to Cuba, to which Khrushchev agrees and suggests a summit meeting. JFK insists offensive weapons first be removed.

Stevenson at the U.N. Security Council confronts Soviet Ambassador V. A. Zorin on television. Because international newspapers are skeptical, the USIA releases aerial photos. Stevenson reminds Zorin of previous denials and asks for confirmation - without a translation - yes or no. When Zorin refuses to be bullied, Stevenson says Zorin is in "the courtroom of world opinion," says he will wait for hell to freeze over to receive Zorin's answer - and then presents "incontrovertible" photographic evidence, with "devastating effect."

To give Khrushchev more time and not put him in an inescapable corner, JFK allows the Bucharest to go on to Cuba, but intensifies photographic over flights and has Soviet submarines harassed by an impressive U.S. naval force. Thursday night's photographs show rapid construction and Friday night's reveal uncrated and assembled IL-28 bombers. An East German passenger ship carrying 1,500 is let through, rather than risk so many lives.

JFK and Khrushchev correspond almost daily, beginning with a long letter on 22 Oct., in which JFK confesses concern that the Soviets may misunderstand U.S. determination;

JFK assumes no sane man would deliberately plunge the world into a catastrophic war that cannot be won. Khrushchev accuses JFK of threatening him and insists the U.S. is practicing "banditry" and "degenerate imperialism." Soviet ships will defend their rights. On 25 Oct., JFK points out that the USSR has broken all public and private assurances, and suggests Khrushchev reread his Tass statement from Sep. JFK charges Khrushchev with issuing the first challenge and maintains he is merely responded as promised. JFK regrets this deterioration in relations, which the USSR can restore just by taking necessary action.

The correspondence seems to have little effect, as construction speeds up. At 7 AM, Friday, 26 Oct., U.S. destroyers board the Marucla, Panamanian-owned, Lebanese-registered, U.S.-built, and Soviet-chartered. JFK wants to show resolve without directly affronting the Soviets. There are no incidents and no contraband is found. Because of the escalating construction pace in Cuba, JFK orders more low-level over flights and adds petroleum products to the embargo list. Privately, JFK does not see these efforts helping. It seems that this cup will not pass without a direct military confrontation. Both "hawks" and "doves" are criticizing U.S. policy. RFK includes a clear and dramatic reference to Jesus Christ's prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane before the crucifixion to show the futility that participants feel.

The second section raises the drama and tension effectively. Rallying the OAS is made much of in the Afterword section as giving legitimacy to the blockade. RFK is silent about whether the Soviet ships could go dead in the water. He expresses relief and looks to the remaining danger points. The confrontation between Stevenson and Zorin, quoted verbatim, is a classic moment in modern history.

Thirteen Days, pgs. 63-88

Thirteen Days, pgs. 63-88 Summary and Analysis

Friday morning, JFK orders the State Department to prepare for establishing civil government, should Cuba have to be invaded and occupied. McNamara predicts very heavy casualties. JFK warns Ex Comm that the missiles could fire before invading forces reach them. McCone warns how well equipped the enemy is and conditions are as adverse as in Korea. JFK follows up on details as they await Khrushchev's answer. It comes at 6 PM. Much has been written about it, including allegations that the author is incoherent. It is long and emotional, pleading that they not succumb to "petty passions" or "transient things." Khrushchev has been in two wars and knows where it leads. Soviet missiles will not be used offensively; only lunatics or suicides could do what the Americans charge. The USSR wants to peaceful competition. Soviet ships carry no weapons, for all weapons are already in Cuba (Khrushchev's first admission). JFK has courageously admitted the Bay of Pigs is a mistake. If he promises not to attack Cuba and lifts the blockade, then the missiles can be removed or destroyed. Armaments only bring disaster. Piratical interference with Soviet ships will only tighten the knot leading to thermonuclear war, while relaxing forces could allow it to be untied peacefully. The Soviets are ready for this.

Khrushchev's letter is studied repeatedly and analyzed by the State Department. RJF is slightly optimistic driving home that night. For all its rhetoric, the letter suggests accommodation and agreement. An important official in the Soviet Embassy approaches ABC Reporter John Scali to pass to the U.S. government immediately a suggestion of a reciprocal stand down supervised by the U.N. Such unorthodox communications are common in the USSR. JFK too feels hopeful.

On Saturday morning, 27 Oct., RFK receives a disquieting memorandum from FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover about rumors Soviet personnel in New York are preparing to destroy sensitive documents in anticipation of U.S. military actions against Cuba or Soviet ships. This suggests the Khrushchev letter might not be sincere. At the Ex Comm meeting, JFK reveals a different, formal letter obviously from the Kremlin's Foreign Office, demanding removal of missiles from Turkey. In return for this and a pledge not to interfere with Cuba, the USSR promises not to interfere with Turkey. McNamara reports evidence of intensified work at the missile sites and on the IL-28s. The most difficult 24-hour period in the crisis begins.

The Soviet proposal is reasonable and in line with JFK's efforts that year to remove the Jupiter missiles that have been rendered obsolete by Polaris submarines in the Mediterranean. Twice the State Department lets the question drop when the Turks object. JFK is angry that his presidential wishes are disregarded and peace held hostage by these weapons, but cannot lose face by withdrawing them under Soviet threat. The new letter suggests confusion at the top in the USSR. An attack on Cuba

could result in a counterattack on Turkey, which would involve NATO and bring on a nuclear exchange. Still, the JCS insists on an air strike and invasion on Monday.

A new crisis occurs when U-2 pilot Maj. Rudolf Anderson Jr. is shot down by a SAM over Cuba and dies. JFK declares it a "new ball game," but in the face of calls for destroying the SAM sites, cautions that they must look many moves ahead in this hazardous course. He needs absolute verification that it is not an accidental crash and orders nuclear missiles defused so he must give personal permission before they can be used. Turkey and NATO might have little time to decide on their response, should the USSR reciprocate on them over Cuba. The implications of every step must be understood and every response anticipated.

Participants in the Cabinet Room discussions can never forget the power and responsibility of the U.S. and its President deciding the fate of people around the globe who know nothing of them or their deliberations. JFK decides not to attack, but to try again. The State Department drafts a response to the second letter, stating the U.S. cannot remove its missiles from Turkey or trade. RFK dislikes the content and tenor of the letter and, backed by Sorenson and others, suggests they respond only to the first letter and offer made through Scali. Disagreements are sharp. Everyone is tense, exhausted, and worried. JFK is the calmest, but exasperated. He sends Sorenson and RFK to compose an alternative response, which he can compare with State's. They work for 45 minutes in the President's office. JFK refines it, has it typed, and signs it. It accepts Khrushchev's original "offer."

JFK declares the Chairman's 26 Oct. letter a welcome solution. Once work stops on all missile bases in Cuba and the offensive weapons are rendered inoperable under U.N. arrangements, he will authorize representatives to work with U Thant and Soviet representatives on a permanent solution to the Cuban problem along the lines of Khrushchev's letter: the USSR will remove weapon system under U.N. supervision and not introduce such systems again; and the U.S. will promptly end the quarantine and promise not to invade Cuba. JFK is certain Western Hemisphere nations will do likewise. If Khrushchev instructs his representative likewise, an agreement can be announced to the world within days, easing tensions, and allowing the two powers to work toward reducing other armaments as Khrushchev has suggested in his public letter. The U.S. wants to halt the arms race. Both should work with their allies to cooperate in détente. The first ingredient, however, is to cease work on sites in Cuba and disarm the weapons. The threat should not be prolonged or the solution linked to broader questions of security. The risk to the world is too great.

As the letter is prepared for transmission, the Kennedy brothers discuss Maj. Anderson, noting its is always the brave and best who die while politicians and officials pontificate about principles and issues, make decisions, and dine with families. War is rarely intentional; usually it starts by miscalculation. The Russians want war no more than Americans, but if events continue as they have been going, mankind may be engulfed and destroyed. JFK wants to be sure he has done everything possible to avert such catastrophe. The Russians must have every opportunity not to diminish their national security or be humiliated. He worries most about the young people of the world who

have no say in having their lives snuffed out. His generation has had its chance to shape their destinies through election or revolution and has tragically erred. JFK and Rusk decide that RFK should visit Dobrynin to express the President's pain and concern.

RFK phones Dobrynin at 7:15 PM and asks him to come to the Department of Justice. RFK first reveals that he knows work is accelerating in Cuba and a U-2 has been downed. This is serious. JFK does not want a military conflict with Cuba or the USSR, but his hand has been forced through Soviet deception. When Dobrynin says the Cubans resent their air space being violated, RFK reminds him the U.S. has been lied to about the missiles and world peace is more important than Cuban air space. The U.S. needs a commitment by tomorrow that the secret bases in Cuba will be removed. This is not an ultimatum, but a statement of fact. If they are not removed, the U.S. will remove them. JFK respects the USSR and the courage of its people. If the USSR feels it must retaliate, it should realize Russians would die as well as Americans. RFK informs him of the response to Khrushchev's first letter and says no quid pro quo in Turkey is possible under pressure. JFK would, however, like to remove the missiles from Turkey and Italy once the crisis is over. JFK wants peaceful relations, including resolution of problems in Europe and Southeast Asia. He wants to move forward on controlling nuclear weapons - but only after the crisis is behind them. Only hours remain before something happens.

RFK returns to the White House without optimism. JFK orders troop carrier squadrons to active duty. He hopes Khrushchev will change his course but does not expect it. Military confrontation is more likely. Sunday morning, RFK takes his daughters as promised to a Horse Show. There he receives a phone call from Rusk announcing the Soviets have agreed to withdraw their missiles. He goes to the White House, where Dobrynin calls to request a meeting. They meet in RFK's office at 11 AM. Dobrynin passes to him Khrushchev's personal promise and best wishes to him and the President. It is a very different meeting from the night before. RFK returns to the White House. JFK phones former presidents Truman and Eisenhower, says he should go to the theater tonight (a reference to Lincoln) and writes a letter to Mrs. Anderson.

The third section of the memoir watches the crisis deepen after the apparent breakthrough. Oddly, there is no mention of the 1960 downing of U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers over the USSR, to provide context on such reconnaissance, as the Bay of Pigs is several times mentioned to contextualize the missile crisis. During RFK's mission to Dobrynin, the Russian plays dumb as the Foreign Minister had with JFK. In neither case is it a wise strategy.

Thirteen Days, pgs. 89-106

Thirteen Days, pgs. 89-106 Summary and Analysis

RFK often thinks afterward about how the crisis must be handled secretly, privately, and swiftly - but not immediately. A 24-hour decision would have been far riskier. They are able to debate and gather a spectrum of views. Presidents often hear unanimous viewpoints from cowering advisers. They have virtual unanimity over the Bay of Pigs - or if top officials disagree, they do not express it. RFK suggests having a "devil's advocate," but at the time of the Cuban missile crisis one is not needed. U.S. international commitments have grown so complex and the nation so powerful that the Secretary of State can no longer do everything alone, and, unlike 30 years earlier, other agencies and departments have strong interests in foreign affairs. Representatives of the Pentagon, CIA, AIAD, USIA, Peace Corps, Export-Import Bank, and American businesses can have more influence in some countries than the official ambassador. These bodies collect information and intelligence useful to the President and often with a different slant. Too many hands may sift data before they reach the President.

During the Cuban missile crisis, JFK makes sure he hears from all departments and is insulated from no one by rank or position. Even before the crisis, he enlarges meetings to include diverse experts whom he learns are being excluded. The ability to raise questions, criticize, and think intelligently is his only criterion. He wants to be challenged on the consequences of each particular course of action. In 1961, when the military says destroying Hanoi (possibly with nuclear weapons) is the only recourse if the Pathet Lao attack U.S. troops sent to stabilize Laos, JFK sends no troops and looks for diplomatic solutions. JFK often seeks advice from people whose wisdom he respect, who ask difficult questions, make him defend his position, present different points of view, and are skeptical.

RFK finds this most necessary in the military arena. JFK is impressed with the way the armed services respond to the crisis but distressed that the generals (except Taylor) care little about the implications of their assumptions that the Soviets and Cubans will not respond to diplomacy and war is in the U.S. national interest. One military adviser feels betrayed when the Soviets agree to withdraw the missiles and wants to attack anyway. JFK is disturbed that, having been trained to fight, these men cannot look beyond. This emphasizes the need for civilian direction and control of the military and questioning their recommendations. JFK considers McNamara the most valuable person in government.

By skeptical probing and examining the crisis from all angles, JFK hopes to foresee contingencies and know his decision is based on the best possible information. The outcome shows this approach correct, and shows the importance of being respected in the world. Five years later, RFK senses this has dissipated in a new isolationism, which could keep Latin America from giving support and legitimizing the blockade - an unexpected, heavy blow to Khrushchev. Had NATO been skeptical, Khrushchev might

have split the alliance and undermined the U.S. effort. Even in Africa, where antagonism to the U.S. is significant, Guinea, Senegal, and Dakar lend support by refusing permission to Soviet warplanes to refuel. Personal regard for JFK proves crucial. It is as Thomas Jefferson says: respect for mankind's opinions is vitally important. The U.S. cannot be an island. Exasperation over Vietnam should not close Americans' eyes to the possibility of future crises in which having friends will be crucial.

The final lesson of the Cuban missile crisis is the importance of putting oneself in another's shoes. JFK spends much time figuring out how not to disgrace Khrushchev or humiliate the USSR. Miscalculation, misunderstanding, and escalation by one side invite counter response. That is how unwanted wars that cannot be won begin. Both sides understand the other does not want war but can be brought to it by a collision of limited interests or misunderstanding of the other's objectives. JFK wants to make clear in word and deed that he does not intend to affect Soviet national security. Missiles in Cuba vitally concern only American national security. When Khrushchev realizes this, he drops his adamant position, justifying JFK's belief that he is a rational, intelligent man. Time is all he needs. It is said that World War III will be fought with nuclear weapons and World War IV with sticks and stones.

During the crisis, Barbara Tuchman's The Guns of August makes a deep impression on JFK. He is determined no one will write a similar book about The Missiles of October. Historians will see that the U.S. has made every effort to let the USSR maneuver for peace. After the crisis, JFK makes no statement claiming credit for himself or the Administration. Participants are forbidden to give interviews or claim victory. He respects Khrushchev for doing his job and for looking out for the interests of mankind. It is a triumph for the next generation rather than for any particular government or people.

The final section of the memoir has RFK reflecting on the crisis' lessons. Sorensen's note makes clear RFK had intended to edit and amplify his remarks, but is assassinated in 1968.

Thirteen Days, pgs. 106-150

Thirteen Days, pgs. 106-150 Summary and Analysis

Richard E. Neustadt and Graham T. Allison's Afterword analyses the Cuban missile crisis on three levels: 1) how humans control the power to destroy humankind; 2) how the American presidency works in microcosm; and 3) how the roles of Congress and the Presidency relate in time of war (the great question of the 1970s). During this crisis, JFK decides and informs congressional leaders two hours before acting. Pres. Johnson obtains minimal congressional consent through the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution before committing to the longest war in U.S. history. Nixon as Commander-in-Chief invades Cambodia, ostensibly to protect U.S. troops. This then provokes a constitutional debate about war making.

In Oct. 1962, JFK chooses the path that offers a one in three change of nuclear war. Five years later, RFK wonders under what circumstances a government has the moral right to risk nuclear destruction for its people and the world. Both sides have the incredible ability to destroy most of the globe, but 26 years into the nuclear age, no one has. Can such a war happen or is modern warfare qualitatively different because: 1) the magnitude of destructive power is unparalleled; 2) the suddenness and swiftness of destruction is unprecedented; and 3) "victory" is a moot point. The two sides live in the tension of "mutual superiority," convincing Thomas Schelling that they cannot become involved in a major nuclear war. Choosing to start one would mean choosing "mutual homicide." Pres. Eisenhower already concludes, "there is no alternative to peace."

Many observers find confirmation of this in the Cuban missile crisis. There is no explosion because the leaders are cautious, circumvent self-interests, allow the conflict to cool, and discourage other nations' nuclear programs. War is now unlikely between the U.S. and USSR. Still, the missile crisis demonstrates an "awesome crack" between unlikely and impossible. These are the events that actually occur: 1) USSR installs missiles clandestinely in Cuba (6 Sep. 1962); 2) U-2 flights discover them (14 Oct.); 3) JFK initiates public confrontation by revealing the Soviet action, demanding withdrawal, ordering quarantine, putting U.S. forces on alert, and declaring any missile launched from Cuba will be retaliated against as though launched from the USSR (23 Oct.); 4) Khrushchev orders full strategic alert and threatens to sink interfering U.S. ships (24 Oct.); 5) Soviet ships stop short of the quarantine line (25 Oct.); 6) Khrushchev letter offers withdrawal for pledge of non-invasion (26 Oct.); second letter demands U.S. withdraw missiles from Turkey; 7) U.S. accepts conditions in first letter but sets deadline of 28 Oct. to avert air strike (27 Oct.); and 8) Khrushchev announces withdrawal of missiles (28 Oct.).

Instead of Step 8, this could have happened: 8) Khrushchev reiterates retaliatory policy for any strike against Cuba (28 Oct.); 9) U.S. launches surgical air strikes killing a limited number of Soviets (30 Oct.); 10) Soviets destroy U.S missiles in Turkey, killing a few Americans (31 Oct.); 11) Per NATO obligations, U.S. destroys Soviet bases that

launch attack on Turkey (31 Oct.); 12) USSR, fearing destruction of limited ICBM stock, fires them at U.S. (1 Nov.); and 13) U.S. ICBMs hit USSR. Other "accidental" roads to war could begin with Soviet missiles being fired from Cuba or the sinking of a ship. The downing of a U-2 on 27 Oct. nearly brings about an attack on Soviet SAMs. RFK identifies at least five nuclear fuses.

Given the many possible nuclear dead ends, how does JFK start down this path? Could he not have accepted Soviet missiles in Cuba and announce he is unwilling to play "Russian roulette"? He may have taken seriously his brother's quip about impeachment and certainly feels personally challenged. None of this explains how he finds confrontation "tolerable, rational, justifiable." Under the doctrine of mutual superiority, since neither nation can win, both must be willing to lose or the aggressor wins by default. JFK and Khrushchev thus become "partners in a game of preventing mutual disaster." Had nations seen the U.S. unwilling to stand up for its vital interests, the rules of the "precarious status quo" would have withered. JFK had announced firmly that the U.S. would not tolerate Soviet offensive weapons in Cuba and Khrushchev had vowed they would not be placed there. Had JFK let it go, what line could he have drawn that Khrushchev would not cross? Berlin? The reckless step suggests the Soviet leaders do not appreciate the danger well enough not to hope the U.S. will back down. Only against Cuba does the U.S. have an advantage in bringing conventional forces to bear. JFK might have answered his brother's question about bring people to great risk by saying that is simply the present condition. RFK, however, asks more: why tolerate this immoral, irrational, and intolerable condition?

One could wish risks away. Neustadt and Allison have heard Ex Comm advisors (mostly military) argue that once JFK publicizes the missiles, the threat of holocaust vanishes, because in the face of overwhelming U.S. superiority, the Soviets would retreat. Others, including Ex Comm members at the table, have since convinced themselves that "toughness pays." These are flawed assumptions, which the President resists. JFK seems to believe Khrushchev is a leader like himself, beset with uncertainties about the adversary's understandings, fallible, emotional, fatigued, and plagued with "bureaucratic imperfections." Khrushchev's lengthy 26 Oct. letter supports this. JFK seems to be looking towards hypothetical steps 11-13 above and holocaust.

When the U.S. makes war, the Constitution supposes collaboration between the President and a circle of advisers democratically elected, accountable "fellow politicians on Capitol Hill." In practice, modern presidents turn to their own appointees, whom they need but who share no accountability. During the missile crisis, no member of the House or Senate sits in on meetings. In fact, Congress is ignorant of a crisis until two hours before JFK tells the world. Congressional leaders object strongly and insist the record show they are informed, not consulted. No one in Congress is involved in the decisions of the following week either.

The secretaries of Defense and State, Director of the CIA, Chairman of the JCS, and White House Assistant for National Security Affairs are involved of necessity, because each has "a portion of the wherewithal for action." Sub-secretaries analyze data and help implement policies. Next, there are "the President's men," his brother and his

Special Counsel, Ted Sorenson, JFK's personal adviser and speechwriter since 1953. After the Bay of Pigs fiasco, JFK insists these two participate in every national security decision. Finally there are "surrogates" like Acheson and Lovett, former government officials whose judgment JFK values. Stevenson and Dillon belong in this category more so than through their official roles. These advisors play an extraordinary part in formulating through deliberations the response that JFK adopts.

When Bundy awakens JFK with the news, JFK is startled, angered, and offended Khrushchev would, knowing Cuba and relaxing tensions with the USSR are hot political issues, lie to him and lay down this challenge. JFK has worried after the Bay of Pigs and the Vienna summit about Khrushchev misjudging his "mettle." Ex Comm labels two possible paths "doing nothing" and "taking a diplomatic approach." For McNamara, the U.S. ought not to initiate a crisis. Bundy favors diplomacy with powerful arguments, but within a week sides with air strike advocates. He tries to stay in the minority and keep JFK's options open. RFK wonders if JFK will be forced into an insane act or blacken the U.S. in history through another Pearl Harbor. Sorensen prods, questions, and keeps the discussion moving. The JCS wants to get past the Bay of Pigs and rid the Western Hemisphere of communism. JFK decides this is madness and invasion a wrong use of U.S. power. Other, more persuasive advocates of military action are Acheson, Nitze, Dillon, McCone, and Rusk, who look only at U.S. security and world leadership, and want swift action. Blockade gives the enemy time to go operational with its weapons.

Ex Comm sees many facets of diverse issues represented in the missiles. Initially, members' responses are more diverse than "hawk" and "dove." RFK's memoir allows the process to be reconstructed. Initially, JFK and most advisors want a clear, surgical air strike: wipe out the missiles or disable them. By the end of the first week 6 of the 14 still want this and only a fortuitous coincidence of factors keeps the world intact: 1) foresees holocaust, McNamara frames the issue in terms that JFK finds appropriate; 2) RFK presses the "Tojo" analogy; 3) JFK's absence on the campaign trail allows RFK, McNamara, and Sorensen to united around blockade; 4) proponents of air strikes give JFK little reason to abandon his initial preference; and 5) advocates of blockade use inaccurate data to convince JFK that surgical strikes on missiles alone are impossible. Thursday evening, JFK goes with blockade. Civilian analysts later contradict the Air Force's negative assessment; why the question is not probed at the time is unknown.

The checks and balances involved in making this decision are hardly mentioned in the Constitution. RFK's memoir shows JFK needing information, analysis, and control, while top officials need a forum for discussion and a referee. Their jurisdictions are divided and entangled. All have defined roles but must share a stage and submerge parochial interests. RFK and Acheson differ on what history teaches and how history may look at what they are doing. Ex Comm improvises procedures, limits the forum, and serves as a "court-of-last-resort." There are signs in the second week that a third week would burn out the lower-echelon bureaucrats who would have had to mount military and diplomatic operations. RFK's memoir does not deal with the needs and frustrations of these subordinates, but Neustadt and Allison have heard vivid, detailed complaints from them. Two weeks of crisis is as much as they could endure; ad hoc subcommittees of Ex

Comm are already proliferating and representing vested rights. The President would eventually have had to destroy the structure to regain flexibility.

The forces that shape presidential needs also shape bureaucratic needs, but in different ways. The Executive Branch's organizational chart is a tangle before the crisis. By 1949, operations are entangled, congressional oversight is confused, seven separate hierarchies deal with national security, and the civil service is compartmentalized. The stakes - prestige, power, and promotion - are high and strictly vertical. All compromise, waste time "papering over" differences, and search for lowest common denominators. Staffs also push pet projects upstairs and few arguments are settled short of the White House. If a president satisfies these bureaucrats, he loses flexibility to make the decisions for which he is politically accountable. Presidents and officialdom are usually incompatible; the missile crisis is a rare case of it being not so - but the structure would probably have not held together another week.

Since World War II, the U.S. government has tried to "square the circle" by tinkering with structure, tightening up procedures, and loosening constraints on the White House. Each administration tries to fix the "weakness" of its predecessor, but still presidents are not well served by frustrated, uncomprehending bureaucrats, who can be as big a problem to them as their own ignorance, judgments, or temperament. JFK wisely disbands Ex Comm after the crisis. Checks and balances enlarge destructive hazards and the only remedy is individual prudence, luck, and fortitude, as 14 men display for 13 days in October 1962.

The U.S. Constitution as a product of the Enlightenment acknowledges that common good requires someone wield political power but seeks to minimize the inherent risk of power by: 1) limiting arbitrary authority, 2) sharing powers, 3) separating institutions and making each accountable politically, and 4) letting the people replace monarchy without yielding to direct democracy. Checks and balances are built in throughout. No one has unlimited prerogatives, but neither does the mob reign. Human failings are expected to cancel each other out.

Then as now, war is the ultimate expression of authority. The Founding Fathers go beyond having Parliament control the purse. Congress must declare war and the Senate must ratify alliances and peace. The president commands such armed forces as Congress votes to raise and keep. From the start, presidents have sent troops into battle without declarations of war. Three of the four most costly wars - the Civil War, Korea, and Vietnam - are undeclared, and had October 1962 progressed to war, it would have been undeclared.

Presidents shy away from Congress when deciding about war because: 1) Security: leaks would have scuttled diplomacy, as when James Reston of the New York Times has his story delayed only when JFK calls his editor; 2) Flexibility: it takes care and subtlety to find the "right" first-step response - one that signals intentions, specifies expectations, and leaves JFK poised for the next round; 3) Uncertainty: Soviet intentions are always a riddle; 4) Complexity: U.S. forces must be marshaled, deployed, and controlled; allies persuaded without public fanfare, and Moscow communicated with

effectively - while the rest of government business goes on; and 5) Time: everything must be done at once under the pressure of modern technology.

Time in particular limits the number of people with whom the Commander in Chief can consult. The Ex Comm guarantees defense, diplomatic, and intelligence interests are represented. When parochialism naturally rises, JFK holds it in check, relying having chosen his own aides. Time restraints dictate that the president's mind be the final arbiter of politics, history, and psychology. Congress can at best be told after-the-fact. Prior consultation would offered minimal added legitimacy, for JFK feels he more representative of the electorate than congressmen, singly or as a body. Command decisions rest with him alone, so he informs them afterwards.

In the first four days of the Korean War, Truman consults with officials and escalates gradually: sends observers, appeals to the U.N., neutralizes Formosa; commits air power, and finally commits nearby ground forces. He informs the congressional leadership and is more generally applauded than JFK. Timely choice and circumstances make a declaration of war inappropriate, for it implies total war, while Truman wants to limit the fighting and end expeditiously. Having four days to avoid a world war, he does not need Congress as a partner. Truman could have sought - and obtained - ratification afterward, but does not want to blur for his successors the president's command authority. Instead, he cites Senate approval of the U.N. resolution and asks for money and controls to fight. When the Chinese enter and prolong the conflict, however, Truman pays politically for not consulting Congress, leading to Eisenhower's election in 1952. Conscious of this, Eisenhower comes up with the "Quemoy-Matsu" formula for "pre-associating" Congress with command decisions. LBJ uses it in Vietnam, but cannot keep the fighting short enough, and like Truman refuses to go to Congress. As months of war turn into years, congressmen feel duped and begin bitter attacks that help legitimize popular dissent. LBJ's fate resembles Truman's.

In the nuclear age, it is hard to fault presidents who act alone. He is America's "Final Arbiter." In non-nuclear warfare, however, presidents also stay aloof from Congress, because it is notoriously leaky and slow moving. Once war is declared, it must be formally ended. LBJ and Nixon both prosecute the Vietnam War without invoking "war powers," which provide advantages in controlling the economy, public order, and the media.

The cost, duration, and lack of agreement on the purpose or success of Vietnam have led many to believe power of the purse does not suffice, for few politicians will withhold funds from troops in the field. Congress wants a voice before commitment to "redress the constitutional balance" by: 1) requiring affirmative legislative action for operations lasting more than 30 days; 2) the option of vetoing commitments overseas; 3) statutory prohibition of military action or support in specified countries; 4) requirement of consultation. Any of these proposals would constrain a modern president greatly. Until Pearl Harbor, Franklin Roosevelt has great difficulty getting Congress to let him transfer overage destroyers to Great Britain.

In deciding about war, one must consider several issues such as how to make "good" decisions, how to make "appropriate" choices, how to resolve differences, and how it affects individuals' personal power in Washington. Also it is important to consider whether action will be taken and unintended side effects. All are practical and political concerns rather than constitutional questions. Before World War II, millions of Americans are isolationists, finding World War I a needless waste, while after the war, the press and public fear "another Munich." In the future, memories of Vietnam will affect the "balance" between President and Congress.

Characters

John F. Kennedy

The 35th President of the United States (1961-63), JFK faces two Cuban crises during his short time in office. The first is the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion and the second is the subject of this book by JFK's younger brother and closest confidant, making Thirteen Days a "profile in courage" of the late president. Profile in Courage is the title of JFK's Pulitzer Prize-winning book. During the crisis, JFK intensifies his habit of seeking advice from people whose wisdom he respects but whose job descriptions might not seem relevant including people who ask difficult questions, make him defend his position, present different points of view, and are skeptical.

JFK returns to midterm election campaign trail to deflect suspicion of crisis in Washington, cuts it short when the Ex Comm has prepared options for his consideration, puts the armed forces on alert, and decides on blockade. JFK has long favored removing obsolete Jupiter missiles from Turkey, but rejects the idea of a quid pro quo. His briefing of leaders of Congress is heated, and he leaves upset, but later sees they are doing their job. Going on national television, JFK explains the situation and the reasons for quarantine as an initial step, with the Pentagon preparing for any military eventuality. JFK goes to bed with trepidation but knowing the country is with him.

JFK writes Khrushchev, asking him prudently to observe the quarantine and keep the situation under control. As the quarantine goes into effect, JFK is grim, but when Soviet ships halt, he is relieved and orders the Navy not to interfere with their retreat. JFK takes pains to give Khrushchev time and not back him into a corner. He regrets this deterioration in relations, which the USSR can restore just by taking necessary action. Khrushchev answers that if JFK promises not to attack Cuba and lifts the blockade, the missiles can be removed or destroyed. A second letter arrives, obviously from the Kremlin's Foreign Office, demanding removal of missiles from Turkey. When a U-2 is downed, JFK declares it a "new ball game," but puts off hitting the SAM sites, cautioning that they must look many moves ahead in this hazardous situation. He signs and dispatches to Khrushchev a response accepting the Premier's original "offer."

In the end, JFK worries about the young people of the world who have no say in having their lives snuffed out. His generation has had its chance to shape their destinies through election or revolution and has tragically erred. During the crisis, Barbara Tuchman's The Guns of August makes a deep impression on JFK, and he is determined no one will write a similar book about him blundering into a world war. Historians will see that the U.S. has made every effort to let the USSR maneuver for peace. After the crisis, JFK makes no statement claiming credit for himself or the Administration. Participants are forbidden to give interviews or claim victory. He respects Khrushchev for doing his job and for looking out for the interests of mankind. It is a triumph for the next generation rather than for any particular government or people.

Robert F. Kennedy

The U.S. Attorney General in the Kennedy Administration, RFK is the President's younger brother and closest confidant, having worked for him politically since 1953. RFK writes as the premier insider, revealing conversations they alone share. He writes respectfully of others, including generals whose opinion appall both him and JFK, and skims over the Vietnam War, which causes a break between himself and JFK's successor, Lyndon B. Johnson. After the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion, JFK makes no foreign policy decisions without input from RFK and Ted Sorensen. Thirteen Days is very much a "profile in courage" of the late president, emphasizing how JFK seeks advice from people whose wisdom he respects but whose job descriptions might not seem relevant; people who ask difficult questions, make him defend his position, present different points of view, and are skeptical.

Weeks earlier, RFK raises concerns about military equipment going to Cuba with Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin, who passes along Chairman Nikita S. Khrushchev's promise of no trouble preceding U.S. elections. RFK warns that the U.S. is watching and missiles in Cuba will bring the gravest consequences. RFK reports the conversation to JFK, the secretaries of State and Defense, voices personal skepticism, and advises a clear public statement that the U.S. will not tolerate offensive weapons in Cuba. Once the crisis begins, RFK volunteers to visit Dobrynin again, points out the Soviet lies, and goes home feeling slightly optimistic. RFK presses the analogy of Japanese Gen. Tojo planning Pearl Harbor and presides over Ex Comm in his brother's absence, uniting with McNamara and Sorensen on pushing for blockade. JFK agrees and issues orders.

When two responses arrive from Moscow and work intensifies in Cuba at making the missiles operational, RFK objects to the content and tenor of a State Department response and, backed by Sorenson and others, suggests they respond only to the first letter. JFK sends Sorenson and RFK to compose an alternative response, which he refines, has typed, and signs. JFK and Rusk decide that RFK should visit Dobrynin to express the President's pain and concern. RFK reveals that he knows work is accelerating in Cuba and a U-2 has been downed, says JFK does not want a military conflict, reminds Dobrynin the U.S. has been lied to, and insists a commitment be given by tomorrow to remove the secret bases. RFK informs him of the response and says no quid pro quo in Turkey is possible under pressure. JFK would however like to remove the missiles from Turkey and Italy once the crisis is over and move forward on resolving many political differences. RFK returns to the White House without optimism. Sunday morning, RFK takes his daughters as promised to a Horse Show, where he learns the Soviets have agreed to withdraw their missiles. He goes to the White House and then receives Dobrynin in his office to receive Khrushchev's personal promises and best wishes

McGeorge Bundy

The National Security Advisor in the Kennedy Administration, Bundy startles JFK on the morning of 16 Oct. 1962 with news of Soviet missiles in Cuba. Bundy initially favors the diplomatic approach, confronting Gromyko or Khrushchev with the evidence directly and demanding withdrawal; anything else requires suspending the rules of diplomacy and shortsightedly humiliating the USSR. If Khrushchev refuses, the Administration is shielded from criticism it has provoked a confrontation without first trying to negotiate. The argument is powerful but within a week, Bundy sides with the air strike advocates. He tries to stay in the minority and keep JFK's options open.

Anatoly Dobrynin

The Soviet Ambassador to the United States, Dobrynin promises RFK weeks before the Cuban missile crisis that Chairman Nikita S. Khrushchev intends no trouble preceding U.S. elections. RFK warns Dobrynin that the U.S. is watching and missiles in Cuba will bring the gravest consequences. When U-2 photographs show the Soviets have been lying, U.S. officials disclose nothing initially. Dobrynin is told how the Americans will respond via blockade an hour before JFK's announcement, and is shaken up. RFK visits Dobrynin at the Russian Embassy to review the events that have led to confrontation. Dobrynin denies knowledge of missiles in Cuba, and wonders why JFK has not laid out the facts to Gromyko. RFK counters with the question of why has Gromyko not said what he knows. Dobrynin is concerned as RFK leaves, admitting the latest orders call for the ships to continue to Cuba.

Once a response to Khrushchev's two letters is prepared, RFK again visits Dobrynin to express the President's pain and concern. Dobrynin says the Cubans resent their air space being violated, but RFK says world peace is more important than Cuban air space. Within hours, the U.S. needs a commitment that the secret bases in Cuba will be removed. Once Khrushchev gives a positive response, Dobrynin request another meeting with RFK to pass along Khrushchev's personal promise and best wishes to him and the President.

Andrei Gromyko

The Soviet Foreign Minister who meets with President Kennedy late afternoon Wednesday, claiming Cuba and the USSR wanting "peaceful coexistence" and how the Russians are only assisting Cuban agriculture and providing a few defensive arms but no offensive weapons. The U.S. should stop threatening Cuba. Astonished but admiring such boldness, JFK says firmly that the USSR is fomenting discord and making it harder for him to maintain in public that no action is required against Cuba. The President refers to the meetings between Dobrynin and RFK and reads aloud his 4 Sep. statement about consequences. Gromyko assures him the U.S. need not be concerned. Kennedy is displeased.

Nicholas Katzenbach

Deputy Attorney General in the Kennedy Administration, Katzenbach together with RFJ drafts a public warning to the Soviets on 4 Sep. 1962 to not install offensive weapons in Cuba.

Nikita S. Khrushchev

The Soviet Chairman who claims to have sent missiles to Cuba to keep the U.S. from attempting to overthrow Cuba's communist government as it once tries to overthrow the Soviet revolution, Khrushchev blusters for several days after learning the secret is out. He finally writes a long and emotional letter to JFK, pleading that they not succumb to "petty passions" or "transient things." Khrushchev has been in two wars and knows where it leads. Soviet missiles will not be used offensively, knowing the U.S. will respond in kind. Only lunatics or suicides could do what the Americans charge him with. The USSR wants to peaceful competition. Soviet ships carry no weapons since all weapons are already in Cuba. This is Khrushchev's first admission of guilt. JFK has admitted that the Bay of Pigs like Stalin is a mistake and acknowledging such mistakes takes courage. If JFK promises not to attack Cuba and lifts the blockade, then the missiles can be removed or destroyed. Armaments only bring disaster. Piratical interference with Soviet ships will only tighten the knot leading to thermonuclear war, while relaxing forces could allow it to be untied peacefully. The Soviets are ready for this.

John McCloy

A Republican advisor to President Kennedy on European affairs, McCloy is called home from Germany to join Ambassador Adelai Stevenson to present the case to the U.N. McCloy initially favoring a military attack.

John McCone

The Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in the Kennedy Administration, McCone lets JFK get a good night's sleep on the night of October 15, 1962, after being advised of Soviet missiles in Cuba. McCone and the CIA are primarily responsible for Ex Comm being kept abreast of breaking news. McCone warns how well equipped the enemy is and conditions in Cuba are as adverse as in Korea.

Robert McNamara

The U.S. Secretary of Defense in the Kennedy Administration, McNamara is, according to RFK, considered by the President the most valuable person in government. McNamara strongly advocates blockade as flexible, dramatic, forceful, and controllable,

while "surgical air strikes" on missile bases alone are impractical. If an invasion is needed, McNamara reports confidentially and is approved by JFK, a 90,000-man elite invasion force will grow to 250,000 ground troops where 2,000 air sorties will be flown, and 25,000 casualties can be expected. Worse, McNamara foresees nuclear holocaust and frames the issue in terms that JFK finds appropriate. During the President's absence on the campaign trail, RFK, McNamara, and Sorensen unite around blockade and proponents of air strikes give JFK little reason to abandon this course.

Dean Rusk

The U.S. Secretary of State in the Kennedy Administration, Rusk ranks highest in the Ex-Comm, but rarely attends meetings. This allows everyone present to speak as equals, uninhibited and unrestricted, which is rare in the rank-conscious Executive Branch.

Ted Sorensen

Presidential Counsel to President John F. Kennedy, Sorensen is JFK's personal advisor and primary speechwriter since 1953. After the Bay of Pigs fiasco, JFK makes no national security decisions without advice from Sorensen and his brother, RFK.

Adelai Stevenson

The U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Stevenson suggests in the National Security Council meeting withdrawing missiles from Turkey and Italy and giving up the Guantánamo Bay base as a good faith gesture. JFK has long felt the obsolete Jupiter missiles should go, but Guantánamo Bay cannot be abandoned under threat. RFK disagrees with Stevenson's recommendation but feels it is courageous, sensical, and adds to the discussion. As a former presidential candidate and leading liberal spokesman, Stevenson carries more weight in Ex Comm than his official position warrants.

Objects/Places

Bay of Pigs

The 1961 Bay of Pigs Invasion was an unsuccessful attempted invasion by armed Cuban exiles in southwest Cuba, planned and funded by the United States, in an attempt to overthrow the government of Fidel Castro. This action accelerated a rapid deterioration in Cuban-American relations, which was further worsened by the Cuban Missile Crisis the following year.They have virtual unanimity over the Bay of Pigs and if top officials disagree, they do not express it. After the Bay of Pigs fiasco, JFK insists these two participate in every national security decision. JFK has worried after the Bay of Pigs and the Vienna summit about Khrushchev misjudging his "mettle." Ex Comm labels two possible paths "doing nothing" and "taking a diplomatic approach." For McNamara, the U.S. ought not to initiate a crisis. The JCS wants to get past the Bay of Pigs and rid the Western Hemisphere of communism. JFK decides that this is madness and that invasion is a wrong use of U.S. power.

Berlin

The former capital of Germany, Berlin is located deep in the Democratic Republic of Germany after World War II and divided into four sectors by the victorious Allies. Soon the Soviets restrict access to West Berlin from West Germany, precipitating a crisis that nearly rise to military confrontation. JFK first meets Khrushchev in Vienna to discuss lessening tensions in Berlin, but comes away worried the Soviet Premier misjudges his "mettle." JFK anticipates that if he takes military action against the Soviet missiles in Cuba, the Soviets will again blockade Berlin.

Central Intelligence Agency

Created along with the National Security Council by the National Security Act of 1947, the CIA charged with gathering and analyzing information overseas for use by policymakers. As part of this mission it flies U-2 spy planes over Communist territories, taking high-altitude surveillance pictures. When it finds proof of Soviet missiles and nuclear weapons in Cuba, the CIA briefs high officials using charts and photographs that are nearly unintelligible to laymen, but stunning and surprising. Thereafter, John McCone, Director of the CIA, is primarily responsible for keeping Ex Comm abreast of breaking news, although Defense Secretary Robert McNamara clearly has his own independent channels.

Cuba

The Caribbean island off the tip of Florida, Cuba is in 1962 officially a Marxist country, the first in the Western Hemisphere. JFK inherits Eisenhower's hostility to Fidel Castro,

which centers around a trade embargo. Within a month of taking office, however, JFK authorizes air support for a counterrevolution by Cuban exiles in Miami. It fails disastrously and freeing Cuba becomes a major political issue in the U.S. As Cuba becomes a client of the USSR, JFK warns Khrushchev against putting offensive nuclear arms in Cuba. Khrushchev promises he has no need of this. The Cuban missile crisis of October 1962 is precipitated when U-2 spy planes spot ground-to-ground missiles and IL-28 bombers on the ground. Subsequent photographs show 16-32 1,000-mile missiles that will be operational in a week. Having half the power of the total Soviet arsenal, they can kill 80 million Americans in minutes. The JCS unanimously calls for immediate military action, but JFK decides instead to blockade the island and use diplomacy when dealing with Moscow.

Ex Comm

The Executive Committee of the National Security Council, constituted 21 Oct. 1962 under National Security Council Action Memorandum No. 196, meets almost constantly 12-28 Oct. 1962, and for six weeks thereafter almost daily to talk, argue, fight, and ultimately present recommendations on which the President can act. The members are intelligent, industrious, courageous, and dedicated, but none is consistent in his opinion from start to finish. Unfettered minds are essential and the pressure is intense. Everyone present speaks as an eqaul, uninhibited and unrestricted, which is rare in the rank-conscious Executive Branch. Members include Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, CIA Director John McCone, Treasury Secretary Douglas Dillon, National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, Presidential Counsel Ted Sorensen, Undersecretary of State George Ball, Deputy Undersecretary of State U. Alexis Johnson, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Maxwell Taylor, Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America Edward Martin, Chip Bohlen (before he leaves to become Ambassador to France) and then Llewellyn Thompson, Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric, and Assistant Secretary of Defense Paul Nitze. At various meetings, Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson, Ambassador to the United Nations Adlai Stevenson, and Special Assistant Ken O'Donnell, and Deputy Director of the United States Information Agency (USIA) Don Wilson also attend. Almost all of them agree in the beginning that some action is required. A few of them see no change in the balance of power. Most of them want an air strike.

Ground-to-Ground Missiles

Essentially offensive weapons, as opposed to surface-to-air missiles, ground-to-ground missiles can have an intercontinental range or ICBMs for shorter ranges. Contrary to public and private promises, the Soviet Union installs 16-32 medium range ballistic missiles or MRBMs in Cuba, capable of striking 1,000 miles into the United States. It is estimated that they will be operational in a week and having half the power of the total Soviet arsenal, they can kill 80 million Americans in minutes. The JCS unanimously

calls for immediate military action, but JFK decides instead to blockade the island and use diplomacy on Moscow.

Joint Chiefs of Staff

The JCS consists of the chiefs of the U.S. Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps. Its Chairman is the principal military adviser to the President. At the time of the Cuban missile conflict, the Chairman is the thoughtful Gen. Maxwell Taylor. During the crisis, it is significant that neither the JCS nor its chairman has command authority over fighting units, whose commanders receive their orders from the President through the civilian Secretary of Defense. Throughout the crisis, the JCS demands immediate military action against Soviet installations in Cuba, with Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Curtis LeMay going so far as to argue that the Soviets will not respond. The JCS also claims it wants to get past the embarrassing Bay of Pigs defeat and rid the Western Hemisphere of Communism. Defense Secretary Robert McNamara disagrees with the JCS but tells the President men and materiel can be deployed by 23 October. JFK decides that the JCS view is madness and that invasion is a wrong use of U.S. power.

North American Treaty Organization

A post-World War II military alliance established provide collective defense in the event any member states is attacked from outside, NATO support JFK and the blockade of Cuba; had members been skeptical, Khrushchev might have split the alliance and undermined the U.S. effort. Neustadt and Graham's Afterword provides a scenario in which Turkey's membership in NATO and the presence of obsolete Jupiter missiles there could have precipitated a full-fledged nuclear exchange, had the USSR retaliated for U.S. surgical air strikes in Cuba.

Organization of American States

A post-World War II collective security arrangement for the Western hemisphere (like NATO) toe OAS responds to a U.S. request for support when Soviet offensive weapons are discovered in Cuba. The U.S. has considerable trepidation, given past tensions. Surprisingly, all 20-nations give support and several contribute men and materiel to the effort. The effect is to turn the blockade from an outlaw action by one nation into a united action by 20 nations legally protecting their common interests.

Surface-to-Air Missiles (SAMs)

Essentially defensive weapons, as opposed to ground-to-ground missiles, SAMs are situated to protect offensive missile launchers. The Cuban missile crisis becomes "a different ballgame" when SAMs down a U-2 piloted by Maj. Rudolf Anderson Jr. When the JCS calls for destroying the SAM sites, JFK cautions that they must look many moves ahead in this hazardous course. He needs absolute verification that it is not an

accidental crash and orders nuclear missiles defused so he must give personal permission before they can be used.

U-2

A high-altitude aircraft flown by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to take photographs of suspected military targets in Communist countries, the U-2 first detects offensive weapons in Cuba, proving Soviet promises to the contrary are lies. The Cuban missile crisis becomes "a different ballgame" when SAMs down a U-2 piloted by Major Rudolf Anderson Jr. When the JCS calls for destroying the SAM sites, JFK cautions that they must look many moves ahead in this hazardous course. He needs absolute verification that it is not an accidental crash and orders nuclear missiles defused so he must give personal permission before they can be used.

Themes

Mutual Superiority

By October 1962, humans control the power to obliterate their species, but their leaders feel constrained not to resort to nuclear armaments by the knowledge of the magnitude of destructive power at their disposal, the suddenness and swiftness with which it can be delivered, and the fact that "victory," which is historically defined as the unconditional surrender of the enemy has become a moot point, for little or nothing of either civilization can survive the holocaust. This creates the tension of "mutual superiority," later termed, more descriptively, as "Mutual Assured Destruction" or MAD. In October 1962, JFK chooses a path that offers a one in three change of nuclear war. During the Cuban missile crisis, there is no explosion because the American and Soviet leaders are both cautious, circumvent self-interests and allow the conflict to cool. Nevertheless, the missile crisis demonstrates an "awesome crack" between unlikely and impossible.

Under the doctrine of mutual superiority, since neither nation can win, both must be willing to lose or the aggressor wins by default. JFK and Khrushchev thus become "partners in a game of preventing mutual disaster" rather than playing "Russian roulette." JFK had announced firmly that the U.S. would not tolerate Soviet offensive weapons in Cuba and Khrushchev had vowed they would not be placed there. The Soviets' reckless step suggests their leaders do not fully appreciate the risk, hoping the U.S. will back down. JFK worries that after the Vienna summit, Khrushchev will underestimate his "mettle." Had JFK ignored the real threat of 16-32 missiles, to be operational in a week, capable of killing 80 million Americans within 1,000 miles of Cuba, the rules of the "precarious status quo" would have withered. Only against Cuba does the U.S. have an advantage in bringing conventional forces to bear. In Berlin, the other hot spot of confrontation, the Soviets have the edge. RFK does not live long enough to revise his memoir and answer the question he raises of how JFK finds confrontation "tolerable, rational, [and] justifiable." JFK might have answered his brother's question about bring people to great risk by saying that is simply the present condition. RFK, however, asks more and questions why society should tolerate this immoral, irrational, and intolerable condition.

Courage

Thirteen Days is framed as a "profile in courage" of the President John F. Kennedy or JFK, his handful of advisers, and the Soviet Premier who precipitates the crisis that threatens to destroy the human race. Profiles in Courage is JFK's Pulitzer Prize-winning book about courageous stands taken by U.S. senators throughout history. Robert F. Kennedy, also known as RFK, the President's brother, Attorney General, and closest confidant, show people of wisdom, asking difficult questions, forcing JFK to defend his position, presenting diverse points of view, and above all, being skeptical. "

RFK never equates "courage" with machismo, which is represented by the military brass, who consistently insist on "surgical" air strikes against the Soviet missile installations to end the immediate problem and eliminate the political problem left over from the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961. Republicans during the mid-term elections are also pushing for action against Fidel Castro, and congressional leaders when briefed on the decision to limit the U.S. response initially to a naval blockade, find it too weak. JFK's greatest act of courage is cautioning that they must look many moves ahead in this hazardous situation. Both Kennedys admire the U.S. military units that respond as trained, swiftly, efficiently, and with resolution, but decry the narrowness of the generals who cannot think beyond their professional training to fight.

JFK also respects the USSR and the courage of its people. He takes pains to give Khrushchev time and not back him into a corner where only machismo is possible. JFK regrets the deterioration in relations, and suggests the USSR can restore détente by removing or disabling the offensive weapons. He offers the "carrot" of broad diplomatic efforts to reduce nuclear weaponry and reach accord on several "hot" international issues. Khrushchev answers that if JFK promises not to attack Cuba and lifts the blockade, the missiles can be removed or destroyed. A second letter in his name then arrives, obviously from the Kremlin's Foreign Office, demanding removal of missiles from Turkey. JFK signs and dispatches a response accepting the Premier's original "offer" and ignoring the second. He says simply that if the USSR feels it must retaliate, it should realize that as many Russians will die as Americans. He does not accept a quid pro quo in Turkey but says he wants to remove those missiles once the crisis is over.

Secrecy

The Cuban missile crisis is a profile in secrecy as well as courage. While assuring the Americans publicly and privately that no offensive weapons will be placed in Cuba, Soviet Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev clandestinely ships nuclear warheads, medium-range boosters, and bombers to the island, and they are discovered only when secret surveillance flights by U-2 spy planes reveal the hurried activity to make them operational. JFK withholds the fact that he knows of the Soviet duplicity when he meets as scheduled with Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, allowing him to talk about wanting "peaceful coexistence," assisting Cuban agriculture, providing a few defensive arms, and demanding the U.S. stop threatening Cuba. Knowing Gromyko's assurances are lies, JFK displeased. The Soviet Ambassador to the United States, Anatoly Dobrynin, learns about the photographic proof and the U.S. decision to blockade only an hour before JFK's televised announcement. The Cabinet and congressional leadership are kept as in the dark until the policy is set and implemented, and the latter go on record protesting being informed rather than consulted.

The authors of the Afterword state that, "For a nuclear crisis it is hard to fault the balance struck in 1962, tipped all the way toward the President in an Ex Comm. Secrecy, flexibility, uncertainty, and urgency - each alone makes a strong argument...formal Congressional participation is not only inconvenient, but impracticable." RFK pictures his brother sticking to his commitments to campaign for

Democratic candidates in the mid-term election in order to keep the press from catching the scent of blood in the water. As a widening circle of officials is called on to implement the blockade policy, word gets out, and James Reston of the New York Times has publication of his scoop delayed only when JFK personally calls his editor. JFK has to have all the pieces in place before announcing his reaction: diplomatic and military. The lengthy Afterword by Professors Richard E. Neustadt and Graham T. Allison helps put this need for secrecy from Congress in perspective by examining the policies of Presidents Truman, Johnson, and Nixon.

Style

Perspective

The author of this memoir, Thirteen Days, is Robert F. Kennedy or RFK, who is probably the most important participant on the American side of the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962, after his brother, President John F. Kennedy or JFK. RFK has worked politically for his brother since 1953 and is at his side during every decision after the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961. At the time of the crisis, RFK is the U.S. Attorney General and often JFK's stand-in during discussions. RFK is conscious of playing the role of devil's advocate.

Thirteen Days is very much a "profile in courage" of the late president and the handful of men he gathers to give him advice as the world stands on the brink of nuclear obliteration. Profiles in Courage is JFK's Pulitzer Prize-winning book about courageous U.S. senators. It is a tribute to these people of wisdom, who ask difficult questions, make JFK defend his position, present different points of view, and are skeptical. Their efforts avert a third unintended and unwinnable world war. RFK writes as the premier insider, using diaries and recollections. He works on his memoir in the summer and fall of 1967, as the Vietnam War is escalating and he is breaking with JFK's successor, Lyndon B. Johnson. RFK is assassinated in 1986 before he can address the basic moral question that he identifies. The question is, "What, if any, circumstance or justification gives this government or any government the moral right to bring its people and possibly all people under the shadow of nuclear destruction?" It seems clear that RFK's intention is to make thoughtful readers ponder this deeply.

Presidential scholar Richard E. Neustadt and nuclear armaments specialist Graham T. Allison do some of the pondering for readers in the lengthy Afterword to RFK's memoir. Writing a few years later, they look at the Cuban missile crisis on three levels. First, they consider how humans control the power to destroy humankind and secondly, how the American presidency works in microcosm. Finally, they look at the roles of Congress and the Presidency relate in time of war, which was the great question of the 1970s.

Tone

Robert F. Kennedy or RFK writes with surprising calm and respect of the people who help his brother, President John F. Kennedy, also known as JFK, avert nuclear holocaust in October 1962. The subject matter is emotional and the tension among Ex Comm members is palpable but never turns to bedlam. RFK disagrees adamantly with top-ranking military leaders who want to take care of the problem of Cuba once and for all, and pushes the analogy of Gen. Hideki Tojo planning for the sneak attack on Pearl Harbor that brings the United States into World War II. He sees his brother and his handful of advisers as "profiles in courage," and agrees with his brother that their great adversary, Nikita S. Khrushchev is also and intelligent man unwilling to destroy

humankind. He simply needs time and space to maneuver away from belligerency. Thirteen Days is RFK's insider's subjective telling, but he seems eager to put the objective truth on record.

The lengthy Afterword by Professors Richard E. Neustadt and Graham T. Allison helps put the memoir into perspective by looking at three aspects of the Cuban missile crisis on three levels. First, they consider how humans control the power to destroy humankind and secondly, how the American presidency works in microcosm. Finally, they look at the roles of Congress and the Presidency relate in time of war, which was the great question of the 1970s Note that both are at some point associated with the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, so they are not unbiased. The Afterword takes the book on tangents away from the thirteen days and is intended for a more scholarly audience.

Structure

Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis begins with fourteen unnumbered chapters headed by a catchphrase from the following text. The organization is chronological, with the exception of flashbacks in the first section to the author's discussion with the Soviet Ambassador, when the basic deception is set forth. They are the work of Robert F. Kennedy, brother of the President, his Attorney General, and closest confident. RFK writes in 1967, using diaries and recollections.

Following RFK's memoir, Professors Richard E. Neustadt and Graham T. Allison provide a lengthy, scholarly Afterword, which helps put the memoir into perspective by looking at three aspects of the Cuban missile crisis on three levels. First, they consider how humans control the power to destroy humankind and secondly, how the American presidency works in microcosm. Finally, they look at the roles of Congress and the Presidency relate in time of war, which was the great question of the 1970s. The Afterword takes the book on tangents away from the thirteen fateful days in October 1962, but is generally helpful in thinking about the moral question RFK had intended to address if had he lived. The question he brings to light is, "What, if any, circumstance or justification gives this government or any government the moral right to bring its people and possibly all people under the shadow of nuclear destruction?"

Following the Afterword are the full text of eleven primary documents mentioned in the memoir, including JFK's television address to the nation, correspondence between president and premier, and White House announcements. Finally, there is a brief bibliography and index.

Quotes

"On Tuesday morning, October 16, 1962, shortly after 9:00 o'clock, President Kennedy called and asked me to come to the White House. He said only that we were facing great trouble. Shortly afterward, in his office, he told me that a U-2 had just finished a photographic mission and that the Intelligence Community had become convinced that Russia was placing missiles and atomic weapons in Cuba."
"That was the beginning of the Cuban missile crisis-a confrontation between the two giant atomic nations, the U.S. and the U.S.S.R., which brought the world to the abyss of nuclear destruction and the end of mankind" (Thirteen Days, pg. 1.)

"The general feeling in the beginning was that some form of action was require. There were those, although they were a small minority, who felt the missiles did not alter the balance of power and therefore necessitated no action. Most felt, at that stage, that an air strike against the missile sites could be the only course. Listening to the proposals, I passed a note to the President: 'I now know how Tojo felt when he was planning Pearl Harbor" (Thirteen Days, pg. 9.)

"He interrupted at that moment and said that was exactly what he had told me and that he had given me his word that the Soviet Union would not put missiles in Cuba that could reach the continental United States."
"I said that, based on that statement and the subsequent statement by Tass, the Soviet news agency, the President had taken a less belligerent attitude toward the Soviet Union's actions than other political figures in the U.S. and assured the American people that military action was not necessary against Cuba. Now the President knew he had been deceived, and that had devastating implications for the peace of the world" (Thirteen Days, pg. 43-44.)

"ZORIN: 'Continue with your statement. You will have your answer in due course.'
"STEVENSON: 'I am prepared to wait for my answer until hell freezes over, if that's your decision. And I am also prepared to present the evidence in this room.'
"And with that Stevenson revealed the photographs of the Russian missiles and sites, with devastating effect" (Thirteen Days, pg. 54.)

"A great deal has been written about this message, including the allegation that at the time Khrushchev wrote it he must have been so unstable or emotional that he had become incoherent. There was no question that the letter had been written by him personally. It was very long and emotional. But it was not incoherent, and the emotion was directed at the death, destruction, and anarchy that nuclear war would bring to his people and all mankind. That, he said again and again and in many different ways, must be avoided" (Thirteen Days, pg. 64.)

"At first, there was almost unanimous agreement that we had to attack early the next morning with bombers and fighters and destroy the SAM sites. But again the President pulled everyone back. 'It isn't the first step that concerns me,' he said, 'but both sides escalating to the fourth and fifth step-and we don't go to the sixth because there is no one around to do so. We must remind ourselves we are embarking of a very hazardous course" (Thirteen Days, pg. 76.)

"He said the Cubans resented the fact that we were violating Cuban air space. I replied that if we had not violated Cuban air space, we would still be believing what Khrushchev had said-that there would be no missiles placed in Cuba. In any case, I said, this matter was far more serious than the air space of Cuba-it involved the peoples of both of our countries and, in fact, people all over the globe."
"The Soviet Union had secretly established missile bases in Cuba while at the same time proclaiming privately and publicly that this would never be done. We had to have a commitment by tomorrow that those bases would be removed. I was not giving them an ultimatum but a statement of fact. He should understand that if they did not remove those bases, we would remove them. President Kennedy had great respect for the Ambassador's country and the courage of its people. Perhaps his country might feel it necessary to take retaliatory action; but before that was over, there would be not only dead Americans but dead Russians as well" (Thirteen Days, pg. 85-86.)

"After it was finished, he made no statement attempting to take credit for himself or for the Administration for what had occurred. He instructed all members of the Ex Comm and government that no interviews should be given, no statement made, which would claim any kind of victory. He respected Khrushchev for properly determining what was in his own country's interest and what was in the interest of mankind. If it was a triumph, it was a triumph for the next generation and not for any particular government or people" (Thirteen Days, pg. 105-106.)

"Thirteen Days does not have much to say about the needs and frustrations of subordinate officials. It is a personal memoir and its author viewed the scene from a position close to the top. But the authors of this Afterword have heard in vivid detail the complaints of those below, also their hopes and plans" (Thirteen Days, pg. 132.)

"Yet from the start of our development under the Constitution, Presidents have sent troops into battle without declarations of war. This has occurred quite regularly since Thomas Jefferson dispatched marines against the Barbary pirates. Moreover, of the conflicts known to us as 'wars,' three of the four most costly-measured by both life and money - have been undeclared: the Civil War, the Korean War, and now Vietnam. Had war begun in October 1962, its aftermath, perforce, would also have been undeclared" (Thirteen Days, pg. 139-140.)

"What does this reading of the recent past suggest about division of warmaking powers between President and Congress? For a nuclear crisis it is hard to fault the balance struck in 1962, tipped all the way toward the President in an Ex Comm. Secrecy, flexibility, uncertainty, and urgency-each alone makes a strong argument.

Representation for essential interests underlines it. Together these impel the view that when a nuclear exchange impends, formal Congressional participation is not only inconvenient, but impracticable. In the missile crisis, if presidential decision had escalated to nuclear war, Congressional ratification would have been a mockery, or moot. Here, the President is, and probably remains, the nation's Final Arbiter" (Thirteen Days, pg. 145.)

"Finally, what of unintended side effects? These are the bane of constitutional reforms adopted to keep some contemporary problem from ever occurring again. The Twentieth Amendment is a classic case. In order to avoid, forevermore, the crisis that ensued in the four months from FDR's election to inaugural, we so shortened the learning time for Presidents-elect as to invite fiascos like the Bay of Pigs" (Thirteen Days, pg. 149.)

Topics for Discussion

Contrast the depiction of Generals Maxwell Taylor and Curtis LeMay during the crisis and why civilian control of the military is necessary.

What is Robert F. Kennedy's relationship with Anatoly Dobrynin? Is Dobrynin's contention that Khrushchev dupes him as well believable?

How does Adelai Stevenson contribute to resolving the crisis?

How does Pearl Harbor affect the crisis?

How does the Bay of Pigs shape the thirteen days in October?

How does Barbara Tuchman's The Guns of August figure in the crisis?

What is JFK's "gutsiest" decision?