Document D and Commentary

[For the Executive Committee of the National Security Council]

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Deputy Under Secretary
G/PM

TOP SECRET [Declassified November 20, 1981]

MEMORANDUM October 27, 1962

SUBJECT The Military Significance of the Soviet Missile Bases in Cuba

1 The presence of 24 1,020 n m MRBM launchers and 12 or 16 2,200 n m IRBM launchers in Cuba provides a significant accretion to Soviet strategic capabilities for striking the continental United States In view of the relatively limited numbers of Soviet operational ICBM launchers—at present an estimated 75—the missiles in the Caribbean will increase the first-strike missile salvo which the USSR could place on targets in the continental United States by over 40 percent

2 At present, 20 of the 24 MRBM launchers are believed to be fully operational, and the remaining four will be within a few days The first 4 IRBM launchers will probably reach emergency capability by November 15, and full operational status on December 1 The 8 other confirmed IRBM launchers will probably reach emergency capability by December 1, and be fully operational by December 15 An additional four IRBM launchers will probably be completed, but it is possible that the quarantine has stopped them The current threat is thus 24 MRBMs, by December it will—unless construction is effectively stopped within a month—be augmented by at least 12 and up to 16 IRBMs Each launcher is assumed to have the standard two missiles, allowing one reload (for refire in 4–6 hours) In at least one of the nine bases more missiles than launchers have been positively confirmed, and in general the number of identified MRBM missiles at least is sufficient to man all the launchers for an initial strike Earth-covered bunkers suitable for storage or checkout of nuclear weapons are under rapid construction, and at least two of them now appear to be complete There is one such bunker for each pair of launch sites

3 The strategic significance of the Cuban missile complex is due not only to the substantial quantitative increase in megatons deliverable in a surprise first strike, but also by their effect on the US deterrent striking force Approximately 40 percent of the SAC bomber force is now located

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on air bases within range of Soviet MRBMs in Cuba and almost all of it is in range of the IRBMs If the present base complex in Cuba is completed late in 1962, and taking into account the estimated Soviet ICBM force for the end of 1962, a Soviet attack without warning could destroy an appreciably larger proportion of over-all United States strategic capability than it could if the Cuban complex were not included The number of US *weapons* surviving and ready to retaliate on targets in the USSR would be decreased by about 30 percent, and would thus leave only about 15 percent of the number in our pre-attack force This force could still cause considerable destruction in a US retaliatory strike, the Soviets could not rely on the degree of surprise assumed in the above calculation and it is very unlikely that the Soviets would be tempted toward resort to war by the change in the military balance Nonetheless, this represents a serious dilution of US strategic deterrent capability

4 The reasons for the strategic significance of the Cuban bases are (a) the size of the Soviet ICBM force does *not* allow coverage of SAC bomber bases and soft ICBM sites, the addition of the MRBM/IRBM force already on the island of Cuba *does* permit coverage of *all* such points, thus bringing under fire an *additional* 26 US ICBMs and over 100 B-47s, (b) the Cuban based missile systems have high reliability (80 percent), accuracy (1 to 1 5 n m CEP), and warhead yield (up to 3 megatons each for the MRBMs, and up to 5 megatons for the IRBMs), (c) the United States does not have BMEWS or other early warning radar on the southern approaches and (d) as taken into account earlier, many SAC bomber bases are concentrated in the South and Midwest

5 All of the discussion above is concerned with the missile complex now being completed in Cuba There is no reason why the Soviets could not, if unimpeded by an effective quarantine, literally multiply the number of launchers to a force large enough to threaten the entire strategic balance of power The Soviets have deployed over 500 MRBMs and IRBMs on their own territory, and the lesser cost compared to ICBMs would make a major expansion in Cuba very attractive

Raymond L Garthoff
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Enclosure 2

ADC HISTORICAL STUDY NO. 15

THE AIR DEFENSE COMMAND IN THE CUBAN CRISIS

OCTOBER-DECEMBER 1962

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THE ATLANTIC COMMAND

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USCONARC PARTICIPATION IN THE CUBAN CRISIS 1962 (U)

BY

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