Panel: “CIA and the Cold War”

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Title: “To the Brink: Turkish and Cuban Missiles during the Height of the Cold War”
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Abstract

The events of the Cuban Missile Crisis, during which the Cold War between the American and Soviet superpowers nearly went hot, were, according to some historians, “the most perilous in the planet’s history” and the closest belligerent forces have ever come to engaging in mutual thermonuclear conflict. The thirteen days of the crisis—which took place during the latter half of October, 1962—hallmarked the placating, diplomatic intentions of the American and Soviet heads of state and showed that cooperation between capitalists and communists could occur in the interests of the preservation of their respective systems and states. The progress of the situation was publicized to the nations of both superpowers, with frequent updates in newspapers, radio broadcasts, and television features, but the diffusion of the Soviet-American tensions around Cuban shores was not won precisely the way public media announced. Negotiations involving nuclear missiles stationed by NATO in Turkey had been key to the rise of the crisis, and were an important bargaining chip in the diplomatic course elected by American President John F. Kennedy and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, a secret which was held by both parties for over twenty years. This presentation will take a closer look at the missiles placed in Turkey and at their roles in both igniting and diffusing the situation. The Cuban Missile Crisis hosted benefits for the different states involved: Cuba was promised to not be invaded by the United States again. Turkey received stronger protection via ICBMs. The Soviet Union no longer needed to fear nuclear missiles coming from Turkey. Likewise, the United States no longer needed to fear nuclear missiles coming from Cuba. The situation took relations between the Soviet and American heads of state to a high and fostered mutual understanding between the two leaders; both states had been willing to grant concessions in favor of the other, perhaps opening a new doorway to the mollification of American-Soviet relations. But with President John F. Kennedy’s assassination thirteen months after the Cuban Missile Crisis, and Premier Nikita Khrushchev’s removal the following year, this new passage of understanding was transient at best, and hopes of a mutual movement to ease the Cold War ended with the respective administrations. It is impossible to speculate what would have happened had the two heads of state remained in office. Perhaps more understandings between the United States and Soviet Union would have transpired; perhaps not. Such speculations cannot rewrite history, and after the crisis in Cuba, there would be another quarter of a century until the Cold War would end, and tensions between the American and Russian nations have yet to fully diffuse.
Bibliographical Note

Because many 1960s documents have been declassified and the Cuban Missile Crisis has received so much international spotlight, there was a plethora of primary and secondary sources for this paper. October 1962 correspondences between Nikita Khrushchev and John F. Kennedy were primarily used, as was former Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy’s memoir of the events. Fifty years after the crisis, the spotlight of historical analysis again shone on the Kennedy administration, providing me with new insight on the situation through the works of Mark White, Jeffrey D. Sachs, and Barton J. Bernstein. Additional secondary sources were written by Michael R. Beschloss, Shane J. Maddock, and Nasuh Uslu.