



**“Roundtable Review: FRUS on the Cuban Missile Crisis” (roundtable discussion),  
*Diplomatic History*, Volume 24, Issue 2 (Spring 2000).**

- [Raymond L. Garthoff, “Documenting the Cuban Missile Crisis”](#)
- [Jorge I. Domínguez, “The @#\\$%& Missile Crisis \(Or, What Was ‘Cuban’ about U.S. Decisions during the Cuban Missile Crisis?\)”](#)
- [Philip Zelikow, “American Policy and Cuba, 1961-1963”](#)

Commentary by **Robert J. Maddox**, Pennsylvania State University, [rjm5@psu.edu](mailto:rjm5@psu.edu)  
*Published by H-Diplo on 2 May 2000*

The comments of all three respondents indicate that this volume has been carefully and skillfully put together. However, the number of errors pointed out (especially by Gartoff) raises the question of how much, if any, vetting by independent scholars takes place in the preparation of this series. Surely the compilers of this volume would have profited from the comments of the three readers before publication. If not already done, H-DIPLO would provide a valuable service to scholars if it would solicit critiques from two or three experts on every volume of FRUS as it appears and have them on an accessible file. These comments should emphasize factual matters, suggest related lines of inquiry, and provide additional bibliography just as the three scholars have done in this case.

A related question is why the microfiche supplements are being discontinued. Budgetary reasons? SHAFR should address this matter, if it hasn't already. Single-volume compilations on important issues may have sufficed in pre-WWII years when only the president, the State Department, and perhaps Treasury were likely to be involved. The multiplicity of organizations having input on foreign policy questions since that time renders such a concept obsolete.

Gartoff's essay is a model of its kind, and is indispensable as a source for those who wish to explore the FRUS volume in depth.

Dominguez shows why independent critiques are necessary to supplement document collections. As he points out, the role of Cuba is conspicuously absent in this volume because of the Kennedy administration's insistence that negotiations would be conducted only with the Soviet Union. Kennedy's attitude towards Castro simply closed off avenues that should have been explored. The hijinks of the CIA during this period--dropping balloons filled with leaflets, sabotaging sawmills--seems straight out of a Peter Sellers' movie.

Zelikow provides an excellent context within which the missile crisis developed--something that can only be teased out of the documents themselves. It is all too easy to bash the actors in a situation for not knowing what we know now. A proper appreciation of the assumptions and uncertainties within which decisions were made in another era is crucial to understanding why things happened the way they did (as opposed to assigning blame, which some historians seem intent on doing as though they were awarding grades).

All three scholars have performed a valuable service.

Robert J. Maddox

---

**Copyright © 2000-2004 by H-Diplo, all rights reserved.** H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For other uses contact the H-Diplo Article Discussion Co-ordinator, George Fujii, [gfuji@umail.ucsb.edu](mailto:gfuji@umail.ucsb.edu).

---