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Reviewed by **Don Munton**, University of Northern British Columbia¹

The phrase "thirteen days" will forever be associated with the Cuban missile crisis. The fable that the crisis ran its course in the latter half of October 1962 began with Bobby Kennedy's book *Thirteen Days* and resurfaced with the recent Kevin Costner movie of the same name. It finds reinforcement in such scholarly contributions as *The Kennedy Tapes*, which covers thirteen days, plus one.² David Coleman challenges this fable. The October crisis, Coleman emphasizes, became a November and December crisis, and the "domestic political subtext ... played out long after the famous fortnight" (6).

Coleman seeks to explore "how the Kennedy administration assessed the 'known risk' posed by the Soviet short-range missiles in Cuba and the associated combat troops, particularly during the post-crisis settlement period." The risks he examines were thus both political and military. President John F. Kennedy faced a domestic political problem after Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev withdrew the missiles not unrelated to the criticisms domestic opponents directed at his Cuba policies before American intelligence discovered the offensive missile sites. Rightfully in my view, Coleman underscores the influence of domestic American politics on presidential decision making, during and after the crises. He also argues the president accepted "a degree of permanent military risk" (8) in deciding "Soviet troops in Cuba armed with dual-use tactical missiles" could stay in Cuba. Coleman arguably suggests even more, hinting at the possibility these missiles may have had a deterrent effect on President Kennedy. I will mainly examine the latter two points.

¹ I am grateful to David Welch and Costina Keresztesi for comments on an earlier draft.

² Ernest May and Philip Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1997.

The attention Coleman draws to the “other” missiles is useful and welcome. (Stephen Twigge and Len Scott would likely suggest we refer to the tactical nuclear weapons in Cuba as the “*other, other, other*” missiles.³) To be sure, the presence of various short-range missile systems there in 1962 is now a well known part of the story. Less-well appreciated perhaps is the fact many of the short-range weapon systems remained in Cuba not only after the Kennedy-Khrushchev negotiations resolved the fate of the MBRMs Moscow had deployed there, but also beyond the post-thirteen days period of November and December 1962, and apparently for years to come. As familiar as we might be with these facts, we still refer to Khrushchev withdrawing “*the* missiles” – a convenient but misleading shorthand Coleman would want us to abandon.⁴

Coleman brings to his task an intimate knowledge of the available evidence from his position as deputy director of the Presidential Recordings project, and is clearly willing to challenge some longstanding and important conventional wisdom regarding the missile crisis.

This commentary will focus on two broad elements of Coleman’s presentation.⁵ First, what impact did the short-range missiles in Cuba have on American policies during the “thirteen days” of October and the sixty days that followed? In particular, did they have a deterrent effect on the Kennedy administration? Second, what was their longer-term importance? Did they present “a degree of permanent military risk” as well as a political risk? Coleman’s treatment of these questions is subtle. My answers are not brief.

The short-range missiles the Soviets deployed to Cuba were four basically defensive systems: (i) Luna rockets (U.S. designation - “FROG”); (ii) FKR (*frontovaya krylaya raketa*) cruise missiles; (iii) Sopka missiles (U.S. designation - SSC-2B Samlet); and (iv) sophisticated V-75 surface-to-air missiles or SAMs (U.S. designation – SA-2). The USSR also provided Cuba with 42 IL-28 light bombers, some of which could carry nuclear gravity bombs. The well-known SAM/V-75s, with conventional warheads, were a major threat to U-2 spy planes and potentially to other American aircraft, if Kennedy ordered air strikes against Cuban targets. One of these SAMs shot down a U-2 on 27 October, killing the pilot

³ Stephen Twigge and Len Scott, “The Other Other Missiles of October: The Thor IRBMs and the Cuban Missile Crisis” <http://www.ihr.sas.ac.uk/publications/notesart3.html>.

⁴ As an aside, I would suggest scholars best avoid the terms “retreat” and “backed down” in reference to Khrushchev’s decision to withdraw the MRBMs (Coleman, 23). This is language reminiscent of media coverage from October 1962, and of the first generation of writings about the crisis. Given our understanding of the role the Kennedy-Khrushchev negotiations played, however, and of the American concessions offered, it is arguably misleading language. To be sure, Nikita Khrushchev reversed his decision to deploy the R-12s and R-14s. On the other hand, he did not “back down” from his decision to send Soviet combat troops nor to deploy some tactical missiles. To put the shoe on the other foot, few observers have referred or would refer to Kennedy’s decision in November to withdraw American ships from the blockade lines as a “retreat” let alone so brand his qualified promise not to invade Cuba (albeit a promise later withdrawn) or his withdrawal of Jupiter missiles from Turkey and Italy.

⁵ I will assume readers have a basic but not detailed knowledge of the events surrounding the 1962 crisis.

Rudolf Anderson. The Sopkas were coastal defence missiles armed with relatively small conventional warheads. While they could have been a threat to American invasion ships, or the Navy's spy ships, most observers largely ignore them.

American intelligence never discovered the FKR, apparently unable to differentiate them from the (conventional) Sopka missiles (15, 19).⁶ As a consequence, the FKR was not a factor in American *thinking* and had no independent impact on Kennedy administration decisions.⁷ Coleman's main focus is thus the Lunas which he describes rightly as the most controversial. Along with the FKRs, and the offensive missiles, the Lunas could potentially turn the conflict over Soviet deployments to Cuba into a general nuclear war.

The Luna was "similar to" the U.S. Honest John, a first generation, unguided rocket (technically, not a missile). Like its American counterpart, the Luna could carry either a conventional or atomic warhead.⁸ The U.S. Honest John was not only inaccurate but also notoriously, even wildly, unreliable in its basic flight pattern, more so in fact than its liquid-fuelled predecessor, the Lacrosse. Switching to the Honest John, the U.S. Army (and NATO) got mobility at the cost of reduced accuracy. For optimal if not merely reasonable performance, the Honest John required a preparation period of one to two days prior to firing. (NATO forces learned they had to warm up its solid fuel to a certain temperature and do so slowly using a sort of electric blanket wrapped around the rocket.)⁹ Operational problems in using Honest Johns in Europe were thus considerable, quite apart from the question of destroying significant parts of West Germany in the effort to stop a conventional Warsaw Pact attack and in such case being the first to employ nuclear weapons in a conflict. An advancing Soviet column might well not be obliging enough to stop and wait, preferably in a concentrated formation ten to twenty miles away, until NATO forces could ready and fire their Honest Johns. Moreover, rockets being readied were sitting ducks to an air attack.

⁶ A February 1963 report to the president from director John McCone assessing the Central Intelligence Agency's performance during the crisis thus wrongly claimed that "every major weapons system introduced into Cuba by the Soviets was detected, identified and reported" (Mary McAuliffe, ed., *CIA Documents on the Cuban Missile Crisis*, Washington, 1992, 375).

⁷ Coleman outlines the available American intelligence on the Soviet coastal defence missile sites in Cuba during early September 1962 and updates the information as of February 1963 (19). In the same paragraph, he then says that 80 nuclear warheads for these missiles were in Cuba "at the time." That phrase is ambiguous but appears incorrect as applied to either time frame. The detailed information provided by Fursenko and Naftali suggests the relevant tactical warheads had not in fact arrived by September. And, they all were gone by the end of 1962.

⁸ Some sources identify the Luna as simply a "nuclear missile" (for example, May and Zelikow, 475).

⁹ Thomas B. Cochran, William M. Arkin, and Milton M. Hoenig, *Nuclear Weapons Databook*, Cambridge, MA, Ballinger, 1984, 280-83. For a photograph of a NATO Honest John in its "electric blanket" see Sean Maloney, "The Canadian Army and Tactical Nuclear Weapons, 1955-1962" *Canadian Defence Quarterly*, January 1994.

The Lunas had some of the same problems and were, according to American estimates, even less reliable than the Honest Johns. To be sure, a Luna atomic warhead carried considerable clout, and would have been a formidable threat to an invasion force if a Luna missile were fired and proved reasonably accurate. Those however are big ifs. American air attacks would likely have destroyed some rockets before launching. By the law of averages, at least some of those fired would have landed well wide of their intended targets. A conventional Luna would have had even more limited operational effectiveness in Cuba. The purposes for which the Soviet military intended their Lunas seem unclear. While some observers say they were to protect Cuban soil against an invasion force, others suggest their role was to protect the MRBM sites.

Despite recent declassifications, existing public sources are not entirely consistent or clear on the deployment numbers for the Lunas and other systems. Some of the discrepancies seem to be due to the differences between the numbers of weapons included in deployment proposals and those Khrushchev decided to send versus the numbers that actually left the USSR, arrived in Cuba, and got deployed, respectively.

Coleman states the Soviets deployed 36 Lunas to Cuba, the total provided not only in the single source he cites but also in such others as Fursenko and Naftali's *One Hell of a Gamble* and Gribkov and Smith's *Operation Anadyr*.¹⁰ These overall numbers are higher than those May and Zelikow offered in *The Kennedy Tapes*, for example, and higher than those David Welch and I cited in *The Cuban Missile Crisis: A Concise History*.¹¹ Given the weight of evidence, I suspect Coleman has the correct figures - 36 Lunas in Cuba, twelve of which were a version with an atomic warhead.

Coleman sometimes moves back and forth between references to "nuclear warheads" and references to dual-capable or nuclear-capable missiles - without emphasizing that such missiles do not necessarily carry such warheads. And more of the Lunas in Cuba in the fall of 1962 clearly could not or did not have such warheads than did. The presence of the tactical warheads in Cuba was moreover very brief. They only arrived in mid-October and may have remained on their transport ship. Khrushchev ordered all tactical nuclear warheads removed in November, and they were gone by the end of December.

The November withdrawal order included the twelve atomic warheads for the Lunas. On 26 December U.S. surveillance planes photographed ten Luna transporters on a pier at the port of Mariel, suggesting the Soviet military withdrew the nuclear-capable versions of the

¹⁰ Aleksander Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble*, New York, Norton, 1997; General Anatoli Gribkov and General William Y. Smith, *Operation Anadyr*, Chicago, edition q, 1994. References in *One Hell* to twelve Lunas are to those assumed to be nuclear capable.

¹¹ May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes*; Munton and Welch, *The Cuban Missile Crisis: A Concise History*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2007.

rocket itself at roughly the same time as the warheads. The remaining 24 conventionally armed Lunas apparently remained in Cuba for some time.¹²

Coleman's title ("The Missiles of November, December, January, February ...") implies not only that various short-range missiles remained in Cuba, which they did, but also that they represented the same capabilities and same threat through 1963 as in fall 1962, which they did not. Conventional Lunas did not pose the same risks as nuclear-armed Lunas.

To return to the first of Coleman's two main points, why were the short-range missiles important? He acknowledges the fact that "no hard evidence has come to light" that Soviet short-range nuclear weapons in Cuba deterred President Kennedy from ordering an air attack or invasion (46). To most readers most of the time, such a statement would suggest an author was accepting the null hypothesis. Coleman, however, seems unwilling to dismiss the idea simply for lack of currently available confirmatory sources.

He implies the absence of such "hard evidence" should not be surprising. After all, Kennedy made a "remarkable confession" when he later told a group of advisors that "what [the Soviets] had in Cuba alone would have been a substantial deterrent to me" (46). Given the extent to which officials, experts and others debated nuclear deterrence during the 1960s, both in public forum and in secret meetings, it is not clear why the president's private "confession" was so "remarkable." If Kennedy's comment was at least unusual, however, then that would help to make the case, implicitly, that we are unlikely to find hard evidence of deterrence in action.

Coleman then goes on to show that Kennedy was generally worried that use of tactical nuclear weapons might escalate into a general nuclear exchange with strategic weapons. He does not explicitly conclude that the president's concerns about the slipperiness of graduated response explain any decisions during the missile crisis, especially ones related to the short-range weapons, but the implication is there for readers to contemplate. While so contemplating, we need to recall such Kennedy concerns did not halt NATO deployment of tactical nuclear weapons. Nor, to offer another example, did it stop Kennedy himself from pressuring allies such as Canada, after October 1962, to add Honest John rockets to their forces in Europe. The president's concerns seems to have been less a determining belief than a reflection of the contradictions of nuclear strategy and the nuclear age.

To repeat, Coleman does not explicitly argue that Soviet short-range missiles deterred Kennedy from taking more forceful military action in Cuba, particularly an invasion. He does come very close to making that case however, and certainly seems to think the possibility was there. "If Kennedy at some point ordered an invasion of the island" Coleman notes, "U.S. troops might well be entering a nuclear battlefield." Fair enough, but

¹² We do not find out from Coleman (or other sources) answers to a number of questions related to the short-range weaponry in Cuba. Did all the nuclear armed Lunas go back to the USSR in December, along with the warheads? What became of the conventional-armed ones that remained? How long did they stay in Cuba? Given that the warheads for the FKR's also went back, what became of these missiles? And what of the Skopas?

he also emphasizes that invasion was “an option that was still on the table” (5). He further asserts the Kennedy administration was aware of the short-range weapons, assumed these weapons were nuclear-armed, and was thus very concerned about them. In other words, the sufficient conditions were all there to dissuade the president from ordering an invasion. If all that were true, then we would definitely need to give the Lunas greater pride of place in our understanding of the missile crisis’ extended version.

Most of these points, though, seem to me at least debatable. What evidence there is for most of them is not particularly strong. I will look here at four key elements: (i) that the Kennedy administration learned early on about the Lunas, (ii) that American officials assumed the Luna rockets were nuclear armed, (iii) that the administration was greatly concerned about them and the other tactical weapons in Cuba, and (iv) that an invasion was “at the time” a genuinely live option. If all these claims are valid, then we might have a strong case for concluding the Lunas had a deterrent effect. Even if Coleman is not suggesting such a deterrent effect, we can still examine these as key points in his article.

Coleman states “the Lunas’ nuclear capability attracted the attention of U.S. analysts and policymakers *from the start*” (13, emphasis added). Presumably “the start” means, not August or September, nor the onset of the thirteen days, but the point at which American intelligence became aware of Lunas. American intelligence reported on 19 October “several” unconfirmed “refugee” reports suggesting to the CIA the presence of Lunas (FROGs).¹³ Since the nuclear-capable Lunas did not leave the USSR until early October,¹⁴ it is almost certain these apparent sightings, if they were in fact of Lunas, were sightings of a conventional version. Hard evidence of the Lunas’ presence did not come until a full week later. Low-level U.S. reconnaissance planes first photographed a Luna launcher on 25 October. After photo-interpreters positively identified the equipment intelligence officials may have reported the finding orally to the president on 26 October. A written intelligence report dated 27 October briefly mentions the launcher and compares the Luna rocket to the Honest John.¹⁵

¹³ Coleman refers to a CIA report on 19 October 1962 warning that “refugee reports indicated that Luna rockets were in Cuba” (21). This phrasing may be too definitive a word for a number of reasons. First, the report in question actually states “There are several refugee reports indicating the presence of tactical (FROG) missiles in Cuba, although there is no photographic confirmation thus far” (“Joint Evaluation of Soviet Missile Threat in Cuba,” 19 October 1962, in McAuliffe, ed., *CIA Documents on the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 203-8). There is no elaboration on the “refugee” reports. Second, Cuban “refugees” (if that is indeed what they were) more likely provided a rough description than the exact name used by the Soviet military. It should also be kept in mind that the CIA had received hundreds of reports about missiles in Cuba dating back years, and that the vast majority of them proved inaccurate. It is possible but not likely that Lunas and R-12s would be confused. The various versions of Lunas were all around 9 meters long, while the R-12s were 22 meters long.

¹⁴ Fursenko and Naftali, *One Hell*, 210.

¹⁵ “Supplement 7 to Joint Evaluation of Soviet Missile Threat in Cuba,” 27 October 1962, in McAuliffe, ed., *CIA Documents on the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 323-5.

October 27 was the same day President Kennedy dispatched his brother Robert to meet again with Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin, to insist the Soviets withdraw the R-12s and, if necessary, to offer up the Jupiter missiles in Turkey. The following day, of course, Khrushchev accepted the offer and announced withdrawal of the MRBMs. In short, Kennedy and his advisors did not learn about the Lunas until virtually the end of the October “crisis” period.

Second, is it the case that administration officials “singled [the Lunas] out for special attention” (13)? The evidence for this assertion is not strong. The first reported sightings of Luna rockets do not appear to have attracted much if any attention, either on the part of American intelligence or ExComm officials. Coleman acknowledges that neither the presidential recordings nor White House meeting minutes indicate any “follow-up” discussion about the Lunas in the second half of the thirteen days (21). Given the seriousness of the direct MRBM threat, it is perhaps not surprising the ExComm did not dwell on the possible short-range problem.

In his 26 October intelligence briefing to the president, based on the low-level reconnaissance photos from the day before, CIA Director John McCone spent most of his time talking about the MRBM threat. May and Zelikow suggest that a still-classified, 38 second long section in the White House tape for this session is likely about the Luna pictures. Assuming they are correct, McCone affords the discovery of the launcher only passing reference.¹⁶ (If the 38 second clip was not about the Luna, then McCone does not even mention the discovery in the oral briefing.) After the 38 seconds of classified material, McCone’s discussion with Kennedy returned almost immediately to the readiness of the MRBM sites and the difficulties of destroying them with an American air strike.

The subsequent 27 October joint intelligence report mentioned the Luna discovery but briefly.¹⁷ The main underlying concern of that report, as for earlier ones, is the MRBMs. The two sentences about the Luna discovery, toward the end of the report, do not mention the earlier sightings, and the agencies apparently attached no particular significance to the Luna evidence.

In sum, neither the president nor the intelligence agencies gave the Luna discovery much prominence in October, nor expressed much concern about it.¹⁸ The timing worked against any such focus. The Luna confirmation came a week after an ExComm consensus developed in favour of a blockade (and thus in favour of putting off a limited air strike let alone an invasion), days after the president decided on the blockade and announced it, and

¹⁶ Ernest May and Philip Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes*, 474-6. Coleman states the briefing definitely referred to Lunas (12).

¹⁷ “Supplement 7” in McAuliffe, ed., *CIA Documents on the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 323-5.

¹⁸ It is not apparent from Coleman’s evidence that the Lunas gained much greater prominence in November.

after he began to pursue a diplomatic solution to the crisis. And, therefore, knowledge of the Lunas obviously did not influence these crucial decisions.

Third, did Kennedy and his advisors “always” (42) assume the Lunas in particular were nuclear armed? If they did so, then it would be more likely that the short-range rockets could have had some deterrent effect, presumably in November, independent of the deterrent impact of the longer-range missiles. While Coleman strongly argues that the administration did believe the Lunas were nuclear armed, there is again room for debate.

About two points there is no ambiguity. First, American intelligence never found hard evidence of tactical atomic warheads for the Lunas or nuclear bombs for the IL-28 bombers (or, for that matter, warheads for the R-12s and R-14s). Second, the ExComm and Kennedy did assume the Soviets had nuclear warheads for the MRBMs in Cuba. The R-12s though were not dual-use; they always carried nuclear warheads. The assumption was not merely prudent but thoroughly reasonable. On the other hand, since the Lunas could be either conventional or nuclear, the same assumption in their case was not the only one possible or necessarily the reasonable one.

Various former Kennedy administration officials claim they did not assume the short-range weapons had atomic warheads. Raymond Garthoff has stated he and his colleagues were aware of the possibility that the Soviet military might have such warheads and bombs in Cuba for the dual-capable Lunas and IL-28s, but that “few if any in Washington really believed there were tactical nuclear warheads in Cuba” (42). Robert McNamara seconded this view: “We didn’t know they were there” (42).

In a bold assertion, Coleman disputes these participants’ claims. While acknowledging that there was an “inevitable uncertainty” about the presence of nuclear warheads and allowing that “it may be impossible to say for certain” he argues that “new evidence from declassified documents and presidential recordings suggests ... U.S. officials always made a strong nuclear presumption” in the case of the Lunas” [42]. The evidence, new and old, that Coleman presents here seems to me less than persuasive.

Coleman first cites various former officials, including Dean Rusk, as saying they assumed there *were* nuclear warheads in Cuba. Most if not all of these statements appear to apply to warheads for the MRBMs. None of these statements relates directly and explicitly to the short-range rockets. While it is possible that the Kennedy administration officials making these statements did believe the nuclear weapons in Cuba included Luna warheads, and they simply failed to refer specifically to the Lunas in their comments, it is at least as likely that they failed to specify that they were referring to nuclear warheads for the R-12s.

The early intelligence reports also do not support the argument that American officials generally and “always” assumed the presence of atomic warheads for the short-range

rockets. Neither the first intelligence reference to the possibility of Lunas in Cuba nor the follow-up report make reference to the rocket having nuclear capability.¹⁹

There is no question, on the other hand, that discovery of the Lunas prompted the Joint Chiefs to alter their planning for a possible invasion during early November. They requested approval for including American tactical nuclear weapons in their invasion force. That, however, is not proof of any certainty; it was reasonable military contingency planning. That the administration approved including delivery vehicles but did not authorize nuclear warheads in the invasion equipment suggests the civilian decision makers and the military did not see “eyeball to eyeball” on this matter.

Coleman further notes U.S. officials did not “contest the claim” made in a newspaper article that Lunas “could be armed with nuclear warheads” (43). It is unclear why any responsible official would have ventured to contest that claim. To do so would be to argue the Lunas *could not be* so armed when it was widely understood they could be – as any reader of *Jane’s* might discover. The point was not whether the short-range rockets were nuclear-capable; the point was whether they were in fact nuclear-armed.

Coleman also suggests the Lunas were so inaccurate, and thus so ineffective as conventional weapons, that the Kennedy administration essentially *must have* concluded they were nuclear-armed. He further states “the very reason for [the Lunas] *existence* in the first place” was that they represented a nuclear capability (emphasis added). While I am not a nuclear hardware historian, this claim seems suspect. The origins of the Luna aside, it is a considerable leap to go from the known presence of a rocket that was sometimes equipped with atomic warheads (and sometimes not) to the conclusion that American officials “always” assumed it was so equipped in Cuba. That case, which is suspect in the absence of genuine evidence, fails on logical grounds.

The “most intriguing evidence of all” (44) that the Kennedy administration assumed the presence of atomic warheads for the Lunas is apparently to be found in a 29 October discussion the president had with Marine Commander David Shoup and Admiral George Anderson. To Coleman, the exchange suggests “Kennedy and the JCS took seriously the problem of tactical nuclear weapons in Cuba and were thinking hard about the grave risks those weapons would pose” (44). To me, the exchange falls well short of conclusive evidence that the president was in fact assuming the Lunas were nuclear-armed. It does suggest both a difference of views, especially between Shoup and the president, and perhaps even an absence of “hard thought” about the short-range weapons.²⁰

¹⁹ “Joint Evaluation of Soviet Missile Threat in Cuba,” in McAuliffe, ed., *CIA Documents on the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 208; “Supplement 7” in McAuliffe, ed., *CIA Documents on the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 323-5.

²⁰ The transcript of this conversation in May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes*, 654-8, differs to some extent from the version used by Coleman, based on Coleman and Timothy Naftali, eds, *The Presidential Recordings: John F. Kennedy*, Volume 4, New York, Norton, forthcoming. The actual recording apparently did not cover the whole briefing.

Shoup expressed concern (though he was apparently not prone to using full sentences) that the Soviets might use their tactical weapons, particularly against the American base at Guantánamo. Kennedy's worries, on the other hand, seem different. "The decision to use any kind of nuclear weapon," he says, "even the tactical ones, presents such a risk of it getting out of control so quickly" The president may be referring to the Lunas in Cuba, or he may be referring to tactical nuclear weapons in general. He may be arguing here that such a Soviet attack is unlikely, that an American nuclear response would be highly dangerous, or that any American preventive attack against Soviet forces in Cuba would risk escalation, or a combination of these. We know Kennedy was concerned about the risk of nuclear escalation, and he may also have been implying Khrushchev might have similar concerns.

The meeting moved directly from the president's response above to the general problem of control over the firing of nuclear weapons (the "keys") and then to Berlin (and was preceded by references to an upcoming Navy college football game). This particular discussion was thus not one focused on nuclear or atomic weapons in Cuba. It does not provide conclusive evidence of presidential concern about short-range rockets in Cuba. Kennedy, moreover, was not obviously agreeing with Shoup.

In the months after October 1962, the JCS repeatedly advocated the resumption of low-level surveillance flights over Cuba. The Kennedy White House rejected these requests. It feared more the possibility that the Cubans might shoot down an American reconnaissance plane and reignite the crisis. This rejection confirms that the administration did not share the chiefs' concerns, or at the very least did not perceive the short-range missile risk to be so great as to outweigh others.

Against this modest assortment of evidence offered by Coleman as to the importance Kennedy afforded the Lunas, stands a significant and rather anomalous fact. As the Soviets were speedily withdrawing the R-12s following Khrushchev's 28 October announcement, the Kennedy administration was drawing up a list of the other weapon systems that Washington wanted the Soviets to withdraw. The question of whether or not the Lunas should be on the list came up at administration meetings in early November. While the first version of the American list included "nuclear warheads," the final version of the list, eventually handed to the Soviets at the United Nations, did not include withdrawal of the Lunas. As Robert McNamara has acknowledged, "We didn't ask for it.

If Kennedy and his advisors believed the Soviets had tactical atomic or nuclear weapons in Cuba, and became as concerned about them as Coleman suggests, then why did they not ask the Soviets in November to remove them, along with the IL-28 bombers? Why at least was there not more discussion about such a request? Once again, the administration's actions imply a relatively benign perception of the Lunas.

The argument for rethinking the importance of the short-range rockets and missiles in Cuba rests ultimately on the likelihood of an American invasion. When and in what sense was an invasion "on the table" (Coleman 5)? To be sure, an invasion was never impossible. Kennedy could in theory have ordered one as a first response, on discovery of the Soviet R-

12 missile sites; as a follow-up to a blockade that proved unsuccessful in forcing Moscow to dismantle the missile sites; as a follow-up to an air strike against SAM sites and R-12s; or even after the Soviets removed the R-12s as a response to their refusal to remove weapons other than the medium range missiles. After the Bay of Pigs failure, the Cubans and Soviets expected a full-scale American invasion and some allies of the United States feared one as well.

Was an invasion “on the table” for the Kennedy administration in the sense of a likely alternative, let alone a preferred option, the pros and cons of which the ExComm debated? I would argue it was not, given what we now know about White House decision making in fall 1962. Invasion was useful as a threat, particularly because the Soviets and Cubans thought it highly likely. And the president thus ordered the U.S. military to prepare for it. An invasion of Cuba however was never a likely or preferred response let alone a choice nearly made by the president. While he raised the idea on occasion, as the ultimate alternative if diplomacy failed, he was debating with himself and his advisors when he did so more than he was revealing inclinations to order it. We need to recall that Kennedy’s fall-back, should Khrushchev and his colleagues not accept the secret deal he offered, was to make a public deal with Soviet leader to remove the Jupiters, and perhaps the Thor missiles in the United Kingdom.

After 28 October, and as the crisis wore on, invasion became a less likely not more likely option. It was a worst-case fall-back position from day one of the thirteen days, and became a remote possibility by November. Compared to diplomatic options of dealing with the bomber problem, the idea of an invasion was at most a hope in the hearts of a few hardliners. It is almost inconceivable that Kennedy would have ordered an invasion of Cuba over the issue of the IL-28s bombers or, say, the Lunas.

We should not attribute too much significance to the fact that the American military was in November still gearing up for an invasion. The preparations underway were part of a contingency plan and a reflection of the inevitable delays in implementing the earlier decision to begin preparing for a possible invasion.

Even if we set aside these questions about the importance of the Lunas for President Kennedy and his key advisors, there are at least two nagging problems with any argument that the rockets provided a significant deterrent effect.²¹

The first problem is one of timing, or lack of time. Following from the principle that weaponry of which we are unaware cannot deter us, the period during which nuclear-armed Luna rockets could have had a deterrent effect was extremely brief. The Central Intelligence Agency informed the president of the discovery of the Luna launcher on 26 or 27 October. Kennedy accepted repeated Soviet assurances in mid-November that they had withdrawn all their nuclear weapons. (He also accepted Soviet assurances that they had

²¹ Given that American intelligence never identified the FKR in Cuba, their presence could not play any role in deterring President Kennedy.

removed all of the 42 R-12s deployed to Cuba, even though American intelligence had counted only 33 transporters heading back to the USSR.) The Soviets had not in fact removed the nuclear warheads for the short-range tactical nuclear weapons in Cuba by that date. Kennedy did not know the truth, however, and apparently never questioned Moscow's word. (As noted earlier, Khrushchev did have the tactical nuclear warheads out of Cuba by the end of December.) Intelligence reports in early 1963 suggesting the possible presence in Cuba of tactical nuclear weapons (Coleman, 35) do not appear to have shaken the Kennedy administration's trust in Soviet assurances. In short, the period during which the presence of atomic Lunas could possibly have deterred American actions was only about three weeks, mostly in November 1962.

A second problem with inferring a Luna deterrent effect is that we would be trying to gauge their marginal impact. We cannot divorce them from the context in Cuba, not only the presence of the MRBMs but also the existence of Castro's army and militia, the strength of which Washington recognized post-Bay of Pigs.²² Moreover, Soviet troops now provided significant back up. From day one, Kennedy and his key advisors were demonstrably worried about the readiness of the R-12s and their capability to inflict horrific damage to the United States. The Soviet leaders had earlier threatened to defend Cuba with nuclear weapons, and Kennedy could not be sure they would not make good on their promise and fire the R-12 missiles, come an American air attack let alone an invasion. The president also had to consider the almost inevitably heavy casualties Cuban and Soviet troops would have inflicted upon an American invasion force, even if the Soviets had not used short-range atomic missiles. Close Kennedy friend and British ambassador David Ormsby-Gore had also warned the president of the extraordinary post-invasion difficulties of occupying a hostile country – if Kennedy even needed reminding on that score.

In short, the MRBMs and the conventional forces in Cuba were a more than adequate deterrent to any invasion proposal. However much worried about the Lunas, Kennedy would arguably still have chosen a blockade and diplomacy over the direct and full scale military action that might have prompted the use of tactical nuclear weapons.

What then were the risks of the short-range weapons *after* January 1963? Coleman highlights the post-post-crisis political controversy in the United States about actual or possible warheads and missiles in Cuba, both short-range and longer range. He explicates well Kennedy's willingness to assume domestic political risks in accepting the presence of Soviet forces and short-range (conventionally armed) missiles.

Coleman does not deal with the parallel Washington speculation that the president had traded away American missiles in Turkey and Italy in order to get Soviet missiles out of Cuba, nor does he contrast the secrecy maintained on that matter with the willingness to acknowledge the presence of Soviet troops and the short-range missiles. What Kennedy secretly dealt away and what he publicly accepted are not unrelated. The combination of

²² As Coleman notes (46), Kennedy himself later acknowledged the missiles in Cuba were a substantial deterrent, apparently a reference to the MRBMs, not the Lunas.

secrecy and outright lies on the deal with Nikita Khrushchev helped ensure Kennedy the acclaim and political boost he needed to withstand charges his administration had been asleep while the Soviets constructed a military outpost mere miles offshore and he had too meekly accepted that result.

Coleman also argues that the president had to face “a degree of permanent military risk in Cuba” (8) given the presence of Soviet combat troops as well as the short-range rockets and cruise missiles. He underscores the point when he concludes Kennedy decided “Soviet troops in Cuba armed with dual-use tactical missiles [sic] was an acceptable risk.” After December 1962, however, there were no atomic warheads for the Lunas in Cuba. Indeed, as noted above, the Soviets probably withdrew the dual-use versions of the Lunas along with the warheads. If so, the remaining ones were conventional (not “dual-use”) versions of the rocket. At the same time, Coleman also appears to accept McGeorge Bundy’s later claim that the Kennedy administration concluded Soviet troops based in Cuba were by themselves not a military risk (48).

Coleman notes that the joint chiefs had two major concerns about the short-range missiles: (i) they represented a threat to the American base at Guantánamo (as Shoup had argued on 29 October) and (ii) Cuba might re-export the missiles to communist subversive groups elsewhere in Latin America (28). From November 1962 through February 1963 the JCS repeatedly shared with the president their fears about short-range Soviet missiles deployed in the hills near Guantánamo. Coleman asserts “they were right to be concerned” since “those missiles were probably nuclear-armed FKR” (24). While we know now that the Soviets had 80 FKRs in Cuba in November and that most if not all of these could carry nuclear warheads, the Joint Chiefs did not have this information at the time.²³ To repeat, American intelligence never identified the FKRs. Taking Coleman’s observation as a retrospective comment, then, is one thing; taking it as a reflection of what American officials knew or should have appreciated at the time would be an error. Moreover, since Moscow withdrew the tactical warheads by the end of December, any missiles still remaining in January and February could not have been nuclear-armed.

Another military risk, which Coleman describes as “the primary concern,” perhaps of the administration generally, was that the continued presence of SA2s, Lunas and other short-range missiles “would provide cover for the rapid reintroduction of strategic weapons” (25). While he neither elaborates nor evaluates this argument, it seems to be at least contentious, especially given the events of August through October and the proven capabilities of American intelligence.

Coleman mentions two other concerns about the continued presence of short-range weapons. Allowing any nuclear-capable weapons to remain in Cuba “would set a bad

²³ Again, given the failure to identify the FKRs, the intelligence the joint chiefs had in November would not have identified them as such. It presumably identified them (possibly incorrectly) as Sopkas. If so, they were therefore conventionally armed “coastal defence missiles” (14). As such, they would have been mainly a threat to American shipping in and out of Guantánamo as well as to ships offshore, and presumably were not an ideal weapon with which to attack Guantánamo itself.

precedent” and it would “create political difficulties” (25). Both suggest a political rather than military appreciation, as with the reasoning behind the November list.

If the administration did not afford the short-range rockets in Cuba much attention, was not overly concerned with them, and was not deterred by them, does it follow that they were therefore unimportant ?

Coleman agrees that the “real risk” of the presence of Soviet short-range nuclear weaponry in Cuba (45) was escalation but plays down the likelihood that the Soviets would have actually used those weapons in Cuba in the event of an invasion. There may not be an inconsistency here, *per se*, but the argument bears examination.

He takes issue with suggestions from various sources, including Roger Hilsman and George Ball, that defending forces might have responded to an American invasion of Cuba with short-range nuclear weapons, an exchange that could have precipitated a general nuclear war. Coleman correctly observes that the Kremlin had not delegated authority to the Soviet commander in Cuba (General Pliyev) to order use of the “special” weapons. Moreover, elite Soviet units exercised “tight ... control” over these weapons (29). The danger of a nuclear exchange, and thus of escalation, was therefore not as high as is often claimed –*assuming*, Coleman adds, that Soviet command and control procedures did not break down and that there was no alteration of orders from Moscow.

Surely, however, we cannot merely assume away either of those possibilities. A failure of Soviet command and control procedures - indeed, a violation of direct orders from Khrushchev - led to the shooting down of the American U2 spy plane on 27 October. A second such failure or violation was by no means unimaginable. Nor was it at all inconceivable that Moscow would change its standing orders to General Pliyev in the event of an imminent American invasion, and give him authority to use whatever means he had available to meet the invasion. In such a situation, it also seems likely Soviet forces would have proceeded as quickly as possible to mate Lunas with their atomic warheads. Certainly the Soviet military would have had all the time it needed and more if American forces, as planned, preceded an invasion by two days of air strikes against the air defence and MRBM sites. No physical impediment prevented local units from firing their Lunas and FKRs, armed or not, and doing so even without Pliyev’s formal consent, thus taking the first step in a possible nuclear exchange. An invasion threat that led to arming those missiles after Castro’s forces had assumed control of them (as planned) could have left the effective firing decision in Cuban hands; Cuba thus could have dragged the two superpowers into a nuclear war –as allied NATO forces in Europe could also have done.

In short, there is a range of possible scenarios by which defending forces in Cuba could and might have employed “weapons of mass destruction” to stem an American invasion. We cannot so easily dismiss the dangers of escalation - *had* the president of the United States ordered such an attack. In the end, John Kennedy did not do so. Other presidents might have.

Revisionist views of the Cuban missile crisis are to be welcomed. We need to encourage challenges to accepted wisdom even, or especially, in the case of such a well-studied event. Coleman is correct that the crisis was not over in thirteen days but rather dragged on for months. He is correct that we have overlooked the “other, other, other” missiles. He also does an admirable job of highlighting the political risks Kennedy faced and surmounted after December 1962, given the continuing presence of Soviet ground and air forces in Cuba.

Coleman’s arguments about the importance of the Soviet short-range missiles, however, seem to me to run aground in places. American intelligence discovered the Lunas late in the thirteen days of October, not early on, and thus there was a vital period in which they were in fact an “unknown risk.” The available evidence also fails to prove that the president and his key advisors were much concerned about the Lunas, that an invasion of Cuba was a serious and realistic option after an early point, and thus that these weapons could have deterred stronger American action such as invasion. Given that the Soviet troops remaining in Cuba after December 1962 did not have atomic or nuclear weaponry, and given the likelihood of invasion was then minuscule, I am not persuaded the president faced, or thought he had to face, a serious “permanent military risk” (8).

Coleman’s attempt to show how “the Kennedy administration assessed the risk posed by the Soviet short-range missiles in Cuba” (6) also runs into over-generalization problems. The administration was not of one mind on these missiles. Political scientists would point to bureaucratic politics to explain, for example, why the military was more concerned about their presence in Cuba than were the president and his White House advisors, and perhaps why the Marine Corps in particular worried about the threat to Guantánamo. Concluding how “the” administration assessed the risks involved thus becomes problematic; one’s conclusions depend on which part of the fabled elephant one is examining.

Don Munton is a professor of International Studies and the founding chair of the International Studies Program at the University of Northern British Columbia, Canada. He is co-author of *The Cuban Missile Crisis: A Concise History* (Oxford University Press, 2007) and author of numerous articles in the areas of international security and the global environment. He received his Ph.D. from The Ohio State University, and has taught at Dalhousie University, and the Universities of Toronto and British Columbia before moving to UNBC.

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