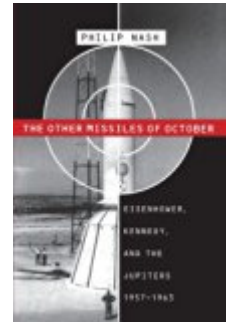


Philip Nash. *The Other Missiles of October: Eisenhower, Kennedy and the Jupiters, 1957-1963.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997. xvi + 231 pp. \$49.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8078-2339-2.



Reviewed by David A. Welch

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Every once in a while you encounter a book that makes you wonder why it had not been written before. Philip Nash's masterful study of the ill-fated Jupiter intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM) deployments is a case in point.

In October 1962--the most dangerous month of the Cold War--a handful of obsolete, vulnerable, militarily-worthless missiles in Italy and Turkey served as the linchpin of an agreement that led the Soviet Union to agree to withdraw similar missiles from Cuba, and permitted the super-powers to back away gracefully from the nuclear precipice. Ironically, those very same missiles played a significant role in prompting the Soviet deployment in the first place. The Jupiters, in short, were both a cause of the Cuban missile crisis, and a key part of its solution. Robert McNamara voiced the common wisdom both of today and of 1962 when he said, "The Jupiters were junk; nobody disputed that." They were provocative weapons whose only function in wartime would be to draw Soviet nuclear fire. What on Earth were they doing in Italy and Turkey? What mad-

man would propose such a deployment? What madman would accept it?

These are questions that naturally spring to mind, yet, curiously, no one has attempted to answer them satisfactorily before. A few scholars--Barton Bernstein and Marc Trachtenberg, for instance--have asked hard questions about certain aspects of the Jupiter deployment, but Nash is the first to attempt a comprehensive history and analysis. He leaves no stone unturned. He meticulously reconstructs the Jupiter decisions using what must surely be every available piece of evidence, and he painstakingly examines every conceivable explanation for every aspect of the deployment. He writes with grace, insight, and wit. In all of these respects, this is model history.

Nash paints largely unflattering portraits of two American presidents who, though aware of the risks of the deployment, nevertheless permitted it to proceed despite their misgivings. He paints a similarly unflattering portrait of American diplomacy, both for its insensitivity to Soviet concerns, and for its paternalism toward NATO. This is not a story of failure and ineptitude across

the board, however; Nash documents in great detail, and with evident awe, the Kennedy administration's successful campaign to prevent public disclosure of the missile trade.

Nash's two core claims are right on the money. First, the Jupiter deployment is a prime example of what can happen when leaders act first and think later. Stung by Sputnik and desperate to try to shore up the American nuclear deterrent until intercontinental ballistic missiles could come on line, Eisenhower and Dulles announced their intention to provide IRBMs to NATO allies in Europe long before thinking through the military and political ramifications, almost all of which were negative. Second, American policy makers were overwhelmingly preoccupied with credibility, and this drove virtually every important decision. Credibility is in the eye of the beholder, of course, and it is therefore particularly ironic--and very nearly tragic--that American leaders made decisions intended to bolster American credibility knowing virtually nothing about how the adversary would interpret them.

The book has two flaws, neither of which is debilitating, but both of which are worth flagging because they illustrate professional hazards for historians. The first is that it inadequately reminds us of the important differences between retrospect and prospect. With the benefit of hindsight, it is easy to see the marginal contribution to fiasco of a series of individual decisions, and it is easy to pluck the signals from the noise that would have led omniscient decision makers to understand the folly of the deployment. But the Jupiter missiles never attracted the attention from the American policy community that they should have received in the ideal world not because American policy makers were stupid or incompetent, but because they had far more things to worry about than they could possibly think through properly. This is not to excuse the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations for what we must surely all agree were mostly lousy decisions; it is simply

to note that it is difficult for Nash's readers to empathize with Eisenhower and Kennedy. Nash does a very good job of explaining why Eisenhower and Kennedy ought not to have made the decisions they made, but in the course of so doing he lulls us into the delusion that most of us, had we been in their shoes, would have avoided the same mistakes.

The book's second flaw is that it allows detail and analysis to push aside the politics and psychology of the Jupiter decisions. This is somewhat ironic, given Nash's thesis that these decisions were essentially political and psychological, not military and instrumental. The point is made most clearly by way of illustration: Nash demonstrates that quite early in the game the Kennedy administration was sensitive to the possibility that an American Jupiter deployment in Turkey could be equated with a Soviet missile deployment in Cuba, and he compellingly argues that any disinterested observer would conclude that the two deployments were symmetrical. Yet while many members of the Kennedy administration were sensitive to the logical or legal symmetry of the deployments, most of them did not equate the two morally or politically, for interesting and important reasons pushed aside by Nash's single-minded focus on logic and legality. The fact that the Jupiter deployments took place under the rubric of NATO and with advance public notice, whereas the Soviet deployment was covert and *sui generis*, reinforced the preexisting tendency of the Kennedy administration to understand its own military moves as defensive and benign, and Soviet military moves as offensive and evil. This is perfectly normal human psychology. Again, the effect here is to undermine our ability to understand American decision making, because we cannot empathize with its politics and psychology when the analysis invites us to decontextualize.

Neither of these flaws is debilitating because Nash is basically right: the Kennedy administration *did* miss signals indicating that the Jupiter

deployment would provoke; in most respects, the American and Soviet deployments *were* analogous. Moreover, the fact that Nash himself does not dwell on those aspects of the Jupiter decisions that would best enable us to understand them as American leaders did at the time in no way prevents us from attempting to do so. Indeed, if we truly seek to understand these decisions from a White House perspective, it is useful to see how a disinterested, fully-informed observer might see them, if for no other reason than to help us gauge the gaps and discontinuities. In short, it is useful to have a bird's eye view; and it is difficult to imagine a better one than Philip Nash has given us.

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