Annihilation Without Representation? Anglo-American Relations and the Cuban Missile Crisis

By Dr. Nigel Ashton

Introduction

The Cuban Missile Crisis has for so long been studied as though there were no players of significance other than the United States and the Soviet Union that any attempt to write other actors back into the drama must begin with the task of self-justification. Why bother to study Anglo-American relations and the Cuban Missile Crisis? Let me offer three main justifications at the outset:

1) As the table of nuclear forces available to the United States, Soviet Union and the United Kingdom in 1962 reproduced below shows, the British nuclear force, relative to that of the USSR at any rate, was of some significance at this point. The British strategic bomber force was as large as that of the USSR, albeit that in terms of ICBMs and SLBMs the UK did not play a role in the strategic balance. At the very least, therefore, on one level, had the Cuban Crisis resulted in a nuclear exchange, and hence ‘annihilation’, the British would not have been without significant ‘representation’ in the nuclear exchanges.

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1 No part of this paper may be quoted without acknowledgement.
2 ICBMs: US, 172; USSR, c.24; UK, 0
   M/IRBMs: US, 0*; USSR, 36 (Cuba), c.700 (USSR); UK, 60 (Thors)
   SLBMs: US, 112; USSR, 97; UK, 0
   Bombers: US, 1450; USSR, 155; UK, 140+
* excludes the 45 Jupiters in Turkey and Italy which operated under dual key arrangements like the Thors in the UK.
(Source: Scott, Kennedy, Macmillan and the Cuban Missile Crisis, p.190)
2) The British role as a Western hemisphere power: this dimension of Anglo-American relations and the Cuban Missile Crisis has been almost completely neglected by historians until now. A simple glance at the map of Britain’s continuing colonial possessions in the Caribbean and Central and South America tells us that Britain continued to play an important role in the region. Although Jamaica and Trinidad had achieved independence in August 1962, marking the collapse of the ill-fated West Indian Federation, Britain still retained responsibility for the smaller islands in the former federation, together with the British Virgin Islands, the Bahamas, Bermuda, British Honduras and, crucially, British Guiana. Part of the essential context for understanding Anglo-American relations during the missile crisis is the course of Anglo-American relations over the Castro question during the preceding years. As we will see when we come to consider the context in more detail, there were puzzling cross-currents in Anglo-American relations in this respect. On the one hand, from April 1962 onwards, the British Government seems to have decided to acquiesce in the face of American demands to rig the political system in British Guiana to prevent a triumph for Castro-ism in the shape of the election of Cheddi Jagan to the premiership. On the other, in respect of the Kennedy Administration’s demand for economic sanctions against Cuba, the Macmillan Government refused to cooperate. These contextual cross-currents are an essential part of understanding Anglo-American relations during the missile crisis itself.

3) The final reason for studying Anglo-American relations during the Cuban Missile Crisis is the extent of British influence and involvement in the inner circles of power in Washington in 1962. Part of this influence was individual, resulting from the close friendship of Kennedy with the British Ambassador David Ormsby-Gore. Part of it was structural, resulting from the close links built up between the bureaucracies on
both sides of the Atlantic during and after the war years. As we will see below, according to one authoritative source, directly after Ray Cline, the CIA Deputy Director of Intelligence, first briefed President Kennedy on the morning of Tuesday 16 October about the photographic intelligence regarding Soviet missiles in Cuba, he briefed Major-General Sir Kenneth Strong, Head of the Joint Intelligence Bureau at the Ministry of Defence. Strong, who was coincidentally in Washington on other business at the time, flew back to alert Prime Minister Harold Macmillan on the first available plane, meaning that, according to this account, by Wednesday 17 October, Macmillan knew the outline of the forthcoming crisis, four days before the news was broken officially. Like the American President, therefore, Macmillan had time to plan his response to the crisis.

**Context**

In fact, his privileged early access to the intelligence regarding the Soviet missiles was not the first occasion Macmillan had been given an advance glimpse of American intentions regarding Cuba. It now appears that during the prime minister’s visit to Washington in the first week of April 1961, Kennedy also took Macmillan at least partially into his confidence regarding the forthcoming Bay of Pigs landing. US documents now available covering the

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3 There is some debate about the timing here. According to David Nunnerley (President Kennedy and Britain, p.77-8), Strong received his briefing on the morning of Friday 19 October. Len Scott (Macmillan, Kennedy and the Cuban Missile Crisis, pp.40-1) also asserts that the British intelligence officers had been formally briefed by the CIA’s Deputy Director for Intelligence, Ray Cline, on Friday 19 October. However, John Dickie, (‘Special’ No More, pp.105-10), argues that the briefing took place on Tuesday 16 October, and that, after informing Ormsby-Gore, Strong flew back to London on the first available plane, briefing Macmillan himself on 17 October. Dickie’s account is sufficiently detailed to seem authoritative. For Ormsby-Gore’s own recollection see Lord Harlech, Oral History, p.15, JFKL. All of these sources concur that Macmillan and Ormsby-Gore received advance warning through the Strong-Cline connection, it is only the precise timing that is in dispute.
planning of the Bay of Pigs operation record the following exchange at a meeting between Kennedy and a group of his closest advisers on the morning of 6 April:

‘Mr Rusk, when queried by the President, stated that he felt that this plan was as good as could be devised, but that we should now take a look at other questions that might arise. One would be what would the US do in the event there was a serious call for help? Second, what might the Soviets do? The President indicated that Mr Macmillan had been informed of the prospect.’

No doubt in view of the political storm that the Bay of Pigs landing caused in Europe it was sound politics for Macmillan not to own up subsequently to any detailed foreknowledge of the operation. This was, paradoxically, one occasion, when a British Prime Minister did not want to claim that he had had inside knowledge of a US Administration’s intentions. Nevertheless, it is significant that Kennedy thought it prudent to give the prime minister at least some advance warning of his plans.

In the aftermath of the failure of the Bay of Pigs landing, Anglo-American relations once again played a role in respect of the Administration’s planning for future contingencies in Cuba. It is here that one sees the essential relevance of the British role as a Western hemisphere power. In May 1961, a request was made through the US Ambassador in London, David Bruce, that an airfield should be made available on British territory on Mayaguana Island in The Bahamas for the possible mounting of ‘combat operations with tactical aircraft’ against Cuba. The response

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5 Thorpe, Alec Douglas-Home, p.232. A State Department telegram, dated 1 June 1961, asking Ambassador Bruce whether he had yet had the opportunity to discuss Mayaguana Island with the foreign secretary, suggests that the original instructions were probably sent out in May 1961.
of Lord Privy Seal Edward Heath at the end of September 1961 shows what a careful line the
British Government had to tread in dealing with the Cuban question in the aftermath of the Bay
of Pigs fiasco. On the one hand, the government wanted to avoid antagonising the US
Administration by refusing the request for access to Mayaguana. On the other, as Heath
explained, an approach could not be made to the Bahamas’ Executive Council for fear that the
news would be leaked to the press. The compromise hit upon by Heath was to indicate that
should a ‘clear-cut attack’ take place on the US Guantanamo Base on Cuba then ‘HMG would
immediately approach [the] Bahamas Govt with [a] definite recommendation and would use its
“utmost influence” to obtain [a] prompt and favourable Bahaman response.’6 In the same spirit,
during the course of 1961, the British Government also channelled intelligence information on
the internal situation in Cuba from its embassy in Havana to Washington.7

The effects of the US Administration’s anti-Castro crusade were, however, to be felt most
keenly by the British Government in respect of the future constitutional development of the
colony of British Guiana. In the wake of the Bay of Pigs failure US Administration officials
devoted much attention to attempts on Castro’s part to destabilise other Central and South
American countries and to export his revolution. In the case of British Guiana, their concerns
focussed on Cheddi Jagan, the leader of the Indian People’s Progressive Party, who was believed
to be a Marxist, and whose American wife was a former member of the Young Communist
league. The British, by contrast, believed Jagan to be a naïve idealist who was more likely to

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6 London to State, 26 September 1961, telegram no.1225, Folder UK General 9/16/61-
9/30/61, Box 170, NSF, JFKL. Len Scott, (Macmillan, Kennedy and the Cuban Missile Crisis,
p.27) believes that a final decision was taken by the government in early October. It appears
to have been along the lines of Heath’s comments.
7 Hershberg, J. G., ‘Their Men in Havana: Anglo-American Intelligence Exchanges and the
Cuban Crises, 1961-62’, Intelligence and National Security, Vol.15, No.2, Summer 2000,
pp.122-3.
chart a neutralist than a communist course in foreign affairs. Or, as Iain Macleod preferred to put it: Jagan was not a communist. He was ‘a naïve London School of Economics Marxist.’

During Macmillan’s Washington talks at the beginning of April 1961, Secretary of State Rusk had already warned his British counterpart Lord Home of the Americans’ concern that in British Guiana, they might find themselves faced with ‘another Castro-type situation.’ In advance of the elections scheduled for 21 August 1961, Rusk had written to Home asking whether there was anything the British Government could do to forestall Jagan’s expected victory. Although Home acknowledged that this might not be the best outcome, he argued that the government could not interfere with due electoral processes.

As expected, Jagan emerged victorious from the election. In its aftermath two tracks of US policy emerged. One was a brief and ill-fated attempt to seek some form of accommodation with Jagan through offers of economic assistance to British Guiana. As part of this track Jagan was invited to the US and met Kennedy at the end of October 1961. The visit did little to allay American fears about Jagan’s ideology, and in its aftermath the State Department judged the chances as being fifty-fifty that an independent British Guiana under Jagan would join the

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9 Schlesinger to Bruce, 27 February 1962, FRUS, 1961-1963, Vol.XII, p.549.
13 Schlesinger to Kennedy, 30 August 1961, ibid, pp.524-5; Rabe, The Most Dangerous Area of the World, p.86.
The other track was to secure British agreement to a programme of American intelligence gathering in British Guiana. Despite some British reluctance to enter into what was an exceptional arrangement for a colonial territory, agreement was reached on this point by a joint Anglo-American Working Group which met in London from 11 to 16 September 1961. At British insistence, the CIA was not initially permitted to carry out covert operations in the colony.

By the beginning of February 1962, US suspicions of Jagan’s intentions had reached such a point that it was decided to abandon all attempts to work with him. One expression of this shift in stance was the CIA’s role in financing the protests and violence that broke out in Georgetown between 12-19 February. Such actions were in contravention of the September 1961 agreement with the British which had excluded covert operations. At the same time on the diplomatic front, the British Government was pressed to take whatever measures were necessary to ensure that it did not hand over power in an independent British Guiana to Jagan. The new US policy was conveyed by Rusk to Home in one of the more remarkable Anglo-American communications of the period:

Dear Alex:...I must tell you now that I have reached the conclusion that it is not possible for us to put up with an independent British Guiana under Jagan... Partly reflective of ever growing concern over Cuba, public and Congressional opinion here is incensed at the thought of our dealing with Jagan. The Marxist-Leninist policy he professes parallels that of Castro...
which the OAS at the Punta del Este Conference declared incompatible with
the Inter-American system... It seems clear to me that new elections should
now be scheduled, and I hope we can agree that Jagan should not accede to
power again. Cordially Yours, Dean Rusk.\(^\text{18}\)

Rusk’s message was met with incredulity in British quarters. Macmillan himself could
not believe it. ‘I have just received a copy of a message to you from Mr Rusk about British
Guiana’, he wrote to Home. ‘I am bound to say I have read it with amazement. One or two
phrases are incredible.’ Macmillan singled out in particular Rusk’s references to not allowing
Jagan to win power through due electoral process. He continued:

How can the Americans continue to attack us in the United Nations on
colonialism and then use expressions like these which are not colonialism
but pure Machiavellianism. Of course, it is nice to feel that they are partners
with us and have such confidence in you as to send you a letter of this kind
but it does show a degree of cynicism which I would have thought Dean
Rusk could hardly put his pen to. He, after all, is not an Irishman, nor a
politician, nor a millionaire: he has the reputation of being an honourable
and somewhat academic figure.\(^\text{19}\)

Foreign Secretary Home’s response to Rusk’s initiative was, as Ambassador Bruce put it,
'cold as the Arctic'.\(^\text{20}\) The foreign secretary warned against the adoption of undemocratic and

\(^{20}\) DKEBD, 27 February 1962, Vol.39, VHS.
transparent devices designed to keep Jagan from power. He did agree though that there should be further Anglo-American consultation on developments in the territory.\textsuperscript{21}

In fact, after his own talks with the president in Washington in April 1962, Macmillan came round to recognising that, in view of the strength of American feeling on British Guiana, it was in Britain's interests to be ‘as cooperative and forthcoming as we can.’\textsuperscript{22} The US Administration too came to realise that a greater subtlety of method than had been evidenced by Rusk’s February telegram to Home might be necessary in dealings with the British over the question. In the event, although American concerns over the colony were to rumble on after the Cuban crisis, the British approach during 1963 and 1964 was to be as accommodating as possible of the US position. This approach was to culminate in an election held under a system of proportional representation effectively framed to remove Jagan from power at the end of 1964.\textsuperscript{23}

If there was a meeting of Anglo-American minds over moves to prevent an outbreak of “Castro-ism” in British Guiana in the summer of 1962, the same could certainly not be said about the Administration’s attempts to secure a trade embargo on Cuba. Differences between the two governments over this question could not have been made much plainer than they were during Rusk's visit to London in June 1962. In a meeting on 24 June, Foreign Secretary Home expressed the view that economic sanctions never had very much effect.\textsuperscript{24} Drawing the parallel with Britain’s own earlier problems in the Middle East, he argued that sanctions had failed to work against both Mossadeq, the Iranian nationalist leader, and Nasser. Although Britain agreed not to supply arms to Castro, the US proposal, which was then before the NATO Council, that any credits to Cuba should be reported, and significant trade in strategic items discussed, presented the government with great difficulties.

\textsuperscript{22} Macmillan to Brook, 3 May 1962, M.112/62, PREM11/3666.
\textsuperscript{23} Shepherd, Iain Macleod, p.239; Rabe, The Most Dangerous Area of the World, pp.90-5.
\textsuperscript{24} Record of a Conversation after Dinner at 1 Carlton Gardens, 24 June 1962, PREM11/3689.
Macmillan himself was even blunter. The whole idea of refusing to sell items to communist countries was ‘ridiculous in itself.’ If the West refused to supply them, the communist countries would soon learn how to make the relevant items for themselves. Moreover, the position of Britain as a country 40% of whose gross national product was made up by overseas trade was very different from that of the United States, for which the corresponding figure was only 6%. Rusk’s reply, in the spirit of the exchange, was forthright. Although communist countries might be able to make products for themselves in the end, they would have to expend a great deal of time and money on the effort. As regards the effects on Britain, ‘though the United Kingdom lived by trade its people needed security as well and must defend themselves against those who would like to cut their throats.’ The gap between the two governments over the sanctions question thus remained, although Macmillan agreed that he would have no objection to merely reporting any credits given to Cuba.

During Foreign Secretary Home’s visit to New York to attend the United Nations General Assembly meeting at the beginning of October 1962, the matter came up again. After a brief talk with Kennedy in which the Cuban question was discussed, Home reported that ‘the president said he simply couldn’t understand why we could not help America by joining in an embargo on trade.’ The foreign secretary’s view was that a lot of Kennedy’s concern stemmed from US domestic politics, because over Cuba ‘the Republicans are gunning for him in a big way.’ Nevertheless, there was also an international dimension to the problem: ‘he really fears that Russia will provoke an intervention by the United States in order to wipe out Berlin.’ Dining with Home on the evening of 3 October after the foreign secretary’s return from New York, Macmillan evidently accepted his argument that the Russians were using ‘Cuba as a counter-irritant to Berlin.’ Nevertheless, he complained that Kennedy seemed unwilling or unable to understand that he could not give orders to British shipping to avoid Cuba without legislation.

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Nor did the president realise the ‘violence of the feeling of British shipowners against the
American Government.’ Overall, Macmillan felt that ‘we are in a rather bad period with [the]
US. This is sad and may do us both harm.’\(^2\)\(^6\) Despite this, he believed that ‘there is no reason for
us to help the Americans on Cuba.’\(^2\)\(^7\)

The climate of Anglo-American relations regarding Cuba was, therefore, far from
auspicious in the weeks leading up to the missile crisis. In view of his public and private
differences with the British Government over the appropriate measures to be taken against the
Castro regime, it might not have been surprising if Kennedy had in fact elected to bypass the
Anglo-American relationship during the Cuban crisis.

Hawk, Dove or Owl? The Puzzling Question of Harold Macmillan’s Place in the Missile
Crisis Menagerie

Blight, Nye and Welch have argued that the reactions of Kennedy’s inner circle of
advisers to the Missile Crisis can be fitted into one of three categories: hawkish, dovish or
owlish. If this is so, then Harold Macmillan’s reaction requires us to imagine an entirely new
species of bird in the missile crisis menagerie, with the attributes at one and the same time of
both a hawk and a dove.\(^2\)\(^8\) Macmillan’s initial reactions are particularly significant since he too
had had time to weigh his response to the crisis in much the same fashion as had the participants
in the ExComm debates. Perhaps the more surprising element of Macmillan’s thinking about the
crisis was his ‘hawkish’ advocacy of an American invasion of Cuba as a better alternative than
the imposition of a blockade. Macmillan made this clear, both in a note he sent to Ormsby-Gore
and in his first telephone call with Kennedy. ‘I would be grateful if you could give me your

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\(^2\)\(^6\) HMD, 3 October 1962, dep.d.47, pp.39-41.
\(^2\)\(^7\) Macmillan to Home, 1 October 1962, PREM11/3689.
Affairs, 1986, Vol.66, No.1, p.173. Macmillan’s diffidence about blockade means that the one
thing he certainly could not be called is “owlish” as they define the term
thoughts on what it is that the President is really trying to do’, he asked Ormsby-Gore. Was he leading up to an invasion of Cuba, or preparing the ground for a conference with Khrushchev? The prime minister revealed that he had considered trying to stop the president imposing the blockade, but had thought better of it since any such move was unlikely to be successful. ‘I feel sure that a long period of blockade, and possibly Russian reaction in the Caribbean or elsewhere, will lead us nowhere’, he wrote. ‘Therefore he must decide whether he wants a coup de main, which will at least put one card in his hands….’

Macmillan made no specific reference to his preference for an invasion in his written reply to the president for two reasons. Firstly because he thought it would be dangerous to have this ‘on the record’, and secondly because he believed it was unlikely to be effective. The president had already evidently determined on his line. Nevertheless, he did make his concerns apparent to Kennedy in their telephone conversation very early on the morning of 23 October (London time). His very first comment, once the two men had confirmed they could hear each other, was ‘...what’s worrying me is how do you see the way out of this? What are you going to do with the blockade? Are you going to occupy Cuba and have done with it or is it going to just drag on?’ Returning to the same point later in the conversation, Macmillan offered a glimpse of at least one of the reasons for his preference for an invasion. ‘In my long experience we've always found that our weakness has been when we’ve not acted with sufficient strength to start with’, he argued. Macmillan was probably drawing here both on the experience of confronting Nazism in the 1930s, and more recently, on that of the 1956 Suez crisis. As he noted in his diary, 'the Suez analogy is on my mind. If K[ennedy] “misses the bus” – he may never get rid of

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30 HMD, 22 October 1962, dep.d.47, p.69.
31 Record of a Conversation between the Prime Minister and President Kennedy at 12.30am on Tuesday, 23 October 1962, PREM11/3689.
32 The Hitler analogy was evidently in Home’s mind as he worked with Macmillan on his 22 October reply to Kennedy’s letter (Thorpe, Alec Douglas-Home, p.239).
Cuban rockets except by trading them for Turkish, Italian or other bases….”33 In order to emphasise the importance Macmillan attached to firm action, his Private Secretary Philip de Zulueta added a covering note to the transcript of the telephone conversation forwarded to Ambassador David Ormsby-Gore. ‘The Prime Minister particularly wanted you to see this record’, he wrote, ‘because his own personal feeling is somewhat in favour of a more decisive action than the Americans have in fact so far taken.’34

A second reason for Macmillan's preference for decisive military action, hinted at in his diary entry, was his belief that if a conference with Khrushchev was necessary the Soviet leader would, as he put it in his written reply to Kennedy, ‘try to trade his Cuba position against his ambitions in Berlin and elsewhere.’35 A negotiation under these conditions should be avoided at all cost since it would ‘endanger the unity of the Alliance.’ Macmillan reiterated this argument in his phone conversation with Kennedy: ‘...if we do have to talk to him and meet him in the last resort the more cards in our hands the better...’36 If Kennedy held Cuba, then he would be able to prevent Khrushchev demanding Berlin, Macmillan believed.

The final reason for Macmillan’s advocacy of an invasion was a negative one, and stemmed from his dislike of the operation of blockade. Macmillan implicitly questioned the legality of the American action in his first letter to the president when he stated that ‘the international lawyers will take the point that a blockade which involves the searching of ships of all countries is difficult to defend in peace-time.’ In his diary he noted that the blockade was ‘patently “illegal”’ and might ‘cause a good deal of trouble with neutral and even with friendly countries…’37 Certainly, as the crisis developed, Macmillan remained pre-occupied with the

33 HMD, 22 October 1962, dep.d.47, p.69.
34 De Zulueta to Ormsby-Gore, 23 October 1962, PREM11/3689.
36 Record of a Conversation between the Prime Minister and President Kennedy at 12.30am on Tuesday, October 23, 1962, PREM11/3689.
37 HMD, 22 October 1962, dep.d.47, p.69-70. The Lord Chancellor, Lord Dilhorne, also argued that the blockade was illegal, although the Foreign Office, at Home’s instigation,
operation of the blockade, warning Foreign Secretary Home on 26 October that if Kennedy decided to widen its scope there would be trouble for British shipping. The prime minister’s concern about the Cuban blockade has to be seen against the background of the Anglo-American dispute over economic sanctions against Cuba which had rumbled on in the months leading up to the missile crisis.

The 'dovish' strand, which formed the other main element of Macmillan’s thinking, was based both on his warnings about European public opinion, and his doubts about the veracity of the Soviet threat in Cuba. In his first written message he had warned Kennedy that ‘many of us in Europe have lived so long in close proximity to the enemy’s nuclear weapons of the most devastating kind that we have got accustomed to it. So European opinion will need attention.’ As the crisis progressed, it was this strand that came to predominate in the prime minister’s thinking. The reason for this was simple. As Macmillan saw matters, dithering in Washington had allowed the chance for decisive military action to pass. In these circumstances, attention should be shifted to a diplomatic settlement.

It was in this context that Macmillan put forward his suggestion of the trade of the Soviet missiles in Cuba for the American Thor missiles stationed in the UK. The liquid-fuelled Thors, which had been deployed by the Eisenhower Administration to Britain in 1959, were now deemed obsolescent and were in any case scheduled for removal by the end of the year. The fate of Macmillan’s Thor offer remains one of the more puzzling dimensions of Anglo-American relations during the Missile Crisis. On one level, the offer might have been expected to appeal to Kennedy. After all, the British were willing to see the Thors removed ahead of their scheduled dismantling date. The Turks on the other hand, were opposed to any trade involving the Jupiter.

avoided issuing any statement to this effect (Thorpe, Alec Douglas-Home, pp.241-2). The US Administration was aware of the legal problems of the resort to blockade, as is witnessed by the selection of the term “quarantine” to describe its actions (Rusk, As I Saw It, p.205; Brinkley, Dean Acheson, p.160-1).

38 Macmillan to Home, 26 October 1962, M.295/62, Fol.380, dep.c.351, HMA.
missiles stationed on their territory. Kennedy, though, was not receptive. His immediate reply to the prime minister’s offer was ‘well, let me put that into the machinery and then I’ll be in touch with you on that.’

When Macmillan pressed the point, the president’s response was ‘sure, Prime Minister, let me send that over to the Department. I think we don’t want to have too many dismantlings. But it is possible that that proposal might help.’ In view of Kennedy’s attitude to the State Department, his comment that he was sending Macmillan’s suggestion over there for consideration was tantamount to saying he was burying it. Certainly, the proposal was at no stage given serious consideration by the ExComm.

Not easily discouraged, Macmillan followed up his telephone conversation with a note sent to the president over the secure teleprinter line. In this he reiterated the suggestion regarding the Thors, offering to propose it to U Thant himself. ‘It might be less invidious for us to take the lead’, he argued, ‘than place the burden on the Turks.’ In fact, Macmillan’s argument had some force behind it. Informal soundings indicated that the Turkish Government would be very reluctant to see the Jupiter missiles stationed on its soil traded away as part of a superpower barter. The question must be posed, therefore, as to why Macmillan’s proposal was given such short shrift by Kennedy. Three main explanations suggest themselves. Firstly, Kennedy undoubtedly wanted to keep the management of the crisis in his own hands. He was all too well aware of Macmillan’s penchant for cutting a figure on the world stage between the superpowers. To have the prime minister proposing his own initiatives, even if first cleared with Washington, might give Khrushchev the impression that there were potential divisions to be exploited in the Western camp. Secondly, the possibility of immobilising or removing the missiles stationed in Britain had never even been mentioned by any of the participants in the earlier ExComm.

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40 May and Zelikow, The Kennedy Tapes, p.482.
41 ‘Message to President Kennedy from Prime Minister Macmillan Teleprinted to Washington’, 27 October 1962, T.513/62, PREM11/3690. The message is also reproduced in May and Zelikow, The Kennedy Tapes, pp.484-5, who note that, due to the time difference between London and Washington, it actually arrived late on the evening of 26 October 1962.
meetings. It is possible that Kennedy was simply unprepared for the suggestion and therefore genuinely wanted time for his advisers to examine it. This explanation could be coupled with the third possible reason for the lack of subsequent consideration of Macmillan’s offer. It was quickly overtaken by events in the shape of the arrival of Khrushchev’s conciliatory message, forwarded to Washington by the US Embassy in Moscow between six and nine p.m. on the evening of 26 October.

Although Macmillan continued to hold his Thor offer in reserve, as matters transpired it was to prove redundant. In the end, despite all of Macmillan’s activity behind the scenes, in public he played the role of the loyal ally, sticking indeed to the line that there could be no trade for the removal of the Soviet missiles in Cuba even after Kennedy himself had abandoned it through his back-channel deal with Khrushchev over the Turkish Jupiters.

**Tangible British Interventions**

If Kennedy was not always in sympathy with Macmillan’s views during the Missile Crisis, the same could not be said of his relationship with Ambassador David Ormsby-Gore. The extent of the ambassador’s influence during the crisis remains difficult to assess, as does the precise number of the telephone conversations, and personal meetings he had with both Jack and Bobby Kennedy. Certainly, the observation of Ernest May and Philip Zelikow that ‘Macmillan and Ormsby-Gore became de facto members of Kennedy’s Executive Committee’ does not seem at all far-fetched in relation to the British Ambassador’s role. Ormsby-Gore made a significant contribution to the president’s management of the crisis on the evening of 23 October. Talking informally to Jack and Bobby Kennedy after a White House dinner party, he argued that Khrushchev would be given more time to consider his position if the quarantine line were to be

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moved closer to the Cuban coast. Initially the line had been set at the 800 miles recommended by Defense Secretary McNamara. The ambassador argued instead for a distance of 500 miles. The president took up Ormsby-Gore’s suggestion in a phone call to McNamara, with the result that the Defense Secretary was over-ruled.44

It seems reasonable to assume that Ormsby-Gore’s influence over the president’s thinking during the missile crisis was much more extensive than this one tangible example so far uncovered. After his own brother, Ormsby-Gore seems to have been JFK’s closest confidant in discussing foreign policy problems. Nevertheless, one should be careful not to confuse the influence of the British Ambassador with British influence in the broader sense. Ormsby-Gore owed his role more to his personal friendship with Jack and Bobby Kennedy, than to his position as British Ambassador. It remains, all the same, a remarkable observation to make that one of the most influential officials in Washington during missile crisis week was not an American at all.

**US Views of the British role**

Much of this paper so far has concentrated on Anglo-American relations during the missile crisis from the British perspective. It seems important also to look at the question from the American side. We have already considered both the effect of Macmillan’s and Ormsby-Gore’s advice on Kennedy’s handling of the crisis. Let me now outline five further respects in which Anglo-American relations played a role in the US thinking about the crisis:

1) British views were of some value to Kennedy in handling domestic political opposition. The president was able to make use of the dovish strand in the prime

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44 For Ormsby-Gore's discussions with the Kennedys see his reports in Ormsby-Gore to Macmillan, 24 October 1962, Washington telegram nos.2662 & 2664, PREM11/3690; and Lord Harlech, 1964 Oral History, pp.16-17, JFKL. Len Scott argues that Ormsby-Gore’s proposal ‘made no difference to the quarantine, as Khruschev decided to avoid a conflict at sea.’ (Scott, Macmillan, Kennedy and the Cuban Missile Crisis, p.116. But, irrespective of this, it was still an indication of the influence over the president wielded by the ambassador.
minister’s thinking in the shape of his cautious written response during his meeting with congressional leaders on the afternoon of 22 October. According to Ormsby-Gore, Kennedy’s priority was to avoid having to seize Cuba. He thus had to hold in check the domestic political hawks in the US. Macmillan’s warnings in his letter about the scepticism of European opinion, and the dangers in relation to Berlin, were further ammunition for the president in his bid to restrain the warlike intentions of some of the congressional leadership. Indeed, Kennedy had commented in an immediately preceding meeting of the National Security Council that Macmillan’s message ‘contained the best argument for taking no action.’ In response to a question about consultation with NATO allies, therefore, Kennedy read the prime minister’s letter out in full to the congressional leadership. It is not clear what effect Macmillan’s message had on the one ‘elderly senator’ who, according to Dean Rusk’s account had earlier ‘groaned’ and fallen ‘over on the table with his head in his hands’ at the news that the president intended to impose a quarantine on Cuba.

2) The question of possible international inspection of the Soviet installations in Cuba: this issue arose in the context of Acting UN Secretary General U Thant’s efforts to secure a verified standstill in the construction of Soviet missile facilities in Cuba. Ambassador Adlai Stevenson was given instructions regarding the terms for any Cuban 'stand-still' acceptable to the US Administration. He discussed these with U Thant late on the afternoon of 26 October. The essentials of the US standpoint were that there should be no further shipments of offensive weaponry to Cuba; that there must be a standstill in work on the missile sites; and that the missiles themselves should be rendered inoperable.

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46 Minutes of the 507th Meeting of the National Security Council, 3 p.m. 22 October 1962, FRUS, 1961-1963, Vol.XI, p.152.
48 Rusk, As I Saw It, p.206.
There would need to be proper UN verification of the whole process. Rusk’s instructions to Stevenson stated that ‘dependable first-rate personnel for this operation will be essential and [the] US should have a strong voice in their selection.’\(^{49}\) Under-Secretary Ball had suggested at that morning’s ExComm meeting that the British would be best for such a mission. CIA Director McCone had backed him up with the comment that ‘I want somebody who knows about this business.’\(^{50}\) Although, as matters transpired, an international inspection regime was not established, there were evidently some hitherto unforeseen advantages for the US in the existence of additional nuclear–capable Western powers.

3) A further putative role for the British from the American perspective beyond that of nuclear inspectors was that of illustrators of the effectiveness of the US blockade. With no clear response from the Soviet Government to the imposition of the blockade on Cuba yet evident, much of the debate in the Executive Committee on 25 October focused on the question of the policing of the quarantine. Which ships should the US Navy stop and search in order to demonstrate the Administration’s resolve to the Kremlin? It was in this context that brief consideration was given to boarding a British-registered tanker, although this was scotched by the comment of National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy: ‘it seems pretty awful to me if we board a British tanker.’\(^{51}\) Perhaps the continuing Anglo-American dispute over Cuban trade made this too sensitive an area in which to tread.

4) Kennedy’s attention to British public opinion: at a number of points during the Excomm debates the question of British public opinion was raised. Kennedy himself referred several times to Lord Russell’s criticism of the US stance during the crisis. He also


\(^{50}\) May and Zelikow, The Kennedy Tapes, pp.467-8.

\(^{51}\) May and Zelikow, The Kennedy Tapes, pp.396-7.
expressed concern as to the impact of the Soviet demand in relation to the Jupiter missiles on European and specifically British public opinion. ‘They’ve got a very good product’, he commented. ‘This one is going to be very tough, I think, for us. It’s going to be tough in England, I’m sure, as well as other places on the continent.’ However, compared to the time that Kennedy spent considering US public opinion, that which he devoted to the consideration of British public opinion was not large.

5) Possibly the most fascinating putative British role in the crisis from the American perspective has only just come to light from documents released last year at the Kennedy Library. This is what we might term the “stalking horse role”. On the evening of 27 October as the crisis reached its denouement, National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy evidently tried to enlist the British government as the stalking horse for what would later become the back-channel deal over the Turkish Jupiters. According to Bundy’s account, in a conversation with Macmillan’s Private Secretary Philip de Zulueta, he 'tried to hint… delicately that if the UK is interested in the Jupiter proposal, it should say so in the North Atlantic Council.' This seems to have been an attempt on Bundy's part to have the British advocate the Jupiter proposal to the forthcoming North Atlantic Council meeting, thus doing the Administration's dirty work for it in relation to the Turkish Government. The hint was too delicate though to be taken up by De Zulueta. The British transcript of their phone conversation records De Zulueta as saying 'I don't quite understand what you mean by active participation' by the UK at the North Atlantic Council meeting. Bundy in any event made it clear that the US would be keeping its own hands clean in public by stressing that the crisis should be contained within a limited

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52 ibid, p.513.
geographical area. The tantalising possibility of the British Government being recruited as the US's agent in the public advocacy of the Jupiter trade was thus stillborn.\footnote{Memorandum by Bundy, 27 October 1962, Folder UK General 10/15/62-1/12/62, Box 170A, NSF, JFKL ; 'Telephone Conversation Between Mr Bundy and Mr de Zulueta', 4am Sunday 28 October, PREM11/3691.}

**Conclusion**

What, then, are we to make of Anglo-American relations and the missile crisis? If one considers the question of context, in view of the state of Anglo-American relations over the Castro question, there might well have been grounds for Kennedy to by-pass the British altogether in his handling of the crisis. Instead, he took the trouble to keep Macmillan informed through nightly phone calls. Although Macmillan’s own suggested initiative in relation to the Thor missiles was not taken up by Kennedy, the president did at least use him as a sounding board for his own ideas on how to handle the crisis. It is in this context that May and Zelikow’s description of Macmillan as a de facto member of the Excomm is valid. How much influence Macmillan managed to exert over Kennedy’s thinking remains a moot point. Influence is a subtle commodity and cannot simply be weighed by looking for obvious examples of a change in US policy in response to British prompting. Rather, influence infiltrates and diffuses itself in a more subtle and elusive manner. This observation has a broader validity for the study of Anglo-American relations.

So, was it ‘annihilation without representation’ for the British during the missile crisis. The simple answer is that it was neither. The crisis did not come to the point of nuclear confrontation so we do not know what influence the British government could have exerted in the face of that contingency. Nor can one claim, in view of the roles of Macmillan, Ormsby-Gore and Strong that there was no British representation. On balance, in view of the context
in Anglo-American relations over Cuba and the nature of the missile crisis, the extent to which British views gained a hearing and exerted influence in Washington was surprising and, dare I use the word, special.