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**PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY'S
INFORMATION STRATEGY AND FOREIGN POLICY**

James Thomas Graham, Jr., Ph.D.

University of Connecticut, 1996

This dissertation investigates whether President John F. Kennedy had an information strategy to influence media coverage of his handling of foreign policy. In depth case studies examine Kennedy's handling of four broad areas of foreign policy: Cuba, Southeast Asia, Nuclear Arms, and China. The case studies are based upon recently declassified U.S. government documents, oral histories, memoirs, and the private papers of journalists, publishers, and Kennedy aides.

The New Frontier never sparked a debate over American foreign policy because President Kennedy decided not to challenge the "firm" policies already set in place to fight the Cold War. Nevertheless, the struggle to maintain a strong Cold Warrior image was a constant consideration driving Kennedy's foreign policy because his public stance contradicted his policy preference to win the Cold War on the cheap with a tough pragmatic stance. The documentary

James Thomas Graham, Jr.—University of Connecticut, 1996

evidence indicates that Kennedy handled his public relations dilemma by following political instincts and lacked a social scientist's approach to public relations. The case studies underscore Kennedy's personal role in developing information strategy through political appointments, individual contacts with reporters, press conferences, and speeches. This study found evidence that polls were consulted by President Kennedy on an ad hoc basis to understand public opinion, but no evidence to support the conclusion that polls were systematically used as part of his governing strategy.

This study adds to scholarship in the literature on the presidency and political communication by identifying the uniqueness of the Kennedy era in terms of presidential relations with the press and foreign policy. Throughout the Kennedy years, television news was in its infancy and offered viewers only fleeting glimpses of the stage of world politics. He used television on his own terms through live speeches and press conferences and made foreign policy without the pressure of live on the scene cameras. He focused primarily upon influencing newspapers and magazines and believed that history would be based upon the printed word. During the final days before his assassination television news expanded from fifteen minutes to thirty minutes and Kennedy realized his information strategy needed to adjust to a new political era.

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B.A., Mount Saint Mary's College and Seminary, 1989

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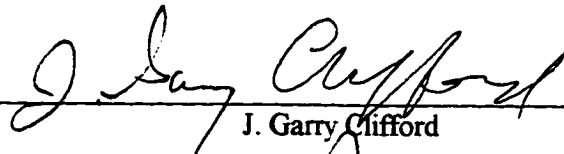
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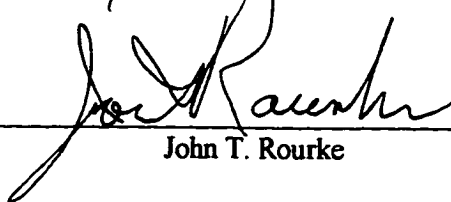
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*For Michele
always and forever...*

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Chapter One

The President and the Press

The techniques President John F. Kennedy used to influence the media are important for political scientists to study because his presidency is often considered to be the beginning of a new era of presidential politics.¹ The modern president has more ways of communicating with the public than the Founding Fathers could ever have envisioned. To be effective, the modern president must coordinate governing strategies with information strategies designed to influence journalists in the news media and sway public opinion. Governing and campaigning have gradually been merging towards a synthesis that requires a strategic approach to information policy in “the permanent campaign.”²

Presidents throughout American history have recognized the importance of the news media and have attempted to influence what it reports to the public. From the earliest days of the Republic the news media have played an important role in presidential politics; even George Washington was not above manipulating the press and believed in what came to be called ‘managed news’ during the Kennedy administration.³

John Tebbel and Sarah Watts noted that the relationship between the press and the president has been constantly evolving because of changing technology, news gathering practices and norms. The authors concluded that despite these changes affecting the operation of the relationship the one characteristic that has remained at the heart of the relationship since George Washington is mutual dissatisfaction.⁴ The partisan press of the early Republic was often vitriolic. James Pollard noted Thomas Jefferson’s observations

of Washington in a Cabinet meeting where he was reacting to the press. Jefferson observed, "The President was much inflamed, got into one of those passions when he cannot command himself, ran on much on the personal abuse which had been bestowed on him."⁵

In the United States, the concept of a free press was granted Constitutional status by the Founding Fathers with the passage of the Bill of Rights. The power granted to the press by the First Amendment came in recognition of the fact that in a free society citizens need to be informed about the political process as a defense against the arbitrary power of the government. Through its ability to monitor and oversee government and the policy-making process and report to the public, the press was placed in a position to function as an additional check on the balances of power in American government outlined by the Constitution. The First Amendment allowed the press to function virtually as a fourth branch of government with watchdog powers to influence the fate of political leaders and policies in the process of making public policy.⁶

Nevertheless, the political scientist Bernard Cohen later suggested that the media and government have a symbiotic relationship. He found evidence that journalists from major news organizations were actively offering advice through editorials and during the course of social and professional interaction. As he put it, "News is a product of all the roles of the press, and since the government depends on this news, the press is a participant in foreign policy making and needs to be brought into theory."⁷

Cohen wrote that this was a process where "political reactions to political events do more than 'just advance the story.' They are themselves part of the interplay of politics."⁸ Doris Graber argued that this was a dynamic process where journalists do more than report the news. In the arena of presidential politics, reporters become the political

environment.⁹ Many studies on the relationship between the president and the press beginning with Pollard and continuing to the present have concluded that it is adversarial.¹⁰ Recent studies have concluded that news coverage of the president is inherently negative due to the reliance upon certain themes and stereotypes by reporters to portray the president in news stories.¹¹

The adversarial relationship of the press and the president is the result of mutual vulnerability, dependency, and different goals.¹² The press and the president need each other for the news and are vulnerable due to conflicting institutional purposes. Political scientists John Rourke, Ralph Carter and Mark Boyer have noted that the press and government have a schizophrenic relationship that is both antagonistic and symbiotic. They conclude that the press can be a critical watchdog and make more information public than presidents would like sooner than they would like. At other times, reporters can play the role of adoring lapdog and function as a propaganda megaphone that magnifies the president's message without asking enough questions or seeking alternative perspectives while relying heavily on government sources for news stories.¹³

Graber has found that more than half of the front page stories in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* were from official government sources. Graber thus concluded that the media emphasize and support administration positions until respected sources voice strong dissent. As a result, the media will strengthen the president's position for issues where official sources speak with unity and when policies reflect the tenor of news stories.¹⁴

William Spragens has argued that the impact of a president's relations with journalists has an impact on the policy process in terms of the news media's influence on public opinion. Spragens described this as a dynamic process involving a two-way

communications “feedback loop” where the president and congress are influenced by public reaction to public policy at the same moment that they are trying to influence public opinion.¹⁵ John Paletz and Robert Entmann found that policy alternatives originate with presidents and other elites, who attempt to influence the news and public opinion as a resource in their favor.¹⁶

The press can perform a democratic function by inviting the public into debate and expanding the scope of conflict beyond the beltway of Washington. The news media’s expansion of the arena of conflict in the policy-making process allows the public to become, in Shattschneider words, “as much a part of the over-all situation as...overt combatants.”¹⁷ At the same time, however, Dan Nimmo and James Combs have argued that the news media focus and frame reality for the public and are responsible for “the creation, transmission, and adoption of political fantasies as realistic views of what takes place.”¹⁸

George Edwards and Stephen Wayne wrote that the presidents relationship with the press is important because the public comes to know presidents through the news media. Presidents attempt to influence the news media in the belief that this effort will influence public opinion and the policy process.¹⁹ Graber noted that the techniques presidents use to influence the press range from attempting to orchestrate the news, holding press conferences, formal briefings, interviews, background sessions, leaks, and photo opportunities.²⁰ Max Lerner recognized the implication for governing and argued presidents must serve as “communicator-in-chief, a function only a little lower on the scale than commander-in-chief and chief decision-maker in global policy.”²¹ There have been numerous studies in political science which similarly conclude that presidents are often preoccupied with public relations in order to influence the news media.²²

The institutional evolution of the presidency has been shaped by the efforts of presidents to shape the content of the media to influence public opinion and policy-making.²³ Throughout history presidents have adapted their behavior to the current news media technology and prevailing societal expectations for appropriate presidential media behavior. According to Harold Innis and Joshua Meyerowitz communications technology throughout history have allowed for certain types of societies, governing processes and ruling relationships vis-à-vis the citizenry.²⁴

The literature is filled with studies by scholars who recognize that the political process has changed with the evolution of the modern news media during the period after President Kennedy. These same studies argue that the candidate centered mass media presidential election process has had the effect of producing multi-media presidents who apply the lessons of the mass media election to the governing process, using the same techniques of mass communication to influence public opinion and policy-makers.²⁵

Presidents who attempt to influence the press have a unique advantage over other political actors because of the news media's focus on the White House.²⁶ Presidents can manipulate information by revealing or emphasizing only the facts that support their policy preferences, as President Johnson demonstrated during the passage of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. According to Paletz and Entman, presidents benefit from the news industry's definition of news and reporting practices.²⁷ For reporters, what the president does, says, and decides is defined as news. The news media focuses on the president as a national symbol of government while simultaneously offering the president the advantages and disadvantages of intense media attention.²⁸

O'Heffernan incorporated the ideas of mutual dependency and vulnerability that other authors have discussed and developed a mutual exploitation model of media influence

in U.S. foreign policy. He argued that the media is part of the policy process and the government is part of the news process for the media. According to O’Heffernan, the “media operate simultaneously as an influence inside the process as a tool for making policy and outside of the process as an influence for both exploiting policy-makers and being exploited by them.” As a result, O’Heffernan argued that from the standpoint of the players in government making policy involves using and trying to influence the media.²⁹

The news media is often in a position where it becomes reliant upon the government when covering international affairs. The ability of the news media to cover international affairs with reporters on the scene is limited due to the costs associated with stationing reporters in other countries. When the news media covers American policy-making, it often depends upon the government for information, which makes it easy for policy-makers to influence journalists. At the same time, however, the news is influenced by the professional norms of journalists and news organizations and the need to make profits. The needs of the news industry and their definition of the news do not always coincide with those of the policy-makers and are thus another force shaping the news.³⁰

The mutual exploitation model of the media-government relationship recognizes that the government and the media are independent organizations with separate values and norms. The needs of each entity place them in an interdependent mutually exploitive relationship where they need each other for the news and have the capability to influence one another’s outputs. The news media can influence the foreign policy-making process by introducing new actors, adding information, and by broadening the goals and criteria for policy. In some case, this can force policy-makers to take a broader view of the options available. When the news media takes a narrow view, however, and relies

primarily on the policy-makers for information about foreign policy, the news can serve to reinforce the status-quo of options that policy-makers have placed on the table.³¹

Even though it remains outside of government the news media plays an important role in the foreign policy-making process by making issues more salient to the public, Cohen concluded.³² Based upon the idea that news content can force attention to certain issues Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw developed the agenda-setting hypothesis.³³ Shanto Iyengar, Mark Peters, and Donald Kinder found news coverage of issues can alter the public's sense of what issues are important and called it priming.³⁴ The portrayal of foreign policy in the news can influence public opinion.³⁵ William Mayer called this packaging effects in an analysis of the Tet Offensive. According to Mayer, packaging effects are the result of the way the media present information in news stories and it leads to distorted information being presented to the public.³⁶

Incorporating Mayer's idea of packaging effects and the ideas of agenda setting into the model of mutual exploitation leads to the implication that presidents can frame and package foreign policy in order to influence the news and the political environment outside of the government policy-making process. Throughout this study political appointments, access, press conferences and speeches will be examined to understand how Kennedy portrayed his image and framed the foreign policy agenda for reporters. The case studies will focus upon how agenda-framing tactics were used to put White House 'spin' on the agenda-setting process and the portrayal of Kennedy's image in foreign policy.

For a president it is important in terms of setting the stage for how the public and other policy-makers reach judgment on his handling of foreign and domestic policy. Richard Neustadt wrote that the modern news media have "modified the terms" of how a president's reputation and prestige are judged by the general public and by others who hold

power in government whom the president must persuade in order to accomplish his policy goals.³⁷ Neustadt argued a president's power is in his ability to persuade and that is effected by his prestige in public opinion polls, reports in the news media, and professional reputation among members of the Washington community. Ultimately, this is a process where the president's "prospects for effectiveness in government" are influenced by perceptions in the Washington community of the president's standing in the polls, the news media, and his professional reputation.³⁸

The literature on the presidency is filled with studies such as Charles Ostrom and Dennis Simon's which conclude presidents value public support because when other policy-makers perceive a president is popular they will give him what he wants and he is more influential in the policy-making process. As a result, presidents have an incentive to manage, manipulate, and attempt to control how they are evaluated in the media.³⁹

Spragens argued that modern news media demands that a president have a press secretary and advisors who can help him script and coordinate "the imagemaking machinery."⁴⁰ Robert Denton wrote that for presidents to be effective they need to control and plan the timing and execution of the release of information in order to influence news coverage.⁴¹ John Maltese traced the institutional development of the White House Office of Communications to the modern president's concern for public relations as it directly relates to manipulating how a president and his policies are portrayed in the mass media and how the public makes up its mind for approval ratings.⁴²

Although they did not examine the Kennedy era in detail, Michael Grossman and Martha Kumar recognized the importance of this period in the development of the modern presidency. They wrote that in general the Kennedy White House attempted to develop a media image that supported his policy goals and that created popular support.⁴³

The Kennedy period marked the beginning of a new set of relationships between presidential candidates and the party. Kennedy ran for office as an individual relying on his own money and strategic use of the news media to challenge the established political order and get the nomination for the Democratic party. Recently, Lawrence Jacobs and Robert Shapiro argued that in order to get elected, Kennedy used an information strategy based upon the premise that public opinion can be influenced by what is being said in the news media. They found evidence that Kennedy used polls to “fine tune” the timing and content of his message. It was beyond the scope of their work to examine whether this technique became part of his governing media strategy.⁴⁴

Maltese mentioned in passing that the Kennedy period became the foundation for what was to develop in the modern presidency’s use of the media to influence public opinion and the policy process. Maltese concluded that in an atmosphere of journalistic scrutiny the desire of presidents to influence public opinion and how they are portrayed in the news contributed to the evolution of the White House Office of Communications.⁴⁵

Samuel Kernell examined the pattern of techniques presidents have used to communicate and influence opinion and briefly described the innovations adopted in current White House information strategy as “the Kennedy system.”⁴⁶ James Pfiffner briefly described this period as “a key turning point in presidents’ efforts to control how they are perceived by the public.”⁴⁷ Aronson, Herman and Chomsky have suggested that during the Kennedy era the press was not critical and Kennedy used “cronies” like Alsop, Bartlett, and Estabrook to publicize favorable information about his policies.⁴⁸

Memoirs by members of the Kennedy administration such as Sorensen and Salinger have insisted, however, there was never an effort to manage the news. Memoirs by journalists from this period such as Bradlee also claim Kennedy tried to influence what

journalists were saying in the media. Yet, while these works deny a news management strategy, they nonetheless reveal a concern for what was being said in the media and shaping public opinion.

Kern, Levering, and Levering's 1983 study examined media coverage of President Kennedy using a case study approach and conducting a source analysis of news stories. The authors found a pattern of favorable coverage during episodes of foreign crisis when the media relied primarily on official sources.⁴⁹ Franklin's 1993 study recognized that the work by Levering (et al.) suggested a White House information strategy; however, the media source analysis used by the authors did not determine whether the pattern of coverage was the result of a detailed strategy to manipulate the press.⁵⁰

Franklin conducted the most comprehensive study to date of public relations and President Kennedy, and she found evidence of concern for developing an effective information strategy among Kennedy's aides. Franklin's research findings were significant. It was, however, beyond the overall scope of her study to examine how concern for public relations related to influencing the process of foreign policy-making. The question remains open regarding whether or not Kennedy used an information strategy for foreign policy, and if he did, what were his dilemmas and options.⁵¹

In the literature on the presidency, the Kennedy period has frequently been described by authors such as Herman, Chomsky, Kernell, Piffner, Maltese, Kern, Levering and Levering, as an important era for political communication because he used an information strategy to influence the press. Jacobs and Shapiro have pointed to the communications techniques Kennedy used to get elected and raised the question of whether he had a governing information strategy. Sorensen has written that Kennedy did not have an information strategy to influence the press. Although Grossman, Kumar, Jacobs,

Shapiro, Maltese, Herman, Chomsky, Maltese, Franklin and Kernell have attributed Kennedy with having “a system” to influence the press, the question has not been settled definitely. The next chapter examines Kennedy’s relationship with the news media while he was president and the question of what he was trying to do to influence the press and how the press responded.

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Chapter Two

President Kennedy, Editor-in-Chief:

The New Frontier's Information Strategy and the Press

Kennedy, the Press, and National Security:

President John F. Kennedy frequently made personal appeals to the patriotism of journalists and asked them to exercise self-censorship and not publish information in the name of national security. The following is an example of a pattern which occurred throughout his administration.

On the evening of his first televised press conference, only four days after President Kennedy's inauguration ceremony, David Wise, a correspondent for the *Herald Tribune*, received a phone call late at night from his bureau chief in Washington, Robert Donovan, requesting him to investigate a tip about an important announcement scheduled to take place at two in the morning. When Wise called Pierre Salinger that night, Kennedy's Press Secretary was nervous and wanted to know his source, but refused to comment on the story. From a few more phone calls, Wise learned that Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviet Premier, planned to release the two RB-47 fliers who had been shot down over Soviet territory while spying for the CIA.¹

Wise called Salinger to confirm the story and include White House reaction in the next edition of the *Herald Tribune*. Salinger thereupon asked Wise not to publish the story because

the airmen were still in Soviet territory and the deal could fall apart if it did not get announced simultaneously in both countries.²

Salinger seemed nervous, but what he said made Wise feel important: "All of these grandiose thoughts were running through my head." After discussing the situation, Wise strongly urged Donovan to hold off publication to help Kennedy protect the airmen.³ Even later, Wise called the White House again to confirm that Salinger had conveyed the wishes of President Kennedy. Salinger reassured Wise that Kennedy wanted him to hold the story for national interest.⁴

In recognition of his actions, John Whitney, publisher of the *New York Herald Tribune*, received a thank-you letter the following day from Salinger who commended the *New York Herald-Tribune* for "the responsible manner in which they withheld publication of the news that the RB-47 pilots were to be released." The letter also hailed Wise as a responsible journalist acting in the national interest and not releasing the information to the public. As Wise judged, "In doing this the Herald-Tribune prevented the violation of an agreement between the United States and the U.S.S.R. which might have had regrettable repercussions."⁵

The following morning Kennedy met Salinger along with his Special Counsel Theodore Sorensen, and National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy for a briefing and rehearsal. During the weeks prior to the news conference William P. Wilson, a television consultant from New York, made arrangements for staging the presidential show. Salinger prepped Kennedy with briefing books filled with questions and answers submitted by government departments and agencies.⁶

The State Department auditorium was renovated with new carpeting and seating. During the final hours workers made final preparations to the stage, adjusting the lights, and the

lectern. As Hugh Sidey, the White House correspondent for *Time*, later wrote, “Hollywood could not have done better in preparing a spectacular.”⁷

Sidey and other journalists were aware of the pending news, but did not scoop Kennedy. “The secret was out even though it had not been published,” he wrote, “It ran through the Washington grapevine all Wednesday morning and afternoon. But it was still a national surprise when John Kennedy strode across that carpeted stage for his first news conference, televised to thirty-six million Americans who eagerly watched their sets.”⁸

In the realm of foreign policy Kennedy understood how to manage the timing of events for dramatic effect. He knew how to impress reporters by putting on a good show that enhanced his image in the press. He often relied upon personal persuasion and emphasized the need not to report information to the public in the name of national security. His strategy to influence the press on a personal level became his principal method for influencing news coverage of foreign policy. Kennedy’s national security strategy also involved managing the press by denying information through the systematic classification of information regarding crises and ongoing covert operations to combat Communism.

Examining Kennedy’s Relationship with the Press:

Stewart Alsop, a syndicated columnist and editor of the *Saturday Evening Post* who covered the Kennedy years, once noted that in a political community such as Washington D.C., “it is not possible to interpret the meaning of the news simply by reading the newspapers and pondering on the significance of the news contained in them.”⁹ To the study the presidency, this means that it is necessary to delve beneath the words in news stories and the early histories and examine the processes that were at play in the relationship between the president and the press.

In the historical literature on the Kennedy years two schools have emerged regarding his relationship with the press. The first school includes Theodore Sorensen and members of his administration, along with many of the early memoirs and histories of this period. This group denies that Kennedy had an information strategy and simply did not engage in any attempts at “news management.” The second view consists mostly of memoirs and oral histories by journalists from this period. Their observations have yet to be comprehensively gathered until this study. A comprehensive review of these works reveal patterns that demonstrate that journalists were an important part of Kennedy’s information strategy.

The evidence suggests that President Kennedy’s press system was not run out of a play book or based upon a sophisticated mass communications theory as outlined in a propaganda manual. The archival research for this study leads to the conclusion that the Kennedy system was not grounded in a belief or understanding of a scientific theory of communications which would require the systematic utilization of public opinion polls. In the Kennedy information and communications system polls played only a minor part as a feedback mechanism in his efforts to track and influence public opinion.

Kennedy’s pollster Louis Harris once observed that Kennedy “was an extensive user of polls, but he had reservations about them.”¹⁰ This was an era when pollsters were working to regain credibility after misforecasting the 1948 election. The experience of Harry Truman was still fresh in the minds of politicians and gave them good reason to be skeptical about accepting the validity of poll results. According to Harris, President Kennedy feared that public opinion would change after a poll was taken. He once told Harris, “You must come down on the merits of the issue, regardless of public opinion. But if you find yourself outside those jaws of consent of the governed, then you’d better look around fast. You can educate the public to extend those jaws. But if you’re outside them too often, then you can get voted out of office.”¹¹

The lack of computer technology prevented the proliferation of polls characteristic of the modern White House for tracking public opinion and adjusting communications strategy. Harris conducted only seven polls while Kennedy was president. Memos to Kennedy's aides regarding polls taken by congressmen offer only the mere hint of any systematic effort to track public opinion on a day-to-day basis.

During the 1960 election, Kennedy learned that polls had limitations in what they could measure and could be skewed by pollsters trying to deliver good news. According to Sorensen, Kennedy's basic philosophy was to determine the national interest and educate the public. "For this John Kennedy did not depend on polls," he wrote, "although he received and read many as President and followed as well the United States Information Agency polls on foreign opinion. He relied on his own sense of public mind that had helped him gain the Presidency, on a feel for the public pulse that resulted from talks with politicians, trips around the country, a sampling of his mail, and reading of the press."¹²

Kennedy's feedback mechanism for understanding how the public responded to his message relied almost exclusively on his personality and political instincts. An avid reader of newspapers and magazines, he also had advance copies of *Time* and *Newsweek* hand delivered to him each week. Henry Luce, the publisher, later complained that Kennedy received a copy of *Time* before he did. Kennedy also scanned large Eastern and Midwestern newspapers, but never read anything from the West Coast. According to Sorensen, "*The New York Times* was in a sense the Kennedys' second bible, devoured each day from start to finish and credited with great influence for its news and editorial judgments; and yet both brothers were troubled by what they felt to be a basic hostility on the part of some *Times* personnel."¹³

Kennedy's information strategy focused primarily on trying to influence the content of newspapers and magazines, because television was only beginning to emerge as coequal

medium toward the end of Kennedy's presidency.¹⁴ There were nearly one hundred and fifty million people in the U.S. with 54,000,000 television sets when Kennedy took office and 61,500,000 at the time of his death.¹⁵ CBS and NBC news went from fifteen minutes to one-half hour in the fall of 1963 while ABC waited until 1967.¹⁶ Although Kennedy has sometimes been labeled the first television president for his famous debates with Nixon and for introducing live television to press conferences, the characterization misreads what was actually an era of transition.

In the nation's political fabric television news was still considered a novelty throughout Kennedy's presidency. Satellites and microwave transmission were non-existent and live political television required make-shift studios. Unstaged international events televised outside a studio were difficult to capture because complicated arrangements required a small safari of technicians to operate heavy cameras, lights, and sound equipment. Film then needed to be transported to technicians who developed and edited the film for airing on a news broadcast. The layer of logistics attendant to covering a news event restricted television coverage of foreign policy throughout the Kennedy years.¹⁷

The debates with Nixon had filled Kennedy with confidence that his ability to strike a high note had edged out victory, but he still called television "that gadget."¹⁸ On election night, he confided to Benjamin Bradlee, a friend and reporter for *Newsweek* that "a few close friends" in Chicago might have provided the real edge.¹⁹ For President Kennedy the printed word and old fashioned deals still represented the life-blood and main arteries of presidential politics. "He was more concerned about a news column read by thousands than a newscast viewed by millions," Sorensen wrote.²⁰ Adding to Kennedy's anxiety was the belief that the majority of reporters favored his narrow victory, but that seventy-five percent of the editors and publishers favored Nixon.²¹ He expected "powerful opposition" from the press on foreign policy.²²

During the transition, Kennedy was concerned about overexposure and remained skeptical of his Press Secretary Pierre Salinger's suggestion to use television in press conferences to get around the press. Salinger sold Kennedy on television after arguing that he could talk directly to the people and emulate President Franklin Roosevelt's "fireside chats." "We should be able to go around the newspapers if that becomes necessary," Kennedy said.²³

The President was proud of his ability to handle press conferences, but joked privately with Sorensen that "he did not feel like facing the press" He "envied" General DeGaulle for scheduling press conferences only twice a year and answering only planted questions. He learned that Roosevelt sometimes held press conferences twice a week, but opted for a less prolific schedule.²⁴ After studying Roosevelt's "fireside chats," Kennedy told advisers that the country thought FDR was on the radio all the time when he had actually "carefully rationed" appearances. Determined to follow suit, Kennedy's information strategy selectively experimented with the television "gadget" in press conferences, speeches, and television specials, while focusing primarily upon influencing newspapers and magazines.²⁵

Driven by the belief that newspapers and magazines were the most influential channels for public opinion, Kennedy personally monitored print coverage of the New Frontier every morning.²⁶ After reviewing the news, the President routinely called reporters and used staff to relay congratulations or displeasure from the Oval Office.²⁷ The President resented any distortions of his views in the press because the public was being misled.²⁸ Sorensen claimed that Kennedy had a very high set of standards for reporters covering the White House and "believed the press had responsibilities as well as rights — including the responsibility to get the facts straight, to consider the national interest and to save bias for the editorial columns — and he did not hesitate to remind those who he thought had failed to meet their responsibilities."²⁹

The archival research for this study indicates that the Kennedy communications system operated very loosely, but was dominated by his personality and proactive involvement in cultivating reporters. Over the course of his political career Kennedy had developed a network of relationships with reporters and publishers from large circulation outlets which he continued to cultivate after he became president. President Kennedy not only socialized with members of the press, but frequently sought them out for advice. According to Sorensen, "He did not see how his accessibility to so many reporters could be classified by (the *New York Times* columnist) Arthur Krock as being more "cynical" than Roosevelt's or Truman's, who gave exclusive interviews only to Arthur Krock."³⁰

The organizational system for the White House during the Kennedy years has been described as 'spokes on a wheel' with Kennedy at the hub.³¹ Kennedy's information system was organized around his personal relationships with selected reporters and publishers. Each reporter and publisher represented a different publication and spoke on the wheel to a separate audience of public opinion that Kennedy wanted to persuade.

According to Salinger, Kennedy considered the wire services most important, the networks second, and the big city dailies third. Syndicated columnists were on Kennedy's regular reading list and required special treatment.³² Special treatment meant that someone from the White House would answer the phone or go to lunch, but memoirs and oral histories by journalists indicate that Kennedy kept 'hard right' conservatives and 'extreme left' liberals at arms length and primarily cultivated journalists who could reach the center. He was also economical with time and realized that cultivation would not work with outspoken critics. Consequently, Isadore F. Stone, the dean of the far left, and William F. Buckley, the dean of the hard right, the political bookends of American journalism were never cultivated by Kennedy.³³

A brief experience as a reporter covering the opening of the United Nations and the Potsdam Conference in 1945 filled President Kennedy with confident pride that he understood how the press works in politics and what journalists look for and need when covering a story. He felt comfortable among journalists and enjoyed talking to them about all areas of their business. At the same time, however, Kennedy also worried about what journalists wrote and remained aware that the press was supposed to function as a watchdog in an adversarial relationship. As case studies in the following chapters demonstrate, democracy's proverbial watchdog often slept when covering the New Frontier's foreign policy. The technique of social cultivation transformed reporters from adversarial critics into adoring White House lapdogs that Kennedy trained to get his 'spin' out on foreign policy news.

Joseph Alsop was aware of the compelling demands. As Alsop later put it, "he (JFK) had in some sense a kind of court, if you want." The court included Kennedy's favored lapdog journalists: "people with no political role." He viewed Kennedy's relationships with members of the press as a problem because "if you're a newspaperman, you can't not have a political role; I mean, you can't suddenly stop being a newspaperman, and you can't join a court in that kind of way. You can't just be the cozy old thing that any old thing can be said to; You know, it's not possible to do." Becoming a lapdog was the price Alsop and other journalists often paid for the access that came with membership in the White House court as 'the chosen Kennedys.' Access to inside information and White House social commendation were the benefits of being 'a chosen Kennedy,' but the President demanded cooperation although many were only chosen for the day.³⁴

President Kennedy used personal relationships with the press privately to persuade journalists to enhance his image with the electorate. Guided by instincts, the strategy was one of constant motion because when 'the chosen' ceased to meet his pragmatic needs Kennedy was

pressed for time and quickly moved on. "He seduces me," Luce confessed. "When I'm with him I feel like a whore."³⁵ Reporters were sometimes treated "curtly" because Kennedy's blunt techniques were often "gauche" and "bad mannered."³⁶ President Kennedy viewed the press as his vehicle to educate the public and wanted to control what was being printed to the extent that it was possible. "John and Robert Kennedy gained new ideas and insights from their constant attention to the press," according to Sorensen's favorable view.³⁷ What emerged was a strategy of relationship marketing wherein Kennedy turned to a key reporter or publisher and offered special access in order to promote his foreign policy message.

The journalist Benjamin Bradlee frequently the most "chosen Kennedy," sensed that the President created the "ideal relationship between the press and the presidency." According to Bradlee, special attention was devoted to small details because Kennedy was "particularly respectful of history and his own role in it."³⁸ Bradlee thought he had a close personal friendship with President Kennedy, but later realized he was merely one of the "historians in the doghouse."³⁹ Nevertheless, he understood and accepted his own role and the expectations of the Kennedys. As he noted, "Kennedys by definition want 110 percent from their friends, especially their friends in the press, and feel cheated by less." "He valued my journalism when it carried his water," Bradlee confessed. "Without embarrassment," Bradlee recognized the "value" for his career and *Newsweek* and thus "used" the friendship.⁴⁰ In return for access, Bradlee gossiped with Kennedy about stories *Newsweek* was currently working on. Throughout his presidency, Kennedy kept a watchful eye on what Bradlee and *Newsweek* published and offered his own hints and suggestions.⁴¹

Off-the-record, Bradlee learned small details about the White House, but on-the-record Kennedy did not want critical stories damaging his image. According to Kenneth Thompson, Bradlee's associate at *Newsweek*, Kennedy wanted cheerleaders and "resented" critical and

embarrassing stories.⁴² In August 1962, Kennedy cut off Bradlee's access after *Look* magazine quoted him as saying, "It's almost impossible to write a story they like. Even if a story is quite favorable to their side, they'll find one paragraph to quibble about." The President was upset because Bradlee refused to tell reporters he had been misquoted.⁴³

During the weeks that followed, rumors that Kennedy had once been married swept through the Washington press corps, but the story was not printed due to a lack of credible sources until *Parade* magazine broke the silence in the first week of September. In mid-September to regain access, Bradlee agreed to squelch the rumors with a story Kennedy approved for *Newsweek*. The story attributed the rumors of the "other wife" to hate groups and gossip columnists who lacked credibility as journalists.⁴⁴ *Time* responded with an article noting that Kennedy had given *Newsweek* access to the "friendliest" spin on the story, but the Missile Crisis soon overshadowed this minor press skirmish.⁴⁵ Kennedy continued to remind Bradlee of his special access and hinted he was not living up to expectations. "Jesus, there you are really plugged in, better than any other reporter except for Charlie (Bartlett), getting one exclusive after another out of this place, and what do you do but dump all over us," Kennedy exploded.⁴⁶

Kennedy chose Bradlee again in March 1963 to help squelch rumors about 'news management.' "Except for the Cuba thing, I challenge you to give me an example of our managing the news," Kennedy said. Bradlee realized that he was an example, but opted for politeness and said nothing.⁴⁷ After Arthur Krock originally raised the 'news management' controversy in February 1962, Kennedy encouraged Bradlee to get a reporter at *Newsweek* to "go after him."⁴⁸ Once again, Kennedy encouraged Bradlee to respond to defend the charge of news management, but now he wanted a cover story. Bradlee described Krock as "out of touch" with Washington. He conducted a straw poll among forty-three journalists and found forty who believed Kennedy managed the news, but agreed Eisenhower had done the same

thing. Seventy-five percent believed Kennedy worked harder than Ike to manage his image, but they were divided over who was more successful. Bradlee wrote that an “overwhelming majority” did not want to hear anymore about Kennedy's ‘news management.’⁴⁹ Kennedy was pleased, but complained that the attack on Krock should have been stronger and the word “fib” should have been used to describe how the administration handled information during the Missile Crisis instead of “lie.”⁵⁰

Walter Winchell, a syndicated gossip columnist with a reputation for political muckraking, added his own voice to the debate over news management in March 1963 with a syndicated column entitled “The Kennedys vs. The Press.” The column criticized the administration for manipulating information as a “propaganda weapon.” “All too often JFK has acted as if he were elected Publisher of the American Press,” he wrote. Winchell decided to act after learning Bobby Kennedy had attempted to pressure executives in the Hearst syndicate to edit out anti-Kennedy comments in his own columns. Winchell regarded Kennedy as a lazy dilettante and playboy who had risen to power because of family wealth. The President could never control a critic like Winchell who was dedicated to attacking his image with gossip about his personal life and criticism of his policies. “How can I take this kid seriously?” he said.⁵¹

Kennedy instinctively reacted to words that suggested press criticism and the charge of news management inevitably resurfaced in April 1962 during the crisis over steel industry plans to raise prices. Kennedy had attacked the steel industry for being unpatriotic and tried to coerce executives into rethinking the price increase. In a nationally syndicated column published in *the New York Herald Tribune*, David Lawrence, the conservative editor of *U.S. News and World Report* called such tactics “quasi-Fascism.” “The fucking *Herald Tribune* is at it again,” Kennedy exploded. He considered the column a personal attack by the *Tribune's* conservative editors and replaced the White House subscription with the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* for its

Democratic slant. The story of the canceled *Tribune* subscription instantly became front page news and left Kennedy horrified by “greater-than-foreseen publicity” that he only liked to read a chorus of praise. He decided to downplay the issue for several months, but continued to read “bootleg copies” without admitting a mistake.⁵²

The charges of news management that dogged the New Frontier amused Kennedy because the public paid little interest. “We aren’t losing any votes on that one,” he assured Sorensen. “Does anyone think we’d be getting ‘belted’ every day if we could control it ourselves?”⁵³ Nevertheless, ‘controlled news’ would have emerged only if the New Frontier developed a Gestapo strategy. Frustrated by the press coverage, Kennedy could not see how his instinct to manipulate information and access were really techniques to manage the news.

For Kennedy, access meant power. Theodore White, a journalist who became famous for his coverage of the 1960 election, was struck by how well Kennedy understood power operated in his relationships with journalists. Indeed, “Kennedy enjoyed the thought that he could, by a word or a story, make a man’s reputation.” In effect, Kennedy used access and friendship to create a caste system among reporters.

During the 1960 campaign the operation of this information strategy is most visible in Kennedy’s relationship with White and the subsequent publication of The Making of the President. Bradlee explained that the book’s success changed the position of journalists by giving them “respectability and authority.” He recognized: “The key to the book’s success, of course, was access, unparalleled access.”⁵⁴ Bradlee concluded that the need for access permanently changed presidential politics.⁵⁵

White’s book highlighted the fact that part of Kennedy’s campaigning strategy involved courting journalists assigned to cover the journey to the White House. As White recalled, “He (JFK) seemed to see American politics cynically, yet hopefully, partly as amusement, more so

as sport.”⁵⁶ Kennedy pumped White and other reporters for political information and counsel.⁵⁷ White was struck by Kennedy's sense that what happened behind the scenes at a news organization was as important to his campaign as his delegate count.⁵⁸ Richard Rovere, a correspondent for the *New Yorker*, also remembered that Kennedy frequently interrupted interviews with questions about his work and friends.⁵⁹

Throughout his political career, Kennedy had regularly courted the press by informally socializing with reporters. Sorensen later explained, “They were not wholly unmindful of the value of such friendships but were basically attracted to these men and women as human beings.”⁶⁰ “He liked journalists,” Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara recalled. Nevertheless, behind Kennedy's bawdy humor and casual manner was a strategy to influence what they wrote.⁶¹

Acting as his own press secretary, Kennedy dealt directly with journalists to influence the information being reported by courting key reporters and offering personal access along with the prestige of social friendship with the President of the United States. Kennedy knew that he could influence their careers with the information he gave them. He would pick favored journalists for special breaking stories.

Sarah McClendon, a White House reporter for the Associated Press described the process: “John Kennedy created media stars. Favored reporters were handed “scoops” directly from the Oval Office.” As McClendon pointed out, “Kennedy’s good press, like everything else in government and life, did not come by chance. The public believed the press courted the Kennedys; it was actually the Kennedys who courted the press.”⁶²

McClendon complained that Kennedy favored journalists from larger circulating newspapers and magazines. This was a problem for her because she wrote articles that would appear in small market newspapers. Noting that the manipulation went both ways, she said

favored journalists “mined Kennedy as if he were the mother lode.” Journalists worked to cultivate Kennedy for access and favors. Favored journalists were frequently invited to parties where gossip led to breaking news. According to McClendon this led to more scoops because other members of government would know whom Kennedy trusted by watching him operate.⁶³

Pierre Salinger’s memoirs claim that Kennedy felt comfortable among his journalist friends and felt confident enough to trust them. Kennedy frequently socialized with members of the press on occasions that ranged from dinner to overnights in Hyannis or Palm Beach. The most frequent guests Salinger remembered were Bradlee, bureau chief of *Newsweek*, and Bartlett, a columnist for the *Chattanooga Times*. Kennedy also frequently socialized with the syndicated columnists Joseph Alsop and Rowland Evans, along with Philip Graham, the publisher of the *Washington Post* and *Newsweek*.⁶⁴

Salinger cited only one journalist who violated this trust, but refused to identify who it was. ABC’s Bill Lawrence confessed later to being the unnamed. He noted that although there had been many times when he had not reported stories when Kennedy had asked him, he felt an obligation on this occasion to go public with a story against the President’s wishes.

During the transition period Lawrence, then a reporter for the *New York Times*, often played golf with Kennedy. As a result of his personal access, “my newspaper was now the chosen instrument of the ‘leaks’ Kennedy chose to use to scoop himself on the selection of his own cabinet and the development of his own policies.” Lawrence thought that the *Times* did not sufficiently appreciate the stories that his access to the President generated. “The indifferent, and indeed sometimes hostile, attitude of the New York office toward my long series of important exclusive news stories from the Kennedy administration-in-the-making,” he wrote, “was perhaps the first visible manifestation to me of the attitude that would lead to my leaving the *Times* after twenty years of service.”⁶⁵

In May 1961 Lawrence received a call from Kennedy consoling him about his problems with the *New York Times*. Lawrence had informed Salinger about his troubles with the *Times* and asked him if he could help get a job at *ABC* working for Eisenhower's former press secretary, James Hagerty. These negotiations led to a position reporting for *ABC* and Lawrence's resignation from the *New York Times*.⁶⁶ After Lawrence moved from the *New York Times* to *ABC*, Kennedy instructed his aide, Kenneth O'Donnell, to give Lawrence "any possible breaks in the news he could" during his first few important "competitive weeks" in order to help him establish himself at his new job.⁶⁷

In another case of cultivation, the reporter Marianne Means was assigned to cover Kennedy's 1960 campaign by the Hearst Syndicate. Means's became one of the "gals" who benefited from Kennedy's friendship, according to Sarah McClendon. He met her while making a speech in Nebraska and soon after got her a job on a suburban Virginia newspaper owned by the Kennedys. Means finally landed a job covering the White House after Kennedy was elected.⁶⁸

Just as the practice of offering favors to journalists began long before Kennedy was elected president, so too did the strategy to manipulate the press begin long before the election campaign of 1960. Kennedy had been quietly grooming and preparing to run for President for most of his adult life and developed a pragmatic attitude toward the press and politics. "It's not what you are that counts it's what people think you are," the elder Kennedy had advised.⁶⁹ The Kennedy image of the 1960 campaign was carefully constructed over a period of years. Under his father, Joseph Kennedy's wing, Kennedy developed relationships with prominent publishers and journalists to promote an intellectual image through books such as While England Slept and Profiles in Courage.

As early as 1940, Kennedy had exploited contacts with the press. His father enlisted Henry Luce to write a foreword for Why England Slept, the Harvard senior thesis he had turned into a book. As Luce later recalled, “Ambassador Kennedy called me up by overseas telephone several times in 1940, and one time, as I recall it, he asked me if I would write a foreword to this book and I said, “Well send me a manuscript and let me look at it.”⁷⁰

During World War II, the elder Kennedy used connections to make sure his son received a commendation for bravery for saving the crew of the PT-109. As captain, however, the younger Kennedy failed to notice as PT-109 drifted in front of the hull of a Japanese cruiser that pierced his vessel in half and sank his Navy command without his firing a single shot. Nevertheless, the elder Kennedy enlisted journalists to write stories for *The New Yorker* and *Reader's Digest* and gave his son a lesson in how to turn military folly into heroics, thus eventually permitting him to stand out in the crowded field of presidential contenders.⁷¹ “Where the hell were you...where the hell was your radar?” Joseph Kennedy Jr. wrote after reading about the PT-109 in *The New Yorker* magazine.⁷²

Concerned about his son developing a rich playboy image, the elder Kennedy encouraged marriage to promote the wholesome family values Americans wanted in a presidential candidate. Then came a cover story for *Life* to promote his son's 1953 engagement to Jacqueline Bouvier, a young debutante from a socially prominent family. Arrangements were made for *Life* to photograph the couple walking blissfully on the beach in Hyannis.⁷³ Nevertheless, marriage never interfered with the Senator's passion for a playboy lifestyle and by 1955, Mrs. Kennedy wanted a divorce. Kennedy's father thereupon offered his daughter-in-law one million dollars and a new Buick not to divorce. “Why not ten million?” she said.⁷⁴ In 1958, Bartlett was struck by Kennedy's reaction to his first child as an opportunity for “bountiful publicity,” but kept quiet.⁷⁵

Kennedy benefited from an unwritten code among reporters not to write about the peccadilloes of politicians. Years later, reporters such as Bartlett and Bradlee have said they never saw “evidence” of Kennedy's infidelity and expressed shock to learn that the President was able to hide the facts.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, Walter Winchell filed a column on the front page of the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* during the 1960 Democratic convention that reported Kennedy fled recklessly down a fire escape at a friend's apartment to escape reporters and photographers who had followed him. Winchell immediately drew criticism for trying to publicize ‘juicy gossip’ and found little interest among his syndicate. “He's a married man!” one editor said.⁷⁷ “Kennedy had an instinct for politics, no principles,” recalled Walter Trohan, a conservative columnist for the *Chicago Tribune*.⁷⁸ He was aware of womanizing although the President kept him at arms length. Trohan remained an outspoken critic of Kennedy's handling of foreign policy, but winked at womanizing because it was considered unethical to report on the President's private life.⁷⁹ Drew Pearson, a syndicated columnist with a muckraker's instinct, wrote a column that said Kennedy “misbehaved with another woman” on the night of the inaugural. President Kennedy wisely chose not to respond to the allegation.⁸⁰ Subsequently, only one unidentified reporter raised the issue of womanizing while Kennedy was in the White House. “Look, he's the President of the United States,” Salinger lied. “He doesn't have time for a mistress.”⁸¹

After preserving his son's family image, the elder Kennedy also bolstered his intellectual image. Years earlier, political connections had opened the admission's door to the Ivy league pedigree of a degree from Harvard.⁸² After a near fatal back operation, Senator Kennedy required a long period of convalescence and spent his time supervising the 1956 production of Profiles in Courage. The Senator took credit for sole authorship and allegedly proved the point by writing long passages in front of journalists. Nevertheless, Theodore

Sorensen's contribution was downplayed and other college professors recruited for research and editorial assistance remained anonymous. The elder Kennedy knew that a well-received book authored by his son would help him stand out as the Senate's resident intellectual. To promote the book, Joe Kennedy spent thousands on advertising and advance purchases to make the book a best seller. Kennedy received the Pulitzer Prize and intellectual notoriety, in part because his father had recruited Arthur Krock to lobby judges on the selection committee.⁸³

In December 1957 during an *ABC* interview with Mike Wallace, Drew Pearson said Sorensen had written Profiles in Courage. Pearson called Kennedy "the only man in history...that won a Pulitzer Prize for a book on which was ghostwritten for him, which indicates the kind of public relations setup he's had." "Sue them!" Joe Kennedy responded. Kennedy had eyewitnesses prepare affidavits and sent Clark Clifford, his lawyer to *ABC*. A week later, Mike Wallace issued a retraction and apologized to Kennedy for airing questions about whether the book was ghostwritten. In January 1958, Kennedy made it a point to show Pearson his handwritten rough chapters from the book, but while admitting "efficiency" required using ghostwriters for speeches and articles. "He got a whale of a lot of help on his book," he wrote in his diary. "I'm still dubious." Nevertheless, Pearson issued a retraction: "Sometimes I'm a sucker for a nice guy."⁸⁴

The triumph of winning the Pulitzer Prize overshadowed Kennedy's ongoing battle with complicated health problems due to high cholesterol, painful back problems, Addison's disease, and an underactive thyroid. He used a backbrace and wore a lift in one shoe because one leg was longer than the other. Kennedy's other ailments responded to drug treatments that mixed cortisone based steroids, amphetamines, and pain killers eventually obtained without any coordination by Dr. Janet Travell and "Dr. Feelgood," Max Jacobson. Side effects the President may have experienced included tannish-yellow skin, a puffy face, along with

heightened libido and sense of personal power. “I don’t think he (JFK) worried at all about how these various drugs might interact at the time,” his good friend Senator George Smathers later noted. Kennedy received Travell’s treatments daily and Jacobson visited several times a week with a “cocktail” to relieve pain and for “additional strength to cope with stress.” A plane was secretly chartered to bring Jacobson to Vienna when Kennedy squared off against Khrushchev; “Dr. Feelgood” was also on hand during the tense days of the Missile Crisis. “I don’t care if there’s panther piss in there,” Kennedy allegedly said, “as long as it makes me feel good.” The press showed some concern about Kennedy’s health, but accepted his explanation of ‘college football’ and ‘war injuries’ and never demanded to see records.⁸⁵

The elder Kennedy had guided the creation of his son’s image as JFK the all-American family man with gallant athletic, military, intellectual and political accomplishments. The next step was a December 1957 *Time* magazine cover story to tell the country about his son’s White House qualification. He pressed Luce to do a cover story that alluded to the Senator’s presidential potential. Joseph Kennedy later bragged that the publicity boost *Time*’s cover had given his son was a bargain at seventy-five thousand dollars. “I just bought a horse,” he said.⁸⁶

Throughout the remainder of his political career, Kennedy tried to capitalize tactically on these ties to Luce to influence the news *Time-Life* coverage. In one episode during the 1960 campaign, Kennedy learned about a negative story to appear concerning Billy Graham’s involvement in his campaign. Kennedy called Luce and asked to have the critical tone of the story changed. According to Hugh Sidey, “the Billy Graham piece came out a real neutral thing, it was changed.”⁸⁷

During the 1960 Democratic convention Joseph Kennedy met with Luce on the night of his son’s acceptance speech for the nomination. The elder Kennedy left soon after the speech was over, telling Luce, “I want to thank you for all that you’ve done for Jack.” : “We are very

grateful for all that you've done for Jack."⁸⁸ The expression of gratitude made the publisher uncomfortable. "I was a little taken aback by it," Luce admitted. "I began to wonder if, did we do too much?" Luce therefore warned, "If Jack shows any signs of going soft on Communism — then we would clobber him."⁸⁹

Following the convention, Kennedy lunched with Luce at the *Time-Life* building. "Kennedy thought that the business community...had him wrong, and that they shouldn't assume he was going to be anti-business," Luce recalled. "In a way he was trying to tell us that we ought not to represent him as in any way anti-business."⁹⁰ Kennedy sought Luce's endorsement in the editorial pages of *Life* and *Time*. Kennedy joked that "your endorsement of the 1961 issue of his book would be the 'last one I shall get.'" ⁹¹ Luce eventually decided to endorse Nixon. Nevertheless, the publisher remained a friend of Joseph Kennedy and was a personal guest at the inauguration.⁹² President Kennedy's subsequent effort to court the conservative press helps to explain why his rhetoric on Communism became sharper during the course of the 1960 campaign.

Luce became an honored White House guest spending the night of the inauguration in Joseph Kennedy's private box. The President came over to greet his family. "He shook hands with Clare (Luce's wife) and he had to reach way over in the box to shake my hand and this appeared on television, so...a lot of people said, "I saw you on television."⁹³

Luce subsequently acknowledged that President Kennedy read *Time* every week. The publisher boasted that Kennedy was one of his "regular and careful readers."⁹⁴ He described Kennedy's pressure tactics as "a dialogue." : "I think the dialogue from his point of view was for the most part quite civilized and even friendly in manner."⁹⁵ Nevertheless, every week Kennedy called Luce or staff people relayed his reaction to *Time*'s coverage. "We would hear if they were more or less mad, pleased, or tolerably pleased," Luce recalled.⁹⁶

Charles Bartlett of the *Chattanooga Times* was one of Kennedy's favored columnists and close friends since 1946 when they first crossed paths at a night club. Kennedy had just launched his political career with the announcement that he was running for a Congressional seat in Massachusetts. Bartlett was on his way to Tennessee for his first job as a journalist.⁹⁷ Bartlett socialized in the same circles with Kennedy while he was a member of Congress and the Senate. At the beginning of Kennedy's bid for the Senate, Bartlett invited him to a dinner party where he introduced Kennedy to his future wife, Jacqueline Bouvier.⁹⁸

In Congress, Kennedy adopted a leisurely style. "He always had a golf club in the corner of his office," Bartlett recalled, "he'd stand and sort of swing the club and discuss the affairs of the day."⁹⁹ Kennedy's approach to making policy in the Senate left Bartlett with the impression that, "he looked at it more or less as an outsider." Not interested in making a mark on policy, Kennedy "took a sort of observer's view of the House." The "hustling freshmen" ethic did not suit his personality.¹⁰⁰ More interested in getting re-elected, Kennedy's pragmatic approach toward policy-making in Congress was less concerned about "political philosophy."¹⁰¹ Once elected to the Senate, Bartlett observed that Kennedy "seemed...much more totally involved."¹⁰² In 1959 with the election looming, Bartlett became a syndicated columnist with Kennedy's connections and encouragement. "It's a shame to keep writing that stuff and sending it down to die in Chattanooga," Kennedy said. Bartlett noted Kennedy's role as "helpful" mentor was guided by pragmatic political instincts. "I'm not riddled with ambition," he insisted.¹⁰³

During the 1960 campaign Kennedy paid careful attention to the needs of working reporters and his staff tried to make them feel welcome and at home. He easily captivated White. During the primaries, Lawrence grew attached to Kennedy after "long bull sessions."

“It was a very intimate relationship — not just for me — for any of the people who chose to cover Kennedy and make the trips with him,” Lawrence later wrote.¹⁰⁴

After spending time socializing, a lapdog relationship blossomed as White felt reporter’s instincts replaced by those of an intimate confidant and a member of Kennedy’s inner circle. After a long day of campaigning, journalists were offered cocktails and Kennedy’s charming companionship. Years later, White confessed to his lapdog status after surrendering to Kennedy’s intoxicating courtship: “It was perhaps at this point that I think I moved or was drawn across the line of reporting to friendship.”¹⁰⁵

Fletcher Knebel of *Look* magazine was given access to Kennedy to write a profile for the campaign book, Candidates 1960. Knebel wanted to write about rumors that during Kennedy’s bid for the Senate the *Boston Post* had dropped its endorsement of Senator Henry Cabot Lodge after the elder Kennedy loaned money to the financially troubled paper. Kennedy vehemently denied the allegation. “Listen, that was an absolutely straight business transaction,” he said. But as Knebel prepared to leave Kennedy confessed, “we had to buy that paper.” Knebel decided not to print the story.¹⁰⁶

Kennedy courted Knebel because he liked the publicity *Look* magazine offered with glossy picture stories about his family. “I wasn’t overjoyed about writing these kiddie pieces,” Laura Knebel recalled, “but the readers ate up the Kennedy material.” Nevertheless, after Knebel’s article was published in Candidates 1960, Kennedy complained that the emphasis on “personality stuff” and his wife’s glamour made him look like a “juenesse doree”. “You did not spell out my qualifications as a candidate,” Kennedy complained. Nevertheless, Fletcher Knebel’s decision to write about the “golden boy” rather than the Kennedy who bought the *Boston Post* was an act of political friendship.¹⁰⁷ When rumors about Addison’s disease and Kennedy’s first wife surfaced during the campaign Knebel sat on both stories. “Again, I was

thinking, do I want to lose this great big news source,” Knebel recalled.¹⁰⁸ “He was magazine copy.”¹⁰⁹ After Kennedy was elected he repaid the favor by offering Knebel access to more family photo sessions.¹¹⁰

There were distinct differences in the treatment reporters received from the Nixon and Kennedy camps. Throughout the election, as Lawrence put it, “you moved from one world to another when you changed candidates.” Nixon never liked reporters and only begrudgingly tolerated them. In contrast, “Kennedy had this friendly air about him.”¹¹¹ According to Robert Pierpoint, a reporter with *CBS*, Salinger introduced new journalists to Kennedy and offered rides on his private plane. Kennedy sometimes asked reporters for advice. Although Pierpoint never served in the administration, he later wrote, “Kennedy began talking about possible Presidential appointments for our friends and contacts.”¹¹²

Chalmers Roberts, a reporter for the *Washington Post*, felt the satisfaction of having Kennedy, the winner of the Pulitzer Prize, compliment him for articles: “Kennedy’s frankness and sense of intimacy it imparted, was refreshing,” he recalled. “Sometimes this Kennedy frankness was of a kind that shocked me, but I must plead guilty to letting it pass too easily.” The chosen reporters protected Kennedy from “excesses simply because so many of us liked him personally — often in contrast to the way we felt about his Democratic rivals and especially in contrast to our feelings about Nixon.” As a result, no one published Kennedy references to his opponent Senator Stuart Symington with expressions of “crudity not worthy of print even now.” “It showed an immaturity that...was one of JFK’s real flaws,” Roberts recorded.¹¹³

During the Kennedy presidency, the success of White’s campaign account underscored what access could do for a journalist. “Teddy White made reporters feel that they needed super access to do their job,” according to Bradlee. “And politicians got the message. They began to

give selected reporters that kind of super access and the great manipulation madness was underway.”¹¹⁴

On the night of the inauguration Kennedy stopped at Joseph Alsop’s house on Dumbarton Avenue to celebrate his first night as President of the United States. Alsop offered a bowl of terrapin soup, but Kennedy wanted sustenance of a different sort. “I soon observed that what he really wanted was one last cup of unadulterated admiration, and the people crowding my living room gave him that cup freely, filled to the brim,” Alsop observed.¹¹⁵ The columnist basked in this period of “excitement” privately socializing with the President and Jackie at his home and being a frequent dinner guest at the White House. He boasted that “by presidential standards they came often” to his home on Dumbarton Avenue averaging one dinner every six weeks.¹¹⁶

On the Monday following Kennedy’s inauguration, Bartlett was the first journalist invited for a private dinner at the White House. “He was just burning with the things he could do,” Bartlett recorded.¹¹⁷ The President spoke freely about his plan to make the first press conference a success.¹¹⁸ “It was a funny position being in my role as a newspaperman who’s sort of on the fringe of the government and a friend of the President’s,” Bartlett wrote. Washington insiders, knowing that Bartlett frequently talked to Kennedy about policy and political appointments, soon cultivated him to get jobs and offer the President advice. The notoriety made Bartlett uncomfortable about his role as a ‘chosen Kennedy,’ but he was willing to protect his friend during crisis periods.¹¹⁹

During the Steel Crisis of 1962, Kennedy called Bartlett for advice on how he should react to steel industry plans to raise prices. “They fucked us and we’ve got to try to fuck them,” Kennedy told advisers.¹²⁰ “Try to scare them a little bit,” Bartlett said.¹²¹ The President used a televised press conference and warned that the steel industry could not raise prices

during the midst of the Cold War. He privately threatened to investigate anti-trust practices and have the IRS audit steel executives.¹²² Bartlett called a friend in the steel industry to make it clear that Kennedy was taking a tough public stance, but really wanted to find a way to cooperate.¹²³ The steel executives backed down.¹²⁴ Bartlett's columns never revealed his behind-the-scenes political role.

The access granted to selected reporters eventually led to charges of "news management." Sorensen has emphatically denied that Kennedy "tried to use his position to intimidate reporter's thinking, to secure his dismissal, to withhold news privileges from opposition papers, to require the publications or suppression of timely stories, to falsify facts deliberately as a means of covering up errors, to blanket as "secret" or "private" any matters that deserved to be known or to shift the blame for his errors to others."¹²⁵

Nevertheless, the record clearly shows that Kennedy sought to manipulate the message that was coming out of his administration. He believed that government should speak with one voice and required all speeches to be cleared. During periods where "particularly sensitive matters" were involved, such as during the Steel and Cuban Missile Crisis, Kennedy "requested in vain that all participants refer reporters' inquiries to the White House."¹²⁶ The strategy to protect Kennedy's image had limitations because official Washington quietly leaked to reporters about his foreign policy.

Indeed, Sorensen during Kennedy's first days in office proposed a different approach to reporters in comparison to past administrations. Sorensen wanted to limit access to the President. Nearly 1000 reporters were accredited to the Kennedy White House when compared to 200 who covered President Franklin Roosevelt; during the Roosevelt era, only 50 reporters regularly attended press conferences, whereas over 400 regularly attended Kennedy's press conferences.¹²⁷ Sorensen noted that U.S. reporters had unique privileges in having press

conferences with Kennedy or on the record access to government officials. By contrast, the British government did not make travel arrangements nor did Prime Minister Harold Macmillan allow reporters on his plane.¹²⁸

Sorensen urged private consultations with publishers to eliminate unwieldy press conferences and called for a system that revolved around a “a select handful” of favored reporters for “better” questions. The effort to lobby publishers to support a new system frustrated Sorensen: “not one I have met or talked to has the guts to force such changes on reporters in his employ.”¹²⁹ Nevertheless, Sorensen encouraged Kennedy’s decision to introduce television into press conferences although, “Television has not basically altered the character of the Press Conference,” and Kennedy benefited because the American public’s “critical eye” could see “the workings of the American reporter.” “To the untrained eye they may appear to be rude,” Sorensen observed, but Kennedy would benefit when Americans saw him supply answers to “inept” questions.¹³⁰ He later rated press conferences as “one of Kennedy’s most effective means of communicating with the American people” because the American people could see and hear his answers and opening statements without editorial interpretations.¹³¹

The Kennedy administration issued twice as many press releases compared to previous administrations. Press Secretary Salinger gave two briefings a day. The President’s working day was designed to fill the news with actions and messages wherein Kennedy “spoke with a larger audience in mind.”¹³² Salinger urged an open beat system for reporters covering the White House. Thus, reporters could have access to any staff person without clearing it beforehand with Salinger’s office. In theory, the open beat system would sometimes lead to stories that emphasized internal conflict about pending policy decisions, but Kennedy would not tolerate the public airing of disagreements about policy once a decision had been made.¹³³ Even

with specially selected reporters, the Oval Office controlled the rules of the game and frequently insisted that background sessions be held off-the-record. The *New York Times* White House correspondent, Tom Wicker, later confessed that the device allowed Kennedy to speak openly about foreign policy and Washington politics, but without being held accountable in public. More interested in impressing his *Time* colleagues than becoming a 'chosen Kennedy,' Wicker distributed background notes to reporters and encouraged critics of Kennedy's news management.¹³⁴ He never developed a close personal relationship with Kennedy and only had two private interviews. "I could see that the Kennedy White House was manipulating the news," Wicker recalled, "...but we didn't seem to have much weapons to cope with that, at the time."¹³⁵

James Deakin of the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, later described the open beat system as "a reporter's dream," with "all those bright, articulate people willing and anxious to talk" and "all those ideas tumbling and frothing over the dinner tables in Georgetown and Cleveland Park."¹³⁶ Kennedy's information strategy was accepted without question because prevailing atmosphere in Washington presumed trust in the relationship between the President and the press. "The news media were inclined to take the word of the president and his spokesmen at face value," Deakin recalled "This was unwise, but what else is new?"¹³⁷

Nevertheless, reporters had complained that the new policy made it difficult to get information because the Press Secretary no longer served as the main source for news. Despite the "new accessibility," Sorensen realized that in the past it was "much easier to get news from one point of view than to have to go out and hustle for it." In previous administrations, according to Sorensen, "there grew up in Washington a great cult of news management."¹³⁸

The only major qualification to the New Frontier's open beat system was in the area of national security. "We believe in the complete right of the press to know what is going on in

government within the confines of national security,” Sorensen wrote. Throughout Kennedy’s days in office concern over press coverage that threatened national security was an important theme in presidential relations with the press.¹³⁹

Another area of communications Sorensen addressed was the “coordination of government policy.” The goal was for the government to speak with one voice to present a coherent picture regarding Kennedy’s handling of policy.¹⁴⁰ As the New Frontier prepared for foreign policy battles in the Cold War, Kennedy was aware of the need to manipulate the wheels of government and the press to communicate an image of constant success.

In February 1961, Sorensen told political aides to prepare a report for Fred Dutton, the Special Assistant to the President, to alert Kennedy for examples of action by departments where they had not coordinated information properly. Sorensen wanted to know about “News releases, public statements, messages to Congress, budgetary commitments, coordination of press timing, clearance with Congressional leaders etc.”¹⁴¹ Dutton asked all Cabinet members to report twice a week on “newsworthy or substantial developments in each department.” Department heads shared points they thought Kennedy should announce at press conferences.¹⁴² Political appointees were instructed to follow the scripts the White House prepared as talking points for speeches.¹⁴³

Early in the summer of 1961, Salinger held his first regular weekly meeting to coordinate information with press officers from other departments. The original idea for these meetings came from Arthur Schlesinger’s discussions with U.S. Information Agency’s director, Edward R. Murrow, and Secretary of State for Public Affairs Roger Tubby concerning ways to give press officers in government background on impending crises. The solution was to review “one or two topics on which press officers are feeling or anticipating pressure (e.g., Berlin, Brazil, Red China and the UN, or whatever)?”¹⁴⁴

In addition to information coordination, the information strategy also emphasized “communication and education” in the context of Kennedy’s personal relations with the press. President Kennedy decided to supplement press conferences with his private access strategy.¹⁴⁵ One basic criticism, especially by columnists was that the President did not make a great enough effort to educate Americans in public forums.¹⁴⁶ As noted earlier, Kennedy deliberately used the bully pulpit sparingly, fearing that too many television appearances would lead to overexposure and the country would ignore his message. He wanted to be very selective about when he made an appeal to the public. “I don’t think he wanted to use them lightly or sort of blow his credibility with the people or anything,” Bartlett noted. “I think he was saving it for the times when he really needed it.”¹⁴⁷

To be effective, according to Sorensen, “Selectivity was the key — selecting the right time and the right issues.” Television speeches were reserved only for Kennedy’s important issues. The White House believed that the country would tune out speeches on pending legislation. There was also fear of a backlash from viewers that “resent being deprived of their regular TV entertainment.” Kennedy recognized that presidential television provided a form of entertainment and competed with prime time programming for audience attention.¹⁴⁸

Television specials were eventually seen as a method to educate the public and maintain Kennedy’s preference for selective appearances. In his memoir, Sorensen described television specials as a vehicle to take the public “behind the scenes.”¹⁴⁹ He wanted Kennedy to narrate a series of half hour documentaries on topics such as foreign aid.¹⁵⁰ The idea was for Kennedy to use the bully-pulpit in a unique and innovative way to promote the New Frontier. “The President is going to have to make some direct appeals to the people on some key issues,” Sorensen recommended.¹⁵¹

The television industry was receptive to documentaries. In a February 1961 memo to Salinger, Elmer Lower, *NBC's* Manager of Special Events proposed a half hour exclusive taped "Conversation with the President" with Chet Huntley and David Brinkley. *NBC* desperately wanted the prestige of an interview with Kennedy and was willing to guarantee an easy interview. "We would view this as a very relaxed occasion," Lower wrote, "much the same as the visits Chet and David paid to the President at Hyannis Port last fall."¹⁵²

Yet television executives were unwilling to accommodate all of President Kennedy's demands. The networks balked at sacrificing revenues by giving the President air-time for press conferences after seven p.m. when most viewers watched television. "I understand the problems occasioned by having the press conferences at 7:00 p.m.," Salinger explained to *NBC's* president, Robert Kinter. "We do not intend to hold evening press conferences more often than every four to five weeks." Kennedy eventually accommodated the networks by scheduling press conferences an hour earlier.¹⁵³

In other areas, Kennedy coordinated with Robert Donovan of the *New York Herald Tribune* in writing the 1961 book PT-109, John F. Kennedy in World War II. "That whole story was more fucked up than Cuba," Kennedy told Donovan after the Bay of Pigs. Donovan was a 'chosen Kennedy' and never filed a news story on Kennedy's candid reflections on both incidents.¹⁵⁴ After Joseph Kennedy used Hollywood connections to negotiate movie rights, Donovan received \$120,000 dollars and PT-109 crew members received \$2,500 apiece.¹⁵⁵ The White House received no payment, but wanted final approval rights for the historical drama.¹⁵⁶ "This is not a great script, but a good one, and should be immensely appealing," Sorensen reported.¹⁵⁷ Nevertheless, "the repeated use of the word "shafted" and the sentimental references to Joe struck me as unnecessary to the action and of doubtful taste — but these are points which only the chief subject (the Chief Executive) can decide."¹⁵⁸ The crew of the PT-

109 had nicknamed Kennedy “Shafty,” and Sorensen understandably did not want Kennedy's critics to follow suit.¹⁵⁹

Although the Kennedy administration was willing to consider using documentaries and involve the president in the making of a movie, there were limits to what Kennedy was willing to do to communicate and educate the public. Because of his concerns about exposure and his belief in the importance of the print press, Kennedy soon placed strongest emphasis on his strategy to cultivate reporters. “His frequent private chats with reporters, columnists and editors have been most fruitful,” Sorensen stressed to Salinger.¹⁶⁰ “The President has been greatly accessible to the press and while this has been on a selected basis,” Sorensen believed, “it is still extremely effective in communicating his views to the people of influence in the newspaper profession.”¹⁶¹

In addition to cultivating relationships with reporters and publishers from large circulation publications, Kennedy sought to add more lapdogs to his court by developing relationships with the press outside of Washington to go around the White House regulars when need arose. Part of his strategy involved holding White House luncheons with editors from regional and small market daily and weekly papers. These luncheons remained off-the-record without upsetting White House reporters. The luncheons also gave editors who normally did not see him a whiff of the President insider experience.

Kennedy also cultivated reporters through letters and staff channels to congratulate them for good articles. Journalists have testified how that White House frequently made telephone calls to express the President’s satisfaction or dismay over how an article was written or to question the accuracy of the facts. Sorensen attributed these calls to Kennedy's own reporter’s sense of “living in the bull’s-eye.”¹⁶²

White House memoirs describe an atmosphere of unpredictability due to Kennedy's anger after reading something he did not like. "I never knew when he was going to be upset..." Paul Fay recalled. "One week it might be *Time* and another the *New York Herald Tribune*, but he was always strongly critical of *U.S. News and World Report* — not of the entire contents, but what he thought was biased reporting."¹⁶³ According to Sorensen, "He could find and fret over one paragraph of criticism deep in ten paragraphs of praise." Sorensen ascribes a "logical inconsistency" in Kennedy's attitudes towards the press.¹⁶⁴

Outside of the White House, David Lawrence attributed Kennedy's cultivation of the press to reporter's instincts "straight out of his glands" to watch every word.¹⁶⁵ Mary McGrory of the *Washington Evening Star* recalled that Kennedy "didn't miss a beat," but was "offended" the "young and good looking...hero" decided never to call.¹⁶⁶ According to Sidey, the New Frontier transformed the atmosphere of White House reporting because Kennedy "absorbed...dissected and analyzed" the news and personally weighed each word for "friendliness."¹⁶⁷ Peter Lisagor of the *Chicago Daily News* observed that Kennedy took a narrow view of his image and "tended to whine about picayune, petty things about the press."¹⁶⁸ To reporters, the manipulation of access and personal attention toward 'guiding' what was being written encouraged Kennedy's unwanted reputation for news management.¹⁶⁹

Nevertheless, the President's efforts at cultivation succeeded to the point that 'the chosen Kennedys' sometimes coordinated with the White House regarding news stories or by offering advice. The President's ability to manipulate journalists left his military aid, General Chester V. Clifton, with the impression that fixing bad press was simply a matter of coordinating with the right people. In October 1961, Clifton told Salinger that portraying weekends trips to Hyannis as working weekends was a only a matter of Kennedy commanding

obedience: “your obvious control over *LOOK Magazine*, *LIFE Magazine*, and the *SATURDAY EVENING POST* through Stewart Alsop would be happily supported if you give the word.”¹⁷⁰

“As President he continued to see privately all of his journalist friends,” according to Roberts, “— a practice that caused some rancor among the less privileged.”¹⁷¹ Initially, James Reston, the Washington bureau chief of the *New York Times*, was one of the less privileged in terms of access. “I didn’t get along with him during his first days in the White House,” he recalled. Reston had annoyed the White House by calling the decision to introduce live television to press conferences “the goofiest idea since the hula hoop.” He also protested that the President stop playing favorites with reporters. Kennedy sent back word that Charles Bartlett and Ben Bradlee were close friends: “He’d damn well see them whenever he liked.” Reston eventually succumbed.¹⁷²

For *ABC’s* Lawrence, President Kennedy “was extremely easy to see.” Kennedy gladly functioned as an editor when Lawrence ran out of ideas. “Whenever you saw him, he tried to dig up a story for you,” he recalled.¹⁷³ In one instance, after learning that a scheduled guest had canceled on his television program, Lawrence impressed his colleagues with a phone call to the White House and Kennedy himself substituted.¹⁷⁴

Marquis Childs of the *Washington Post* noted that being a friend of President Kennedy’s made his job of reporting easier: “as a friend, he was for me an unfailing source of hour-by-hour information that kept me abreast of what was happening.”¹⁷⁵ “The Kennedy approach was smooth and professional all the way, with careful cultivation of the press,” Childs confessed. “He was one of the boys, and this was not entirely disingenuous since the writing and broadcast trade held a fascination for him apart from his own political fortunes.”¹⁷⁶

Childs was impressed by Kennedy’s constant attention to small details about how reporters wrote about the administration and his family. “No detail was too small to escape his

attention,” Childs remembered. “ ‘Why the goddamned hell is so-and-so saying that?’ He would demand of his press secretary Salinger.”¹⁷⁷ During the Cuban Missile Crisis, Childs later learned that he was “thoroughly brainwashed.”¹⁷⁸ “I’m afraid I failed to see the flaws in his character,” Childs confessed.¹⁷⁹

Deakin thought President Kennedy's habit of reading many newspapers and magazines made him a “new junkie.”¹⁸⁰ During interviews Kennedy constantly scanned the pages of newspapers and magazines.¹⁸¹ He told reporters that he could read 1500 words a minute, but after checking with officials from Kennedy's speed reading course, Sidey learned that the President never finished the course and read 700 to 800 words a minute or twice the average. Sidey wanted to write a story in *Time* with the real number, but Kennedy insisted on 1200.¹⁸² In his 1963 biography on Kennedy the word count became “1,200 to 2,000 words a minute, maybe faster.”¹⁸³

Despite Sidey's transparently cooperative attitude, Kennedy privately held reservations regarding the *Time* correspondent because he could not keep “demeaning reflections” out of his writing. He considered Sidey a charmer who came across as a ‘chosen Kennedy,’ who “would never write a work that would trouble your or tarnish your image,” but who also wanted to impress readers with insider's knowledge.¹⁸⁴ Sidey had access, but never had the social relationship that Bartlett, Bradlee, and Alsop developed with Kennedy.¹⁸⁵ According to Sidey, the only scoop Kennedy ever offered was during the 1960 campaign to get the news of his wife's pregnancy into *Time* before gossip columnists had the story.¹⁸⁶ Nevertheless, Kennedy continued to cultivate Sidey and *Time*, believing that the magazine decided elections because it influenced wavering independent voters in the center of mainstream America.¹⁸⁷ “They read the goddamned magazine,” Kennedy said.¹⁸⁸

During private meetings, Robert Estabrook was impressed at Kennedy's knowledge of newspaper stories. The *Washington Post* columnist once asked how he could be most useful, whereupon Kennedy complained about journalists who were inaccurate when covering the New Frontier's foreign policy.¹⁸⁹ The attitude of many journalists with personal access to Kennedy was often guided by the implications of Estabrook's question: "How can I be most useful?"

It was customary for a journalist to become captivated by Kennedy's radiant personality. According to CBS's David Schoenbrun, Kennedy charmed him by saying, "Oh, yes, I have read everything he has written." Schoenbrun suspected that Kennedy had been briefed beforehand that he was prouder of his writing skills than for work in television. "He had said exactly the right thing to win me over and I knew that I would have to be careful not to be captivated by him," he recalled.¹⁹⁰

"The fact is that Jack Kennedy had an extraordinary knack for capturing people and changing them," Joseph Alsop recalled.¹⁹¹ "John Kennedy," he admitted, "was a man adept at flattery, and I suppose I, as member of the press, was a target of his considerable and manipulative charm."¹⁹² Nevertheless, unlike Schoenbrun, Alsop fondly remembered the Kennedy years as the best years of his life. "I loved the president," he confessed.¹⁹³

Kennedy socialized frequently with Philip and Katherine Graham, the publishers of the *Washington Post*.¹⁹⁴ Kennedy's strong sense of anti-Communism appealed to Phil Graham, who considered his inaugural a personal triumph because the *Washington Post* now had direct access to the White House.¹⁹⁵ "Graham had been a political kingmaker," according to Chalmers Roberts.¹⁹⁶ Proud of the *Post*'s role in the 1960 campaign, Graham considered himself a political genius for persuading Kennedy to place Johnson on the ticket in a strategy to win Texas and conservative Democrats in the South.¹⁹⁷ He also advised Kennedy to select

Douglas Dillon for Secretary of the Treasury and David Bruce for the ambassador's post in England. Both appointments were made.¹⁹⁸

Graham very much wanted to be a part of the inner circle of power secretly shaping the nation's policy behind closed doors. Kennedy accommodated Graham's desire with invitations to attend private informal meetings with White House advisers at his brother's Hickory Hill estate.¹⁹⁹ "The chosen Kennedy's' relationship became a cause of concern for his mother-in-law, Agnes Meyer. "Has the Post fallen for Kennedy?" she asked.²⁰⁰

President Kennedy attempted to cultivate the legendary columnist Walter Lippmann with the same social strategy. He initially failed to enlist him. "I had grave reservations about him," Lippmann wrote in his diary, "both because of my knowledge of his father, and because of his own record in the McCarthy affair."²⁰¹ During the 1960 election, Lippmann became a New Frontier convert and wrote columns that described Kennedy's "courage" and immense command of the facts.²⁰²

Arthur Schlesinger wanted to reward Lippmann and asked Kennedy to offer the columnist the ambassador's post in France, even though making him a member of the administration meant sacrificing the services of a friendly columnist. Kennedy preferred having Lippmann on the outside writing columns for the New Frontier and declined to offer the post.²⁰³ The administration felt fortunate to have Lippmann's support and courted him by inviting him to parties and frequently asking for advice. Reveling in Kennedy's attention, the columnist felt he possessed personal influence at the White House.²⁰⁴ Buttered by Kennedy's flattering confession that that he regularly read his column "Today and Tomorrow," Lippmann found the President asking for advice on his inaugural address. He thoughtfully suggested substituting the word "adversary" with "enemy when referring to the Soviet Union."²⁰⁵

Kennedy quickly learned that Lippmann's support for the New Frontier did not preclude criticism. The columnist soon argued that Kennedy was not doing enough to educate the public about the nature of the Communist threat and the stakes in the Cold War. Lippmann complained that Kennedy was not conducting a campaign of "full effective communication with the American people."²⁰⁶ In an interview with Howard K. Smith several months after the inauguration, Lippmann compared Kennedy to Eisenhower only "thirty years younger."²⁰⁷ Kennedy talked about new ideas, but continued with same foreign policy Eisenhower developed without reassessing the goals. Lippmann did not see Cuba as a military threat and opposed military intervention in Laos. He even wanted Kennedy to negotiate over Berlin and tell America that negotiations did not mean appeasement. "I don't agree with the people who think that we have to go out and shed a little blood to prove we're virile men," Lippmann said. "I don't think old men ought to promote wars for young men to fight."²⁰⁸

Nevertheless, when the President drew criticism for "managing the news," Lippmann came to his defense like a 'chosen Kennedy.' He viewed attempts to manipulate what information was made public in the news as inevitable necessities in the Cold War. Lippmann argued that the truth would eventually emerge due to the competitive nature of reporters covering Washington politics.²⁰⁹ He failed to recognize that Kennedy managed the news to protect his political standing.

The ensuing controversy over managed news showed how limited President Kennedy's actual power was to control the news. Kennedy himself understood when he could not always count on selected reporters to promote his message and introduced live television press conferences as a fallback plan to manage the news. In this sense, television was used to encourage print reporters to focus on Kennedy's message. He forced attention to an issue by using opening statements or by planting a question. If a question was on a topic Kennedy did

not want to address he often gave an evasive response or refused to answer on the grounds of national security. He mastered the art of appearing forthcoming in public while skillfully misleading the press.²¹⁰

Live press conferences were used “to get the word out on foreign policy and policy in general” and for keeping Kennedy’s agenda on the front pages of the papers. For foreign policy, Kennedy considered newspapers more important for setting the political agenda than television. According to Sorensen, the printed word in mainstream publications was more important than television for promoting Kennedy’s message.²¹¹

President Kennedy, Editor-in-Chief:

President Kennedy believed that the administration received too much negative press, despite the fact that many reporters had crossed the line to serve as adoring lapdogs. Rationalizing that press criticism was due to political enemies, Sorensen wrote, “he (JFK) also knew that the overwhelming proportion of editors and publishers had been out to defeat him.” Sorensen claimed that the President was less concerned about the spoken word because history would be based upon what “news” was written.²¹²

Concerned about writing history’s first draft, Kennedy treated the White House like a newspaper where he was editor-in-chief carefully cultivating reporters, making suggestions and assigning favored reporters to breaking stories. He needed ‘chosen Kennedys’ to have “his portrait drawn with softer lines,” rather than publicizing the truth.²¹³ For some reporters, Kennedy served as a type of mentor by offering stories that would allow them to accelerate their careers. According to Deakin, Kennedy “never got over the feeling that he could have made a helluva newspaperman. He liked to say that when he left the White House he might buy a

newspaper or become a columnist. It was print journalism, not television, that interested him.”²¹⁴

Relationships with lapdog journalists in Kennedy's court served a political purpose. According to Sorensen, “politics was an ever-present influence in the Kennedy White House, not as the sole subject of many meetings in his office, but as criterion for trips, visitors, appointees, and speeches as an unspoken force counterbalancing the unrealistic, checking the unreasonable, occasionally deterring the desirable and always testing the acceptable.” For each action, Kennedy calculated the political effect on voters in the 1962 and 1964 elections.²¹⁵ He wanted ‘chosen Kennedys’ to form a “cheering squad.”²¹⁶

In the realm of foreign policy Kennedy's information strategy was also influenced by strongly held anti-Communist attitudes and a belief that the press had a naturally biased inclination toward bad news. “Bad news is news,” Kennedy abashedly confessed, “and good news is not news, so (the American people) get an impression always that the United States is not doing its part.”²¹⁷ Having won the 1960 election narrowly, he sought to project an image as a strong Cold Warrior. The lack of a mandate placed him in a position where he was balancing the liberal wing of the Democratic Party against conservative hard-liners who wanted a tough action against the Communists. Throughout the case studies a pattern emerges in foreign policy where Kennedy appears to be hesitant about escalating with American troops while favoring covert military action and negotiation to stop Communism without paying the full price. Concerned that the press would get leaks and report on his flaws, Kennedy developed an information strategy “to correct his errors before they were exposed.”²¹⁸ FBI and CIA phone taps and listening devices were routinely used by Kennedy to monitor clandestinely the private conversations among journalists, political enemies, and White house staff members. In 1962, the President ordered the Secret Service to install a taping system in the White House and his

Hyannis home. Kennedy rationalized that he was not playing 'dirty tricks,' but needed the tapes to verify what people were saying when he wrote the official history of the New Frontier.²¹⁹

In the fight against Communism Kennedy believed covert action was a necessity and for the sake of national security demanded loyalty from the press. This meant not reporting information to the public that would undermine ongoing covert activities or suggest to the Communists that weak internal divisions exist in the United States. These concerns created a culture of national security which led to the classification of information on foreign policy. Kennedy also did not hesitate to call publishers or reporters to appeal to their patriotism and ask them to help him manage national security by 'spinning' his version of the news.²²⁰ Nevertheless, the case studies that follow reveal a pattern in foreign policy where the President used national security and 'chosen Kennedys' as an umbrella from political fallout that would hurt his image as a strong Cold Warrior.

Notes

¹Wise, David, The Politics of Lying: Government Deception, Secrecy, and Power, (New York, 1973), pp.324-326.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Pierre Salinger memorandum to John Whitney January 25, 1961, Box 18, White House Central Subject Files, (hereafter cited as WHCSF), John F. Kennedy Library, (hereafter cited as JFKL).

⁶ Hugh Sidey, John F. Kennedy, President, (New York, 1964), p.50.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., p.52.

⁹ Stewart Alsop, The Center: The People in Political Washington, (New York, 1968), pp.179-180.

¹⁰ Louis Harris, The Anguish of Change, (New York, 1973), p.18.

¹¹ Ibid., p.19.

¹² Theodore Sorenson, The Kennedy Legacy, (New York, 1969), p.70.

¹³ Ibid., p.71; Salinger, With Kennedy, (New York, 1966), p.117.

¹⁴ Richard Davis, The Press and American Politics: The New Mediator, (New York, 1992), pp.96-98.

¹⁵ Harry Hansen, ed., The World Almanac and Book of Facts, (New York, 1961-1965), p.463, p.694; (1965), p.768.

¹⁶ Davis, New Mediator, p.97; Marc Gunther, The House that Roone Built: The Inside Story of ABC News, (New York, 1994), p.37; Gunther reported that user surveys taken in the months after CBS and NBC went to a half hour format indicated that the audience doubled and viewers reported that television was their primary news source.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.98; Mary Ann Watson, The Expanding Vista: American Television in the Kennedy Years, (New York, 1990) pp.75-89; Bradley S. Greenberg and Edwin Parker, The Kennedy Assassination and the American Public: Social Communication in Crisis, (Stanford, California, 1965).

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- ¹⁸ Pierre Salinger, With Kennedy, pp.54-56
- ¹⁹ Benjamin Bradlee, Conversations With Kennedy, (New York, 1975), p.33.
- ²⁰ Theodore Sorensen, Kennedy, p.311.
- ²¹ Pierre Salinger, With Kennedy, pp.44-47.
- ²² Ibid., pp.54-56
- ²³ Ibid., pp.54-56
- ²⁴ Ibid., p.139, p.p. 54-56; Sorensen, Kennedy, p.323.
- ²⁵ Sorensen, Kennedy, p.329.
- ²⁶ Sorenson, Kennedy Legacy, p.71.
- ²⁷ Sorenson, Kennedy, p.319.
- ²⁸ Sorenson, Kennedy Legacy, p.71.
- ²⁹ Sorenson, Kennedy, p.319.
- ³⁰ Ibid., p.319.
- ³¹ Alexander L. George, Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy: The Effective Use of Information and Advice, (Colorado, 1980), pp.157-158.
- ³² Pierre Salinger, With Kennedy, p.120.
- ³³ Robert C. Cottrell, Izzy, A Biography of I.F. Stone, (New Brunswick, NJ: 1992); I.F. Stone, In a Time of Torment, 1961-1967: A Nonconformist History of Our Times, (New York, 1989); John B. Judis, William F. Buckley Jr., (New York, 1988).
- ³⁴ Joseph Alsop Oral History Interview, (hereafter cited OH), JFKL; Victor Navasky, Kennedy Justice, (New York, 1971), p.439. Navasky described a “charismatic authority system” to exercise power over the bureaucracy in the Justice Department. “The advantage of a network of honorary Kennedys, a national charisma distributino system, is that it multiplies the power normally available to the White House, not to mention the Attorney General.” Gary Willis, The Kennedy Imprisonment: A Meditation on Power, (New York, 1981), pp.85-98. Gary Willis borrowed the term “honorary Kennedys” from Victor Navasky to describe the loyal journalists and advisers that offered their services in exchange for access to the Kennedy clan.
- ³⁵ David Halberstam, The Powers That Be, (New York, 1979), p.355.
- ³⁶ Press Panel, OH, JFKL, pp.40-42.

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- ³⁷ Sorenson, Kennedy Legacy, p.70.
- ³⁸ The Joan Shorenstein Barone Center for Press, Politics and Public Policy, The Theodore H. White Lecture with Benjamin C. Bradlee, (Cambridge, MA: 1991), p.12.
- ³⁹ Benjamin Bradlee, Conversations with Kennedy, p.25.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., p.10, p.23, p.26.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., p.23.
- ⁴² Kenneth W. Thompson, ed., Ten Presidents and the Press. (Maryland, 1973), pp.73-76.
- ⁴³ Bradlee, Conversations, pp.23-24.
- ⁴⁴ Bradlee, Conversations, pp.115-117.
- ⁴⁵ "An American Geneology," *Time*, September 28, 1962.
- ⁴⁶ Bradlee, Conversations, p.25.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., p.154.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., p.141.
- ⁴⁹ "How Much Management of the News?" *Newsweek* April 8, 1963.
- ⁵⁰ Bradlee Conversations, pp.161-162.
- ⁵¹ Herman Klurfeld, Winchell, His Life and Times, (New York, 1976), pp.187-189. "He was always a playboy," Winchell said. "He spends half of his time screwing every girl that comes around. I've seen lots of nothings like him around the Stork Club and other places where the sons of rich men go to waste their time and money."
- ⁵² Salinger, With Kennedy, p.118; Richard Reeves, President Kennedy: Profile of Power, (New York, 1993), p.303. Sidey, John F. Kennedy, p.258.
- ⁵³ Sorensen, Kennedy, p.323.
- ⁵⁴ White Lecture with Bradlee, p.12.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., p.12.
- ⁵⁶ White, In Search of History, p.460.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid., p.460.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid., pp.466-467.

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- ⁵⁹ Richard Rovere, Arrivals and Departures: A Journalist's Memoirs, (New York, 1984), pp.115-116.
- ⁶⁰ Sorenson, Kennedy Legacy, p.72.
- ⁶¹ Robert McNamara, with Brian VanDeMark, In Retrospect, (New York, 1995), pp.56-57.
- ⁶² Sarah McClendon, My Eight Presidents, (New York, 1978), p.50.
- ⁶³ Ibid., pp.50-51.
- ⁶⁴ Salinger, With Kennedy, pp.99-108.
- ⁶⁵ Bill Lawrence, Six Presidents, Too Many Wars, (New York, 1972), p.247.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid., p.258.
- ⁶⁷ Theodore White, In Search of History: A Personal Adventure, (New York, 1978), pp.466-467.
- ⁶⁸ McClendon, My Eight Presidents, p54.
- ⁶⁹ Christopher Anderson, Jack and Jackie: Portrait of An American Marriage, (New York, 1996), p. 107.
- ⁷⁰ Henry Luce OH, Time Life Archive, (hereafter cited as TLA), p.4.
- ⁷¹ Anderson, Jack and Jackie, pp.74-79; Ronald Kessler, Sins of the Father, (New York, 1996), pp.282-284.
- ⁷² Nigel Hamilton, J.F.K., Reckless Youth, (New York, 1992), p.659. "What I really want to know, is where the hell were you when the destroyer hove into sight, and exactly what were your moves, and where the hell was your radar?"
- ⁷³ Ibid., pp.116-121.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid., pp.170-171. Clare Booth Luce later recalled, Joseph Kennedy had loose lips and confided in her husband that it only cost one million: "*Time* would never have printed the story otherwise."
- ⁷⁵ Ibid., p.191.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid., p.311; Benjamin Bradlee, A Good Life: Newspapering and Other Adventures, (New York, 1996), pp.216-217; pp.265-271; Bradlee said he never noticed that Kennedy had an affair with his sister-in-law Mary Meyer although they frequently met in the carriage house apartment adjoining his Georgetown home. In 1964, Mary Meyer died of a gunshot wound to the head while on a walk in Georgetown. Salinger called that evening from Paris although Bradlee never realized he was Mary's friend. Shortly afterwards, Bradlee discovered a diary

that documented her affair with Kennedy. "I felt it was a family document," Bradlee said of his decision to arrange for the documents destruction. When the document reemerged in 1976, Bradlee did not raise objections to his wife's decision to burn it.

⁷⁷ Walter Winchell, Winchell Exclusive, (New York, 1975), p.276.

⁷⁸ Walter Trohan, OH, Kern and Levering Papers, JFKL, p.10.

⁷⁹ Walter Trohan, Political Animals: Memoirs of a Sentimental Critic, (New York, 1975), pp.316-340.

⁸⁰ Oliver Pilat, Drew Pearson, An Unauthorized Biography, (New York 1973), p.291; "Jackie was so indignant that she picked up the children and walked out," Pearson reported.

⁸¹ Anderson, Jack and Jackie, pp.312-313; William Prochanau, Once Upon a Distant War, (New York, 1995), p.210.

⁸² Hamilton, Reckless Youth, p.144; Ronald Kessler, Sins of the Father, p.135.

⁸³ Anderson, Jack and Jackie, pp.150-158.

⁸⁴ Kessler, Sins of the Father, pp.350-351; Tyler Abel, ed., Drew Pearson Diaries, 1949-1959, (New York, 1974), p.407, p.420.

⁸⁵ Anderson, Jack and Jackie, pp.151-155; pp.289-301; Anderson provides an account of both President Kennedy and the First Lady's regular drug use from Vienna to the Cuban Missile Crisis based upon "Dr. Feelgood," Max Jacobson's unpublished memoir; Reeves, Profile of Power, pp.242-243

⁸⁶ Kessler, Sins of the Father, p.365.

⁸⁷ Hugh Sidey OH, JFKL, p. 42.

⁸⁸ Ibid

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp.18-19; W.A. Swanberg, Luce and His Empire, (New York, 1972), p.410.

⁹⁰ Luce, OH, p.15.

⁹¹ Ibid., p.18.

⁹² Ibid., p.20.

⁹³ Ibid., p.22.

⁹⁴ Ibid., pp.25-26.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p.27.

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- ⁹⁶ Ibid., pp.25-26.
- ⁹⁷ Charles Bartlett, OH, JFKL, p.2.
- ⁹⁸ Ibid., p.20.
- ⁹⁹ Ibid., pp.4-5.
- ¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.7.
- ¹⁰¹ Ibid., p.9.
- ¹⁰² Ibid., p.16.
- ¹⁰³ Ibid., pp.165-166.
- ¹⁰⁴ William H. Lawrence OH, JFKL, p.8.
- ¹⁰⁵ White, In Search of History, p.469.
- ¹⁰⁶ Laura Knebel OH, JFKL, pp.3-5.
- ¹⁰⁷ Ibid., pp.3-5.
- ¹⁰⁸ Fletcher Knebel OH, JFKL, pp.1-14, p.28.
- ¹⁰⁹ Ibid. p.3.
- ¹¹⁰ Laura Knebel OH, pp.3-5.
- ¹¹¹ Lawrence OH, p.11.
- ¹¹² Robert Pierpoint, At the White House: Assignment to Six Presidents, (New York, 1981).
- ¹¹³ Chalmers Roberts, First Rough Draft: A Journalist's Journal of Our Times, (New York, 1973), p.180.
- ¹¹⁴ White Lecture with Bradlee, p.13.
- ¹¹⁵ Joseph Alsop, with Adam Platt, "I've Seen the Best of It," Memoirs, (New York, 1992), pp.434-435.
- ¹¹⁶ Ibid., pp.439-440.
- ¹¹⁷ Bartlett, OH, p.83.
- ¹¹⁸ Ibid., p.84.

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- ¹¹⁹ Ibid., p.85.
- ¹²⁰ Reeves, Profile of Power, p.296.
- ¹²¹ Bartlett OH, JFKL, p.96.
- ¹²² Reeves, Profile of Power, p.296-303.
- ¹²³ Ibid., p.98
- ¹²⁴ Ibid., p.301.
- ¹²⁵ Sorenson, Kennedy, p.319.
- ¹²⁶ Ibid.
- ¹²⁷ Ibid.
- ¹²⁸ Ibid.
- ¹²⁹ Ibid.
- ¹³⁰ Ibid.
- ¹³¹ Ibid., p.323.
- ¹³² Ibid., p.327.
- ¹³³ Salinger, With Kennedy, p.129.
- ¹³⁴ Tom Wicker, On Press, (New York, 1978), pp.80-83.
- ¹³⁵ Tom Wicker OH, Kern and Levering Papers, JFKL, pp.4-5.
- ¹³⁶ James Deakin, Straight Stuff: The Reporters, the White House and the Truth, (New York, 1984), p.168.
- ¹³⁷ Ibid., p.161.
- ¹³⁸ Memo from Theodore Sorenson to Pierre Salinger, April 17, 1961.
- ¹³⁹ Ibid.; Sorensen, Kennedy, pp.320-321.
- ¹⁴⁰ Memo from Theodore Sorenson to Pierre Salinger, April 17, 1961, Box 36, Theodore Sorenson Papers, WHSF, JFKL.
- ¹⁴¹ Ibid.

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- ¹⁴² Memorandum to All Cabinet Members, February 2, 1961, WHCSF, Staff Files of Fred Dutton, JFKL.
- ¹⁴³ Memorandum to All Cabinet Members and Agency Heads, February 22, 1961, WHCSF, Staff Files of Fred Dutton, JFKL.
- ¹⁴⁴ Memo from Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. June 7, 1961 WHCSF, Pierre Salinger Papers, JFKL.
- ¹⁴⁵ Memo from Theodore Sorenson to Pierre Salinger, "Relationship of the President and the Press, 1961 and n.d." April 17, 1961, Box 11, Pierre Salinger Papers, JFKL.
- ¹⁴⁶ Bartlett, OH, p.162.
- ¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p.162.
- ¹⁴⁸ Sorenson, Kennedy, p.330.
- ¹⁴⁹ Ibid., pp.328-330.
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- ¹⁵² Memo to Pierre Salinger 2/28/61, Public Relations Box 18, WHCSF, JFKL.
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- ¹⁵⁴ Herbert Parmet, Jack, The Struggles of JFK, (New York, 1980), pp.111-112.
- ¹⁵⁵ Sidey, John F. Kennedy, p.182fn.
- ¹⁵⁶ Salinger, With Kennedy, pp.102-103.
- ¹⁵⁷ Misc. 2/22/62-9/18/64 Box 36, WHCSF, Sorensen Papers, JFKL.
- ¹⁵⁸ Ibid; Salinger, With Kennedy, pp.102-104
- ¹⁵⁹ Paul Fay, The Pleasure of His Company, (New York, 1966), p.132.
- ¹⁶⁰ Memo from Theodore Sorenson to Pierre Salinger, April 17, 1961.
- ¹⁶¹ Ibid.
- ¹⁶² Sorensen, Kennedy, p.318.
- ¹⁶³ Paul Fay, The Pleasure of His Company, (New York, 1966), p.195.
- ¹⁶⁴ Sorensen, Kennedy, p.311.

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- ¹⁶⁵ Lawrence OH, p.7.
- ¹⁶⁶ Press Panel, OH, p.3, pp.50-51.
- ¹⁶⁷ Sidey, John F. Kennedy, pp.90-91.
- ¹⁶⁸ Press Panel, OH, p.68.
- ¹⁶⁹ Sidey, John F. Kennedy, pp.81-87; Sorensen, Kennedy, pp.318-322; William J. Small, Political Power and the Press, (New York, 1972), pp.104-107.
- ¹⁷⁰ Box 732, WHCSF, JFKL.
- ¹⁷¹ Roberts, First Rough Draft, p.182.
- ¹⁷² James Reston, Deadline:A Memoir, (New York, 1991), pp.289-290.
- ¹⁷³ Lawrence, OH, p.23.
- ¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p.23.
- ¹⁷⁵ Marquis Childs, Witness to Power, (New York, 1975), p.175.
- ¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p.169.
- ¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p.173.
- ¹⁷⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁷⁹ Marquis Childs, OH, Kern and Levering Papers, JFKL, p.4.
- ¹⁸⁰ Deakin, Straight Stuff, p.164.
- ¹⁸¹ Ibid., p.165.
- ¹⁸² Reeves, Profile of Power, p.53, p.280, p.671n.
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- ¹⁸⁴ Paul Fay, The Pleasure of His Company, (New York, 1964), pp.32-35.
- ¹⁸⁵ Press Panel, OH, p.46.
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- ¹⁹² Ibid., p.449.
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- ¹⁹⁴ Chalmers Roberts, In the Shadow of Power, (New York, 1989), p.348.
- ¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p.348; Deborah Davis, Katherine the Great: Katherine Graham and the Washington Post, (New York, 1979), pp.156-157.
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- ²⁰⁰ Ibid., pp.156-157.
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- ²⁰⁴ Ibid., p.524.
- ²⁰⁵ John Luskin, Lippmann, Liberty and the Press, (Alabama, 1972), p.208.
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- ²⁰⁸ Ibid., pp.69-70.
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²¹¹ Frank A. Bennack, Jr., and Robert M. Batscha, galleyproof for Television and the Presidency A Ten-Part Seminar Series, (New York, 1994), p.66.

²¹² Sorensen, Kennedy, p.312.

²¹³ Fay, The Pleasure, p.32.

²¹⁴ Deakin, Straight Stuff, pp.164-165.

²¹⁵ Sorenson, Kennedy, p.332.

²¹⁶ Ibid., p.312.

²¹⁷ Ibid., p.313; Roberts, First Rough Draft, p.182.

²¹⁸ Sorensen, Kennedy, p.312.

²¹⁹ Reeves, Profile of Power, p.304.

²²⁰ Ibid., p.320.

Chapter Three

Testing Ground for an Image:

Kennedy's Information Strategy and Cuba

Following the Bay of Pigs Crisis, on the morning of April 22, 1961, President John F. Kennedy flew to Camp David for a hastily arranged meeting with Dwight Eisenhower. He told reporters he was seeking out Eisenhower's advice on Laos and Cuba. The important meeting would show the world and the nation that American foreign policy still had bipartisan support. The President wanted the meeting to produce headlines that would silence critics by demonstrating that the best way to deal with a Cold War defeat was for Americans to join together in bipartisanship rather than search for scapegoats.¹

Eisenhower noted in his diary that despite Kennedy's claims to reporters, "The President did not ask me for any specific advice." The former general let Kennedy know that he was personally interested in military details concerning the invasion's timing and what had happened to the air support. As Eisenhower wrote, "they were so anxious to keep the United States hand concealed that they accorded no such support, and when they finally did get word of its need it was too late." The young President explained that the White House was in the dark because Fidel Castro sank the Cuban Brigade's communications ship. Eisenhower commented skeptically, "this is hard to believe because each unit carries some light communication equipment, including the ability to send radiograms to a distance of some fifty to a hundred miles."²

Eisenhower had confidence that "under searching scrutiny" the unknown reasons behind the invasion's failure would eventually be revealed. He saw no need for a congressional investigation because Kennedy "does seem to take full responsibility for his own decision." Sensing the political legerdemain that was at times working behind the Kennedy image, Eisenhower reserved the right to be a skeptic.³

After lunch, Eisenhower and Kennedy met with reporters. The President said Eisenhower had been briefed on what was happening in Cuba and Laos. Eisenhower refrained from criticizing the White House in front of the press; a public attack would have sent the wrong signal to Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev. He noted in his diary, however, that he supported the purpose of the mission, but not the way it was done.⁴

By June 1961, Eisenhower was privately mocking Kennedy for what had happened at the Bay of Pigs. In his diary he described the Bay of Pigs as Kennedy's "Profile in Timidity and Indecision." By June he had learned from former CIA agent William Pawley that orders for air cover had been canceled in the middle of the operation "on orders from the White House." Kennedy had revoked the order after consulting with United Nations Ambassador Adlai Stevenson, Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Undersecretary of State Chester Bowles. Stevenson did not want the American military involved in the invasion. As Eisenhower noted, "part of this story has leaked to the press, but if the whole story ever becomes known to the American people.....there will be a terrible outcry and I should think a virtual repudiation of the present administration."⁵

A seasoned political veteran not unfamiliar with public relations and how to use the press, Eisenhower had initiated the secret planning for the Cuban invasion during the final days of his administration and it was clear that Kennedy had compromised his original plan. The President had violated the General's personal code by not pushing for victory after having

committed the flag. From Gettysburg, Eisenhower was able to cut through Kennedy's veil of Cold War rhetoric and strongman image as portrayed during the 1960 election.

Beneath the facade, at the core, Kennedy was a true Cold Warrior, but he was also a pragmatic politician who wanted to be more compromising than his hard rhetoric suggested. To Eisenhower, President Kennedy had proven himself to be a hesitant pseudo Cold Warrior who was willing to fight Communism, but not willing to 'bear any burden.' Kennedy's unwillingness to escalate and openly commit American troops, along with his willingness to compromise when eye to eye with Castro, had revealed his 'timidity.'

Following the 1960 election, President Eisenhower had ordered CIA Director, Allen Dulles to brief President-elect Kennedy on the secret Cuban invasion plans.⁶ Kennedy did not disagree with the premise of the plan, but was 'astonished at its magnitude.' Despite having grave doubts about this "inheritance," he pragmatically continued with the operation. Theodore Sorensen viewed this as a pressure situation where action was demanded: "this inheritance could not be simply disposed of by Presidential rescission or withdrawal."⁷

The blueprint for Cuba that the new Administration inherited from Eisenhower gave Kennedy a quick answer to the question of how to turn the rhetoric of the campaign and inauguration into action. The original plan called for a large scale invasion of Trinidad, at the foot of the Escambray Mountains. Dulles warned that if the National Security Council did not approve the plan Kennedy would then be faced with "a disposal problem." Throughout the planning period, Richard Bissell, the CIA's Director of Plans, warned again and again: "If we take these men out of Guatemala, we will have to transfer them to the United States, and we can't have them wandering around the country telling everyone what they have been doing."⁸

Kennedy wanted to postpone the invasion, but Bissell warned that the window for invading Cuba was about to close: "You can't mañana this thing."⁹ CIA intelligence added

pressure with reports that Cuba would receive MIG fighter planes as soon as Cuban pilots finished their training in Czechoslovakia. The President of Guatemala was also nervous about having heavily armed Cubans in his country and added to the pressure by requesting that the U.S. remove the Brigade by the end of April. There were also reports warning that the exiles might be difficult to disarm if the invasion was called off. The White House also heard rumors that the Soviets might place missiles in Cuba.¹⁰

Under pressure, Kennedy decided to move forward, but vetoed spectacular invasion plans that were already prepared for a city near the Escambray Mountains. The old plan relied upon overwhelming force to provide cover for the Brigade to slip into the mountainside to begin a guerrilla campaign. The President ordered a less conspicuous night landing at a more remote sight that would avoid any suggestion of a World War II style invasion.¹¹ Allen Dulles later commented on Kennedy's lack of enthusiasm for the invasion plans: "It was sort of an orphan child JFK had adopted (from the Republicans) – he had no real love and affection for it."¹²

White House advisers thereupon developed a revised plan for invading in a swampy region at the Bay of Pigs, nearly eighty-miles from the Escambray Mountains. Dulles chose not to argue with Kennedy about the changes because he feared the entire invasion would be scrapped. Bissell later wrote that the CIA was guilty of negligence for overestimating the probability of success; nevertheless, he claimed the invasion plan itself was never oversold.¹³ Dulles and other advisers ignored Kennedy's hesitance toward attacking Cuba: "We felt that when the chips were down — when the crisis arose in reality, any action required for success would be authorized other than permit the enterprise to fail."¹⁴

Arthur M. Schlesinger offered Kennedy a mixed warning: "No matter how "Cuban" the equipment and personnel, the US will be held accountable for the operation, and our prestige will be committed to its success." After outlining further problems, in terms of whether the

exiles had the competence to run Cuba and whether the White House wanted the headache of running Cuba, Schlesinger predicted a protracted civil conflict, but gave the mission a green light: "These hazards would be outweighed, in my judgment, by the advantage of getting rid of Castro." Kennedy was over-confident that the U.S. hand could be concealed, but wholeheartedly agreed with Schlesinger that 'getting rid of Castro' was worth the risk.¹⁵

On invasion day, in anticipation of President Kennedy's orders, the Marines and the Navy had moved into strategic positions near Cuba to wait for the kickoff signal. The misperception by the planners that the U.S. military was on a type of standby contributed to the overselling of the invasion's probability of success. Overly optimistic intelligence estimates were glossed over in the context of their misplaced belief in the New Frontier's apparent readiness to win at all costs.

The President authorized the plan while reserving the right to cancel the operation at the last minute. The operation which emerged from Kennedy's ambivalence was too modest to succeed and too conspicuous to conceal the American hand in assistance.¹⁶ The invasion at the Bay of Pigs became a complete failure. The President refused to escalate when his military advisers urged sending American forces. He wanted to overthrow Castro, but without paying the price of committing American troops.¹⁷

The Bay of Pigs failure left the New Frontier deeply shaken. Khrushchev cabled the White House to use caution because the Soviet Union would protect Cuba from any future invasion or take action in another part of the world.¹⁸ The Soviet Premier wanted to check the U.S. move against Cuba by making the White House think Berlin was at stake.¹⁹ By August, the State Department learned that Castro claimed to prefer *détente* with Kennedy, but the "U.S. had pushed him into Soviet arms." Castro explained that without Soviet military assistance "his enemies would be walking the streets of Habana."²⁰

Walt Rostow warned Kennedy that without a preemptive invasion Castro would allow the Soviets to make Cuba an offensive base to challenge U.S. hegemony in Latin America: “We should bear in mind what the placing of missiles in Turkey looks like in the USSR.”²¹ “We were hysterical about Castro,” Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara later confessed. The New Frontier scrambled and began hatching plans for more covert action under White House “pressure to do something about Castro.”²²

Dazed by defeat, the lesson Kennedy learned from the Bay of Pigs was to shrug it off and quietly push harder to win the second round against Castro. The Cuban dictator had humiliated the New Frontier by capturing the exile Brigade. He added to the disgrace by demanding a multi-million dollar ransom from the U.S. along with tractors, pharmaceuticals, and food. The President told his assistant Richard Goodwin that he felt morally accountable for the plight of the Cuban Brigade: “They trusted me. And they’re in prison because I fucked up. I have to get them out.”²³

Dealing directly with Castro was impossible because Eisenhower had enacted a trade embargo and severed diplomatic ties. For President Kennedy, the most pragmatic course was to pursue secret negotiations while attempting to overthrow Castro. Kennedy desperately wanted revenge. As Bissell put it, Castro “had defeated the Kennedy team; they were bitter and they could not tolerate his getting away with it.”²⁴

Rather than make a direct pay-off to Castro from the U.S. Treasury, the White House developed a cover operation called the Tractors for Freedom Committee. The plan was designed by the White House for the purpose of negotiating the release of the Cuban prisoners. The President courted prominent Americans for service on the Tractors for Freedom Committee including Eleanor Roosevelt, Walter Reuther the president of the United Auto Workers, Milton Eisenhower, and John Dodge, the Budget Director under President Eisenhower.²⁵

In Gettysburg, Kennedy's plan alarmed the former President because it would establish a "dangerous precedent." "The public should have been told from the first," Eisenhower wrote to Kennedy, "and should even now be told that the foreign policy decision was governmental — only fund-raising being private." Negotiating with Castro and making foreign policy was Kennedy's duty as President of the United States. "Our private committee is not a competent agency," Eisenhower argued.²⁶

For private citizens, negotiating with Castro was an apparent violation of the Logan Act, but the Justice Department never considered prosecution. The Attorney General monitored the process and contacted businessmen on the President's behalf for donations. "We'll give them a tax write-off," President Kennedy said, "whatever it takes, let's do it."²⁷

In June 1961, the *Gallup Poll* found only twenty percent of the country favored the idea of giving Castro tractors for prisoners. Everett Dirksen, a Republican Senate leader, attacked Kennedy for negotiating with Castro. The Cuban dictator did ultimately send prisoners to Washington to negotiate for bigger tractors along with a message to the White House asking to normalize relations. The President refused to negotiate and publicly appease Castro. Shortly thereafter, the Tractors for Freedom Committee dissolved, and an opportunity to lure Castro into the American sphere and retrieve Brigade 2506 fell by the wayside.²⁸

Kennedy was gambling that with better management U.S. covert operations could overthrow Castro and free the Brigade. Operation Mongoose was the code name for the clandestine operations run out of the CIA to harass Castro. The fundamental difference from the Bay of Pigs, however, was that Mongoose operated with the understanding that overt action by the U.S. military might eventually become necessary. The contingency plans called for a full scale invasion using five or six Army and Marine divisions. The covert activities which fell under the purview of Mongoose sometimes went as far as coordinating the activities of the CIA

with figures from organized crime. These activities ranged from burning and poisoning crops to assassination attempts on Castro.²⁹

Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy served as the President's point man with oversight responsibility to manage covert operations against Castro for the White House.³⁰ Helms and others involved in Operation Mongoose were left with the impression that the Kennedy brothers wanted Castro assassinated.³¹ For Bissell, the "intensive oversight" meant that "Operation Mongoose was closely monitored by the chief of state, and all actions received his explicit authorization."³² Nevertheless, President Kennedy maintained plausible deniability by not creating a record documenting the White House role.³³

The administration's covert operations against Cuba actually encouraged Castro to consolidate power and clamp down on dissent. Unwittingly, Kennedy accelerated Cuba's Communist Revolution with policies that suited Castro's casting call for a Goliath-like enemy to rally supporters. The Cuban dictator turned to Moscow for support and Khrushchev responded with Soviet military and economic assistance. In May 1961, Castro declared that Cuba had entered into an "era of socialist construction."³⁴ Khrushchev quickly increased military assistance and transformed the island into a well fortified military base.³⁵

Throughout Operation Mongoose, while Castro built-up Cuban strength in preparation for an invasion, the White House remained hesitant over whether to use U.S. forces. In July 1961, Admiral Arleigh Burke reported to Kennedy that the armed forces could get the job done, but "all hell would break loose."³⁶ Mongoose planning was continually delayed and the decision to use military force always postponed.³⁷ "The SGA (Special Group Augmented) manifested an apparent unwillingness to take the steps necessary to achieve the objectives that had been set," General William Smith, an assistant to General Taylor, later noted.³⁸

In anticipation of orders to participate in Mongoose, the Navy and Marines staged a series of military exercises which rehearsed maneuvers for invading an island controlled by a dictator named "ORSTAC."³⁹ Nevertheless, President Kennedy never really wanted to invade Cuba. He preferred to use diplomacy to isolate Cuba and his support for force grew more hesitant as hawkish advisers tried to coax him up the ladder from covert to overt action. Sorensen later noted that in the wake of the Bay of Pigs, although "public statements were in part deliberately stern to rebuild national unity and morale, Kennedy's private approach was much more cautious."⁴⁰

Cautious delay was part of Kennedy's gamble that one of Mongoose's covert missions would succeed in eliminating Castro without using American troops. An overt invasion was also delayed out of concern for the fate of the Cuban Brigade. Following the dissolution of the Tractors for Freedom Committee, another group called the Citizen's for Freedom Committee emerged to conduct negotiations. The negotiations stayed on the back-burner because Kennedy first needed to demonstrate that Castro could not push him around.

The Cuban Missile Crisis quietly emerged in an atmosphere of heated rhetoric, covert confrontation and stalled negotiations with Castro. In the spring of 1962, the CIA warned the President that there were rumors of missiles being placed in Cuba. He wanted more confirmation and refused to raise the priority of the overt action being planned for Mongoose. Throughout the summer, Republicans attacked Kennedy by claiming that offensive missiles were already in Cuba and Cold War leadership became a central theme in the 1962 election.⁴¹

During the early weeks of summer, the White House moved to jump-start negotiations with Castro for the release of Brigade 2506. In June 1962, Kennedy told representatives of the Citizens for Freedom Committee to appoint James Donovan for direct negotiations with Castro.⁴² Over Labor Day weekend, Donovan met Castro and was told the price for Brigade

2506 was sixty-two million dollars. Rather than ask Congress for an appropriation of funds, the White House decided to encourage American companies to offer Castro drugs. Following the meeting, Donovan told McCone that he was concerned that Castro would attack the U.S. Government for a lack of sincerity if something was not done to keep the deal from falling apart.⁴³

In late September, President Kennedy asked McCone to discuss with Eisenhower how to go about paying Castro. Congress had passed an injunction prohibiting the U.S. from sending tractors to Cuba. Kennedy worried that Republicans would pass legislation prohibiting a ransom in the form of medical supplies and other humanitarian aid. Ike gave Kennedy permission to use his name when approaching Republicans on Capital Hill. Eisenhower warned that only a few people should know about the deal with Castro and that Kennedy should deny the U.S. role if it failed.⁴⁴

On October 14th, Kennedy was given U-2 photos confirming that the Soviets were building nuclear missile sites in Cuba and negotiations for the Brigade's release were put on hold.⁴⁵ To develop a response, the President convened a series of meetings with top officials who later became officially known as the Executive Committee or ExComm. The options that ExComm discussed included a surgical air strike, an invasion, or a diplomatic solution. As the President reviewed policy options the atmosphere grew tense because the Soviet missile sites were near completion. On October 19th Kennedy told ExComm that he preferred a blockade. He argued that an invasion of Cuba offered the Soviets a "clear line" to invade West Berlin and European allies would "regard us as trigger-happy Americans who lost Berlin because we did not have the guts to endure the situation in Cuba." After Khrushchev invaded Berlin, Kennedy said he would be forced to fire nuclear missiles and the Soviets would fire back. "A hell of an alternative," he admitted.⁴⁶

“This blockade and – political action,” declared Air Force Chief Curtis LeMay, “This is almost as bad as the appeasement at Munich.” Kennedy chose to ignore LeMay’s criticism of his cautious stance.⁴⁷ Two days later, the President went on national television to announce a “quarantine” and both sides were pushed to the brink of war.⁴⁸ “What we are doing is throwing a card on the table in a game we don’t know the ending of,” Kennedy told advisers the following day.⁴⁹ On October 24th the President admonished the ExComm to assume that the Soviets would respond to a U.S. invasion of Cuba with a nuclear strike against American cities. “Can we say before we invade, evacuate these cities?” he asked. Civil defense advisers who briefed the ExComm confirmed the President’s fears that a nuclear attack against the U.S. would produce high casualties.⁵⁰

Behind the scenes, Kennedy scrambled to find a diplomatic solution. His instructions to Secretary of State Dean Rusk emphasized that missiles in Cuba should not be an obstacle to any peaceful settlement. Rusk made arrangements to have U Thant quietly contacted at the last minute with instructions to propose exchanging missiles in Cuba for missiles in Turkey. The UN became Kennedy's hidden trump card because it would allow both sides to step back from the crisis without losing face.⁵¹

Subsequent U-2 photos gave the President further reason to have doubts about the Soviet response to an invasion or air strike. On Friday, October 26th, during a private briefing with McCone, a CIA photo analyst pointed to one site and noted, “we’re not sure of it yet,” but there was a possibility that the “frog” missiles “could be tactical nuclear weapons for fighting troops in the field.” The CIA director expressed concern about following the political route because the missiles might be operational by the following morning. Kennedy was still unsure that the missiles could be removed by diplomacy, and unsure about whether an invasion or air strike would prevent the Soviets from firing at the U.S. from Cuba. Nevertheless, McCone

encouraged the President to “move quickly on an air strike.”⁵² At a subsequent briefing an adviser observed, “The 64 dollar question is whether they would use tactical nuclear weapons because they would do bloody hell with Gauntanamo.” Kennedy replied, “The decision to use any kind of nuclear weapon, even the tactical ones, presents such a risk of it getting out of control so quickly.”⁵³

Later that day, Kennedy received a message through channels asking whether the U.S. would be willing to resolve the crisis by exchanging the missiles for a pledge not to invade Cuba. President Kennedy sent back a positive reply. While this communication was taking place a second letter from Khrushchev proposed removing the missiles in exchange for a U.S. pledge not to invade.⁵⁴

While the State Department digested Khrushchev’s proposal, the Attorney General met secretly with Anatoly Dobrynin as President Kennedy’s representative to explore a diplomatic solution. Dobrynin pointed out that the Soviet Union had a right to security and the placement of missiles in Cuba was very similar to the U.S. placement of missiles in Turkey. Robert Kennedy then asked if Khrushchev might be interested in the missiles in Turkey and left to call his brother. He returned with good news: “The President said that we are ready to consider the question of Turkey, to examine favorably the question of Turkey.” The following day, Khrushchev sent Kennedy another note demanding that the U.S. withdraw missiles from Turkey as a quid pro quo for missiles in Cuba.⁵⁵

The transcripts from the ExComm meetings of October 27th show that Kennedy’s aides were unsure about how to interpret Khrushchev’s new demand. The President wanted to jump at the Soviet offer and noted that world opinion would be on the Soviet side if the U.S. rejected the Soviet Premier’s offer and dropped the bomb on Cuba. “Most... people think that if you are allowed an even trade you ought to take advantage of it,” Kennedy said.⁵⁶ “If we don’t take it

we're going to be blamed and if we do take it we're going to be blamed."⁵⁷ "I don't want to take this nation to war over a pile of junk," he said. Unpersuaded, hawkish advisers warned that trading missiles in Cuba for outdated Jupiter missiles in Turkey would weaken NATO and make other nations question U.S. security pledges.⁵⁸ Following the meeting, the President accepted the new Soviet proposal on the condition that Khrushchev stopped work on the Cuban missiles with the understanding that weeks of negotiation with American allies were required before removing missiles from Turkey. ExComm sweated because the President chose not to reveal that his brother Robert had conducted diplomatic negotiations with Dobrynin. The President also kept the ExComm in the dark about the backup arrangements for U Thant to propose a missile trade at the eleventh hour.⁵⁹

President Kennedy did not want to be connected with the missile deal and therefore responded to Khrushchev's first letter agreeing to publicly pledge not to invade Cuba in exchange for the Soviets withdrawing the missiles. He instructed Bobby to make a secret arrangement with Dobrynin: the U.S. would exchange missiles in Turkey for missiles in Cuba, but only if Khrushchev remained silent. President Kennedy would reject the deal and risk war if Khrushchev publicly disclosed the agreement. Unnervingly the world trembled on the brink of nuclear war, but only four White House advisers saw all of the cards in Kennedy's hand.⁶⁰

The pragmatic deal-maker who appeared before Khrushchev contradicted Soviet intelligence reports that Kennedy was not able to stand-up to advisers who wanted to invade Cuba. "Khrushchev shit in his pants," according to Vassily Kuznetsov, a Kremlin strategist who advised responding to a U.S. attack on Cuba in Berlin. Anxious to step back from the brink, Khrushchev did not press Kennedy for a better deal.⁶¹

Nevertheless, the White House was also anxious to end the crisis and did not haggle with Khrushchev because Kennedy remained unaware of the Soviet leader's panic. White House

advisers wanted on-site inspections to make sure the missiles and other offensive weapons were not hidden in Cuban caves, but Castro refused. Kennedy chose not to push the issue with Khrushchev. As a compromise, the two leaders agreed that the U.S. would monitor the removal of weapons by flying over Soviet ships and Cuban territory.

During the months that followed, the White House reported that based upon overhead reconnaissance all missiles were removed from Cuba. In recent years, the Soviets have claimed that U.S. intelligence never had an accurate count of the missiles or military personnel in Cuba.⁶² Kennedy pragmatically chose to wink and look the other way rather than question the accuracy of U.S. intelligence or engage Khrushchev in a fight over the right to take an inventory of military assets stationed in Cuba.

Although the resolution of the crisis was later portrayed as the triumphal Gettysburg of the Cold War, the agreement with Khrushchev actually represented a return to the status quo. Kennedy's letter to Khrushchev was carefully worded to make it seem as if the U.S. was promising not to invade while leaving the door open, but Khrushchev acceded to Kennedy's demand not to use Cuba as a base to spread revolution in Latin America.

The political illusion for the American public was in the end more important for Kennedy than going public. In the months immediately following the crisis, Kennedy still wanted to topple Castro and ordered the CIA to resume covert operations and assassination plots. At the same time, Kennedy considered normalizing relations with Castro if he removed Soviet troops from Cuba and denounced aggression. The experience of the missile crisis did not banish ambivalence from Kennedy's mind: he still wanted Castro removed, but without paying the full cost of using American troops.⁶³

Nevertheless, by the end of the Missile Crisis Kennedy had shown Cuba and the rest of the world that the White House stood ready to protect perceived U.S. interests. The door was

now open for Donovan to negotiate in earnest for the release of the Cuban Brigade. Over Thanksgiving, Kennedy finally agreed that his brother could go ahead with final arrangements to pay off Castro to release the Brigade by Christmas Eve.⁶⁴

The Justice Department solicited private donors by offering U.S. tax dollars in the form of negotiated tax write-offs at the full retail price of a product.⁶⁵ The decision by the White House not to ask Congress to appropriate funds for the pay-off eliminated political problems, but created complicated legal and tax questions.⁶⁶ The donors received assurances from the Justice Department that the plan had the President's complete support.⁶⁷ At the last minute, the White House called upon Archbishop Richard Cardinal Cushing for a one million dollar donation. Kennedy was well aware of Cushing's reputation for attracting generous benefactors to the Church.⁶⁸

On Christmas Eve, the planes laden with over sixty million dollars in U.S ransom landed in Havana to pay off Castro.⁶⁹ On December 29th, the men of Brigade 2506 gathered for a rally in Miami's Orange Bowl and presented Kennedy with their unit's flag. In an emotional moment, forty-thousand Cubans chanted, "Guerra! Guerra! Guerra!"⁷⁰ The President was surprised because his advisors expected jeers for letting the Cuban domino fall.⁷¹ Kennedy responded to the crowd by waving the Brigade's war colors and declaring his support: "I can assure you that this flag will be returned to this brigade in a free Havana!"⁷²

The release of the Cuban Brigade did not change the status quo in Cuban-American relations. During this period, Castro complained that Kennedy 'says one thing and does another.' "How can you figure him out?" asked the Cuban dictator.⁷³ The New Frontier never had a second round against Castro, but the record is clear that Kennedy refused to let a little island in the Caribbean challenge U.S. hegemony in the Western hemisphere.⁷⁴

Kennedy's Dilemma:

President Kennedy approached the Cold War in Cuba with a pragmatic deal-maker's attitude and a crisis manager's hard-line that led to what one official called "inconsistent decisions."⁷⁵ Aware of the political consequences, Kennedy scrambled to cover his tracks on Cuba policy with advisers and the press. Cuba policy was shaped by the tension between Kennedy's reluctance to use American forces in Cuba and his tough campaign rhetoric of the 1960 election. During the 1960 campaign Castro and Cuba assumed symbolic importance after Kennedy used them as a sounding board for Cold War rhetoric which portrayed Eisenhower as an old and lethargic leader who had stalled in the fight against Communism. By contrast, Kennedy's strategy was to offer an image of himself which projected vigorous health and youthful leadership with new ideas that would get the country moving against the threat of Castro's Communism.

After the election, Cuba was transformed into a testing ground for the political integrity of the strong image Kennedy had portrayed for his presidency. As Chester Bowles later remarked, "Kennedy's timidity in regard to foreign affairs may have been due in large measure to the closeness of the 1960 election." Bowles and other liberals often complained to President Kennedy that he was not doing enough to push the Strategy for Peace advocated in the 1960 Democratic platform. The liberal ideas of the Democratic platform promised an end to the Cold War and promised to pursue disarmament and softening relations with the Soviets, recognize China, and offer development assistance to the Third World. When Kennedy's liberal aides pushed him to act on this agenda, he told them that his strategy was to be cautious and spend the first term building a political base that would allow him to pursue a more liberal foreign policy after he won re-election with a large majority in 1964.⁷⁶

Chester Bowles observed a pattern in Kennedy's foreign policy wherein the President tended to support the moderate minority position against the hawkish majority of his advisers. Bowles concluded that Kennedy's acute concern for his image and sense of "personal style would prevent him from boldly advocating the liberal program that I and other Democrats had outlined in the party platform for 1960." Afraid of being labeled a "woolly-headed" liberal intellectual, Kennedy never gave the liberals all they wanted, but he also never gave the hard-liners all they wanted and tried to appease both sides. Frequently faced with decisions that divided liberal and hard-line aides, Kennedy used delaying tactics, such as requesting additional studies, thereby postponing a commitment until the original situation eased or became a full-blown crisis.⁷⁷

As Kennedy straddled both sides of the political fence he needed to use the press to maintain his freedom of choice. While quick to take public responsibility for the Bay of Pigs, Kennedy quietly maneuvered behind the scenes to get his version of what had taken place into newspapers and magazines. In the aftermath, favored journalists played key roles in Kennedy's scramble to maintain control over his image.

The struggle to maintain an image was a constant consideration driving Kennedy's Cuba policy. According to Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Kennedy's decision to go ahead with the Bay of Pigs was largely driven by domestic politics and the fear that there would be "severe political repercussions inside the United States."⁷⁸ Sorensen explained that this was a situation involving the question of whether or not President Kennedy could be as tough on Cuba as the Republicans and whether he could risk disbanding the Cuban exiles and what they would say in public.⁷⁹ President Kennedy feared that "disapproval of the plan would be a show of weakness inconsistent with his general stance."⁸⁰ He understood that not going ahead with the invasion would have been inconsistent with the strong Cold Warrior image he projected to the electorate.

The potential consequences placed pressure on the machismo factor in the Kennedy image. As Robert Kennedy later argued, "if he hadn't gone ahead with it, everybody would have said it showed that he had no courage.....Eisenhower's people all said it would succeed and we turned it down."⁸¹ Kennedy made it clear to Roger Hilsman that he was especially concerned about Richard Nixon who knew there was an invasion plan and would use it against him if he turned it down. "So Kennedy was boxed in," Hilsman later concluded.⁸² President Kennedy faced a Catch-22 decision wherein not approving a risky high-stakes venture in international politics would leave him gambling in domestic politics on whether his image could endure a political attack by opponents who would argue, "The Emperor has no clothes."

Following the failure at the Bay of Pigs, Schlesinger recalled that Kennedy's "first problem was to contain the political consequences of the debacle."⁸³ The public never learned the entire story behind Kennedy's Cuba policy because he was in a position to control most of the information. Kennedy downplayed Operation Mongoose, a covert action designed not to tip the American hand or embarrass the Soviets into a war to defend Cuba. As a result of plausible denial, the world did not learn the full story regarding the events that led up to the Cuban Missile Crisis.

On October 15th, after receiving photographs of missiles in Cuba, President Kennedy anticipated strong domestic pressure. "If I don't do anything about removing those missiles from Cuba," he said, "I ought to be impeached."⁸⁴ Realizing that the American public would not tolerate Soviet missiles ninety miles off the coast, he enacted a blockade and chose not to explain that other countries had American missiles along their borders. "There was no choice. I don't think there was a choice," the President confided to his brother Robert on October 24th. The Attorney General agreed. "You would have been impeached," he said. "That's what I

think,” the President said, “I would have been impeached...removed – impeached, removed – impeached on the grounds that I sat and didn’t do it.”⁸⁵

The Attorney General pointed out “the luckiest thing in the world” was that there was time to deliberate and make arrangements with Allies because only the decisions and facts that the President wanted before the public were being released to the press. Nevertheless, with the November congressional election just a few weeks away, Kennedy felt domestic pressure to act. Angry because Moscow had offered private assurances that nothing would happen in Cuba before the elections, Kennedy sneered at the Soviet Premier’s duplicity: “Khrushchev’s horseshit about the elections.”⁸⁶

Kennedy ordered his advisers not to talk to the press or other government officials. Only twelve government officials knew about the photographs until shortly before October 22, when Kennedy publicly announced a blockade. The rules were designed to protect national security by stopping leaks and the free flow of news. Kennedy wanted the government to speak with one voice and personally orchestrated the flow of information during the Cuban Missile Crisis and prohibited Pentagon and State Department officials from talking to the press without approval from the White House. After talking to a reporter, officials were required to report back to Kennedy or have an information officer present. He told advisers the restrictions were designed to prevent the “disaster” that would result from news being “dribbled out” while he deciphered what the Soviets were doing in Cuba and how to respond.⁸⁷

On October 24th, two days after Kennedy announced the missile crisis to the public, the White House issued advisory guidelines for voluntary censorship that prohibited publishing or airing information that would help the Soviets. Reporters wanted to be on the ships sent to blockade Cuba and complained that even during World War II the rules were not as strict. In preparation for possible war with the Soviet Union, Kennedy planned to reinstitute the formal

ensorship programs of World War II. For bi-partisanship, he wanted the operation to be headed by Jim Hagerty, the President of *ABC News* and formerly Eisenhower's press secretary.⁸⁸

In the aftermath of the Missile Crisis, the Kennedy system once again wheeled into action. He avoided congressional investigations and revitalized his Cold Warrior image. In public statements he limited his gloating, but privately planted his version of what had taken place with key journalists in high circulation publications. The blockade brought the world to the brink, but Kennedy's information strategy deliberately de-emphasized the role of behind-the-scenes diplomacy in ending the crisis.

In the months that followed the crisis, Kennedy used his public statements and U-2 photographs to reassure the American public that the Soviets were taking all of the missiles and bombers out. He pragmatically preferred to put an end to the crisis than to question the accuracy of U.S. intelligence reports or to pressure Khrushchev on the inspection issue. The White House wanted to avoid a panic and attacked political opponents, such as Senator Barry Goldwater, who raised the inspection issue by questioning whether a few missiles had been left behind. For Kennedy, it was pragmatic to end the crisis by portraying it as a U.S. victory in the Cold War, rather than to encourage those who viewed the New Frontier skeptically.

Glowing press reports following the Missile Crisis filled Kennedy with confidence that American strength had been demonstrated to the world. The White House decided to step up the negotiations to release the Cuban Brigade, but Kennedy downplayed the fact that he was the engineer making the wheels in Washington's power circles move. Bi-partisan agreement made it possible for Kennedy to portray the release of the Cuban Brigade as the product of a private effort. Eisenhower knew better, but would not expose Kennedy's bluff and embarrass Washington in the eyes of the international community.

The early 1960's was a period when American leaders were willing to put aside domestic political differences at critical moments in order to present a united front in the war against Communism. The President could downplay his role because Republican leaders, such as Eisenhower, agreed in advance that the U.S. had an obligation to secure the release of the Cuban Brigade. There was also agreement that publicizing the role of the U.S. government behind the Cuban dictator's pay-off would only encourage others.

At the time of his death, Kennedy was still hoping that Castro would be overthrown by U.S. covert operations. During the final weeks, Castro made overtures to the White House regarding a possible détente and arranging a U.S. visit. The administration realized that an official visit would have resumed diplomatic relations with Cuba. Using channels, the President sent Castro a message that he was not interested in changing U.S. policy unless Cuba denounced external Communist influence and efforts to subvert Latin American governments. Bundy's memorandum for the record noted: "Reversals of these policies may or may not be sufficient to produce a change in the policy of the United States, but they are certainly necessary, and without an indication of readiness to move in these directions, it is hard for us to see what could be accomplished by a visit to Cuba."⁸⁹

The only way, then, for Castro to establish détente with Kennedy was to visit Wall Street and denounce Communism. Until that time, the White House planned to continue the strategy of pressuring Cuba. Castro needed to change before Kennedy was prepared to change his information strategy against Cuba. Barring an epiphany, Castro did not plan to buckle under the New Frontier's pressure. Difficult circumstances often forced President Kennedy to be pragmatic towards Castro, thereby making Cuba a testing ground for his image, but his core beliefs as a Cold Warrior remained unshaken. Unless Cuba planned to offer the United States

concessions, Kennedy would not discard a hard-line information strategy that seemed to work throughout his presidency to accommodate Havana with a soft-line.

Kennedy's pragmatism regarding Cuba created chinks in the armor of his Cold Warrior image, but he realized this and glossed over them by controlling information and offering journalists and publishers exclusive access. His public statements were carefully controlled and never revealed the whole story to the public. During the 1960 election, Kennedy had played Cuba as a political football by arguing Eisenhower had lost Cuba. The New Frontier was always under pressure to develop an information strategy that lived up to Kennedy's portrayal of himself as an alternative with tough yet innovative policies. The narrow victory made it impossible for the White House to stray far from a politically proven information strategy of fighting the Cold War in Cuba with a hard-line and tough policies.

Tactical Use of Appointments:

As Kennedy prepared to take office, he realized his victory in the 1960 election was razor thin. This narrow margin forced his hand, pressuring him to maintain a bipartisan foreign policy image that would appeal to Republicans who were hawkish for stronger action in the Cold War. His strategy was to co-opt the Republicans by appointing aides to key positions with a hawkish reputation that would offer a buffer against hostile criticism. This led to the re-appointment of Dulles as the Director of Central Intelligence and keeping Bissell on board as director of plans. Ironically, Kennedy's choice of advisers added to the pressure to authorize the Cuban invasion.⁹⁰

Kennedy had also appointed liberals such as Bowles and Schlesinger to secure his Democratic base. But Schlesinger proved that even among the liberals there was such strong anti-Communist consensus that the advantages of overthrowing Castro outweighed the

disadvantages. Schlesinger sang with the hawks in the chorus when the President requested advice on the Bay of Pigs invasion.

Throughout the Bay of Pigs, Operation Mongoose, the Cuban Missile Crisis, Kennedy manipulated advisers by letting them make contingency plans and not letting them know what he was doing behind their backs. Kennedy knew that his appointees were policy advocates representing points of view that he was not always interested in following. He preferred to allow a hard-line adviser such as LeMay make a contingency plan rather than to tell him that he was busy negotiating. Kennedy knew that he was not the only source for reporters and that the administration had many leaks.

Untrustworthy advisers with personal agendas on how to handle Cuba always left Kennedy in the center of chaotic political conflict. A “spokes on the wheel” organization plan created turbulent disorder, but allowed President Kennedy to use diversions to prevent leaks, rather than come out directly against unpalatable policy options presented by his advisers. The system often left advisers hopelessly spinning around the wheel again and again while Kennedy secretly went off to cut a deal. As a result of deceptive legerdemain, Cuba policy-making was filled with intrigue that served to protect Camelot’s legendary court image, but at a cost for democracy by not having open debate or fully informed citizens.

Tactical Use of Access:

President Kennedy used the access strategy to create New Frontier spin on U.S. Cuba policy and portray an image of continuity. The Cold War created strong bipartisan agreement among politicians and the mainstream press that Castro was a nemesis. Kennedy considered journalists and publishers to be tools in the battle against Communism and part of the White House team in the Cold War against Castro. Journalists and publishers who were invited to

meet with Kennedy were asked to cooperate with the New Frontier's policies and to offer advice.

In July 1962, President Kennedy even sought advice from Herbert Matthews, a reporter for the *New York Times* who had recently interviewed Fidel Castro. The President realized Matthews had a leftist reputation dating back to the Spanish Civil War and actually had traveled to Cuba to get the story, rather than rely upon handouts from government officials in Washington. Kennedy wanted an expert reporter's first-hand perspective on Castro to supplement his usual intelligence channels. "What do you think of the Cuban situation?" he asked. Matthews told him that Castro was an inexperienced ruler, but not a Communist when he took power, "despite the belief here."⁹¹

Castro had pragmatically turned to Khrushchev for support because he did not have other options. "You don't believe that Fidel, Raul, and Che were Communists?" asked Kennedy, who confessed that Khrushchev had insisted at Vienna that Castro was not a Communist. Matthews explained that Castro did not feel obliged to follow the direction of the Kremlin and that the U.S. needed to offer Cuba a line of retreat before it was possible for Havana to change policies. "You are like Fitzroy Maclean who predicted that Tito would break with Moscow," Kennedy said. He told Matthews that he could not offer Castro a sugar quota because Congress would never approve. "Even if we wanted to give him an out," Kennedy said, "how could we?" Matthews suggested using Brazil or another Latin American country to offer Castro a back door.⁹²

Matthews warned that Castro's regime was well established in Cuba and the New Frontier could not count on Havana's surrender or collapse. "He ought to be grateful to us," Kennedy said. "He gave us a kick in the ass and it made him stronger than ever. However, that

invasion did some good. If it wasn't for that we'd be in Laos now, or perhaps unleashing Chiang."⁹³

Kennedy worried about criticism from the right and was not interested in changing Cuba policy to please Herbert Matthews. Although Matthews worked for the *New York Times*, opening a back door to improve relations with Castro did not appeal at all to senior editors and management. Kennedy realized that the *Times* editors and managers supported the idea getting rid of Castro. The President could safely talk about his political frustrations, not because Matthews was a friend, but because of the anti-Castro editorial attitudes that dominated the culture of the *New York Times* and American journalism. Matthews was an influential reporter, but single-handedly unable to change the Cold War attitudes of the *New York Times* or the country as a whole.⁹⁴

Matthews had nowhere else to go with his story on Castro and needed Kennedy to lead the way with new ideas that challenged the conventional wisdom. The President gave higher priority to appealing to mainstream opinion than presenting a challenge from the bully-pulpit. Matthews's notes for the meeting indicate that Kennedy was very intrigued, but kept repeating that Cuba policy would not change because of public opinion and Congress. Matthews had a major story to write, but political revelations about the man who had written *Profiles in Courage* never made it into the *New York Times*.⁹⁵

The access strategy offered a tool to challenge quietly the conventional wisdom regarding Cuba, but President Kennedy chose not to take the risk. He was a politician who knew how to win elections, not a "woolly-headed" professor or philosopher who educated the public. Throughout a meteoric political career Kennedy's image had been packaged and marketed like 'soap flakes' to ride the waves of conventional opinion to the White House.⁹⁶ His pragmatic instinct as a Cold Warrior was to support the conventional wisdom on Cuba during the 1960

campaign. Nevertheless, the same pragmatic instincts also understood that Castro could be leveraged into the U.S. sphere, but Kennedy was not a bulldozer. As a result, the American political landscape went unchallenged by the New Frontier's Cuba policy.

Upon taking office, Kennedy faced the first real test of his Cold Warrior image, but a week before the Bay of Pigs invasion it was clear that the element of surprise, one the mission's most critical elements, had failed. Gilbert Harrison, the publisher of the *New Republic*, uncovered the story that an invasion of Cuba was imminent. Harrison sent the story to the White House for clearance and was told that Kennedy wanted the story canceled as a "patriotic act."⁹⁷ Tad Szulc, a reporter for the *New York Times*, had uncovered the story by hanging around Miami bars. For the White House, a red flag should have reminded them that Castro's agents were as adept at finding information as Szulc.⁹⁸

Instead of using the opportunity to reconsider the mission, President Kennedy turned to his access strategy and contacted James Reston, the Washington Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*. Reston told the New York office to back off or risk being blamed for killing the invasion. "Jack Kennedy was in no mood," he said.⁹⁹ Kennedy's tactic left the *Time's* publisher Orvil Dryfoos "gravely concerned about the security implications of Szulc's story." A patriotic man, Dryfoos did not want his paper to be responsible for "a bloody fiasco." Upon Reston's advice, Dryfoos eliminated references to the CIA and the word "imminent" and changed the story from a four column banner to a routine single column on the front page.¹⁰⁰

On the day Szulc's story appeared in the *Times*, Kennedy spent forty-five minutes with Chalmers Roberts of the *Washington Post*. Told that the invasion was small and the U.S. was not involved or sending troops, Roberts trusted the President's word, but regretted the decision not to publish. "The Bay of Pigs was not just a Kennedy debacle; it also was (with very few exceptions) a press debacle," he recalled.¹⁰¹ Phil Graham, the publisher of the *Washington*

Post, fully supported the Bay of Pigs invasion believing that it was in the national interest to oust Castro.¹⁰² The majority of reporters patriotically applauded the New Frontier for trying to take action and preferred to write anti-Castro stories. Kennedy's access strategy to keep the invasion plans moving forward was successful because of the Cold War attitudes of the press.¹⁰³

Yet Kennedy's anxious gut instinct to use the access strategy placed him a step ahead of advisers who wanted to insulate him from the Bay of Pigs. "When lies must be told, they should be told by subordinate officials," Schlesinger warned Kennedy in an April 10th memo entitled "Protection of the President." He anticipated failure and recommended that the President leave the leaking to someone else in order to have a scapegoat.¹⁰⁴ Schlesinger's admonition came too late. Kennedy had already deceived the press and potentially his head was on the block.

Nevertheless, despite his use of access to keep the mission going, Kennedy was reluctant to approve the mission with a full green light and reserved the right to back out until the very last possible minute. The mission no longer had the element of surprise and it was clear that Castro would be waiting. At the last minute, Kennedy chose to gamble with the odds his planners originally offered rather than "re-examine the odds."¹⁰⁵ Canceling the mission meant that the Cuban Brigade would talk. The invasion decision was a difficult political Catch-22. After the invasion, Kennedy regretted the success of his access strategy. "Maybe if you had printed more about the operation you would have saved us from a colossal mistake," he confided to Dryfoos, the publisher of the *New York Times*. The White House seemed to blame the press for the Bay of Pigs.¹⁰⁶

During the aftermath, the Oval Office was transformed into a public relations War Room as Kennedy scrambled to work the phones and call favored journalists and publishers. The

Eisenhower meeting was Kennedy's first shot in a subtle attempt to co-opt the Republicans and head-off an investigation. The next step in damage control was to take personal responsibility publicly while privately feeding the press his version of events during background interviews. He also began plotting revenge against Castro, but kept reporters in the dark to maintain plausible deniability and prevent another Bay of Pigs nightmare.

The Bay of Pigs made the editors at the *Post* angry at Kennedy for hesitating and not doing enough to roll back Communism in Cuba. The New Frontier was trying to fight Castro with "one hand tied behind its back." As a favor, Clayton Fritchey, a columnist at the *Post*, had been invited by Kennedy to be an overnight guest on the eve of the invasion. Fritchey tried to console the President: "Don't feel so bad. You might have won; then where would you be running Cuba." "That's the first bright thing I've heard," Kennedy retorted.¹⁰⁷

Nothing had ever hurt President Kennedy as much as the Bay of Pigs. "The worst experience of my life," Kennedy told Benjamin Bradlee.¹⁰⁸ The President confided that he had reluctantly approved the invasion at the Bay of Pigs under pressure. Kennedy had boldly promised innovative leadership, but felt intimidated by the experience of the military and CIA people who urged him to plunge ahead. He also faced the pressure of having to build a stronger domestic political base. "I'm sure he was worried about the mandate and the charge that he was going to be a liberal, peacnik type," Bradlee later recalled.¹⁰⁹ Kennedy need not worry about Bradlee reporting about his ambivalence or the domestic political pressure behind the Bay of Pigs decision. His friend's access to the White House version of "contemporary history" came with the pledge to print only "small portions."¹¹⁰

Bradlee saw that Kennedy felt "badly used" by the CIA and the Joint Chiefs of Staff and vowed not to let it happen again. "Presumably I was going to learn these lessons sometime,"

Kennedy said, "and maybe better sooner than later." The lesson for Bradlee was that Kennedy publicly assumed responsibility, but not the blame, for New Frontier's disaster.¹¹¹

To ABC's David Lawrence, the President later confided the White House was fully responsible and there were "no adequate excuses or explanations."¹¹² Nevertheless, throughout the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs, the White House systematically met with journalists and publishers to remind them that Kennedy was taking only public responsibility. The President wanted the press to spin the story that the Bay of Pigs was the result of an inexperienced Commander-in-Chief in awe of experts who urged the White House to move ahead with a plan developed by the outgoing Republican administration. He downplayed the point that the original plan had been significantly altered and the invasion was one of many in a broad range of possible options for Cuba policy.

The President called Walter Lippmann and tried to convince him that the Commander-in-Chief was not responsible for the Bay of Pigs decision. The tactic failed to persuade Lippmann. In his column, Lippmann berated Kennedy for being "hesitant and ineffectual." He considered the Bay of Pigs invasion to be a violation of American principles: "out of character, like a cow that tried to fly or a fish that tried to walk." He warned that Kennedy was playing into the Kremlin's hand. "This has been exactly what Mr. K.'s dogma calls for - that Communism should be the only alternative to the status quo with its immemorial poverty and privilege."¹¹³

The President's brother also told Hanson Baldwin, the national security reporter for the *New York Times*, that the CIA and the Joint Chiefs of Staff had misled the White House. "(The) President accepted their judgment as to whether it was militarily feasible," the Attorney General said. "All the planning (was) in their hands."¹¹⁴ Over lunch with Matthews and dinner with Robert Estabrook of the *Washington Post*, Arthur Schlesinger repeated the same White House line.¹¹⁵

Kennedy personally told *Time*'s Hugh Sidey of his struggle to make the decision. After advisers were told to go ahead with the invasion, he "debated inwardly the morality of the act, the world response, the national response, the Latin American reaction." Ambivalence arguably contributed to his desire to 'lower the noise level' and maintain secrecy for plausible deniability. The end result created anxiety because Kennedy understood the New Frontier was moving ahead with a high-risk caricature of Eisenhower's original plan.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, Sidey later wrote, "The President had accepted the advice of the men who should have known."¹¹⁷

In May 1961, Kennedy repeated similar exculpating rationalizations to Arthur Krock of the *New York Times*, complaining that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had misled the White House by saying the probability of success was "as great as Guatemala." Krock was then given permission to publish that Kennedy no longer had confidence in the Joint Chiefs, but without citing the President as a source. Krock wrote in his diary that he agreed to the conditions knowing that the President wanted to be able to deny responsibility for the story.¹¹⁸ He doubted Kennedy's Bay of Pigs version and later wrote that the "enforced silence" of the Joint Chiefs made it impossible to assess the President's role.¹¹⁹

Joseph Alsop, the syndicated columnist, learned about the Bay of Pigs in advance and heard that Kennedy was "whittling down" the role of the U.S. military. Alsop wanted Castro overthrown, but in anticipation of a disaster he arranged to be in Paris, so he would not have to write about the stumble in Cuba. He did not write about Kennedy's plans because he believed reporters had a duty to put the interests of the United States first when the President commits to covert operations. A veteran of many battles in the Cold War, Alsop had played a similar role for Eisenhower during the 1954 overthrow of Guatemala's President Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán and for the overthrow of Mohammed Mossadegh in Iran. The public was not informed because Alsop viewed his column as a weapon in the Cold War to stop Communism.¹²⁰

After the invasion failed, Alsop wrote a passionate column urging Kennedy to keep trying to "bring Castro down." "The commitment can only be honored if the American government is willing, if necessary, to strike to kill, even if that risks the shedding of American blood," he wrote. Alsop clearly wanted Castro assassinated, but probably did not know about Operation Mongoose. Stewart Alsop later recalled that Kennedy had not told his brother about "dirty tricks," but the Cold War had its code of silence: "you kept your mouth shut about them."¹²¹

The President also told Alsop that the Bay of Pigs was his responsibility, but the fingerpointing that followed left the columnist perplexed about who was in charge. Kennedy blamed the Joint Chiefs, the CIA, and Rusk for not raising objections to the invasion until twelve hours before D-day. The columnist already knew that the President had cut back on Eisenhower's plan. "I don't understand the President having said, 'Well, we'll take this gamble,'" Alsop later wrote. Kennedy's tactic only raised doubts in his mind about the leadership of the New Frontier.¹²²

Kennedy's handling of the Bay of Pigs crisis also raised doubts about his character at the *New York Times*. Reston became angry with how the press fell for Kennedy's access strategy. On May 10th, the columnist fired off an editorial that attacked the press for having "very little to say about the morality, legality or practicality of the Cuban adventure when there was time to stop it." Reston's column appeared next to a *New York Times* editorial entitled, "The Right Not to Be Lied To." The *Times* was self-indulgent, however, for not pointing out that they had not printed the whole story in order not to become Kennedy's scapegoat for canceling the invasion. The *Times* had chosen to wash its hands of the matter and let the invasion go ahead, rather than publish suspicions that Kennedy was afraid to cancel the invasion and stand up to Republican criticism.¹²³

Kennedy's initial reaction was to use his access strategy to co-opt the press as a weapon in America's war against Cuba and Communism. He reasoned that the Bay of Pigs had failed because the press had blown the mission's cover and thus arranged to meet with representatives of the press at the White House to discuss what the press could do to help America fight Communism. At the May 9th meeting, Kennedy rejected a state of emergency, but urged news executives to adopt self-censorship and coordinate with the government when a story involved national security.¹²⁴ He expected the press to cover the New Frontier's Cold War by indefinitely reverting to President Franklin Roosevelt's press rules for World War II.¹²⁵ The reporters and publishers balked, claiming that Kennedy was blaming the press for the Bay of Pigs.¹²⁶

Henry Luce, the publisher of *Time-Life*, was invited to the White House for lunch a few weeks after the Bay of Pigs. 'What should I do now?' Kennedy asked. The President wanted advice, but Luce had little to say. He told Kennedy that the New Frontier simply needed to reassert the Monroe Doctrine to keep Communism out of the Western Hemisphere.¹²⁷

Kennedy wanted to conceal his hesitance at the Bay of Pigs, but White House backgrounders could not keep the rest of Washington from talking to Luce. *Time-Life's* publisher eventually learned the details and struck out at Kennedy in the September 1961 issue of *Fortune Magazine*. The article by Charles V. Murphy was titled, "Cuba: The Record Set Straight." Luce blamed the White House for the Bay of Pigs failure because Kennedy rejected requests to send in air cover.¹²⁸

Kennedy responded by sending General Maxwell Taylor to meet secretly with Luce in New York. Taylor had supervised the internal investigation (the so-called Taylor report) into what had gone wrong at the Bay of Pigs. "If it should become known that General Taylor has discussed the Cuban affair with you," Kennedy warned, "the press as well as the Congress will

immediately descend on us en masse demanding equal treatment.” Kennedy wanted Luce to have a background briefing, but on the condition that nothing was printed “on the record.” His letter to Luce made it clear that he wanted to avoid a congressional investigation or further stories on the Bay of Pigs because the country already faced enough problems. “I would prefer that we let the matter lie as it is,” Kennedy wrote. He wanted to make sure *Time-Life* was “fully acquainted...to be fair.....at some later date.”¹²⁹

Taylor’s background briefing included a recitation of a White House memorandum that attacked Murphy’s abilities as a journalist and pointed out seventeen inaccuracies.¹³⁰ Taylor’s effort did not impress Luce. “I have not been converted,” the publisher reported back to the President. He argued that the only inaccurate fact printed in *Fortune* and *Time* was the name of the aircraft carrier waiting for Kennedy’s orders to support the Cuban Brigade.¹³¹ Nevertheless, while Kennedy did not get a retraction on the Murphy article on the Bay of Pigs, Luce agreed, “the less said the better about it.” Wanting to push Kennedy to take a tough stand against Communism, Luce nevertheless did not want to make Khrushchev more confident in the process.¹³²

Kennedy later gave him a copy of a report by Sorensen that compared Eisenhower’s coverage with the first six months of the New Frontier. Sorensen considered *Time*’s coverage “far more critical and skeptical.” “And the bias shows in every issue,” Sorensen wrote, “a bias on a political leaning to the right and the Republicans with an unmistakable emotional aura surrounding many of the issues.”¹³³

Throughout the Bay of Pigs, Kennedy’s access strategy had proven to be a double edged sword. He succeeded in manipulating Washington’s press corp, but at the cost of making it more difficult to cancel the invasion, presiding over a failure, and being branded a liar by the

Times. During the Bay of Pigs, the access strategy produced mixed results because Kennedy chose to forego careful planning and ran with gut instincts. The lesson for Kennedy was to avoid the press during Operation Mongoose and the initial days of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

The conspicuous absence of references to Operation Mongoose in memoirs by journalists and publishers suggests that Kennedy did not reveal his hand. The only reporter eventually to write about Operation Mongoose was Tad Szulc in a February 1974 article in *Esquire*, revealing that Kennedy did tell him in November 1961 that he had been under pressure from the CIA to assassinate Castro. The President's candid revelation arguably did not strike Szulc as a page one story for the *New York Times* in 1961.¹³⁴

During September 1962, as rumors of missiles in Cuba circulated in Washington, Kennedy prepared for the possibility of a crisis by meeting with Dryfoos, the publisher of the *New York Times*. Dryfoos told Kennedy to call him if a crisis emerged, but with the admonition that, "National security must not be confused with political security."¹³⁵

Kennedy even cut off Bradley's direct access during the Cuban Missile Crisis. "I was scrambling for information like everyone else," he later recalled.¹³⁶ The State Department offered 125 reporters an off-the-record briefing on October 22nd in conjunction with Kennedy's announcement of the crisis. By contrast, Alsop, Reston, Lippmann, White and Graham were offered private briefings by ExComm members. The following day at ExComm, the President said he was concerned about criticism raised by Senator Keating and Arthur Krock's column in the *New York Times* that day that the White House should have known about the missiles earlier and was playing politics.¹³⁷ Krock called Kennedy's announcement of the missile crisis a "marvelous public relations job" and noted that cynics might argue it was timed to influence the election.¹³⁸ John McCone, the director of the CIA was told to brief Krock along with

congressional leaders on how quickly mobile missile sites can be set up and moved. "(Krock's) suggesting it's part of the political campaign," Kennedy said. The President was also concerned about Hanson Baldwin's reporting, but an advisers assured, "We can get him...through the Navy."¹³⁹

The effort to influence Krock failed to change his view of the crisis. The columnist's October 25th column called for an investigation into how intelligence gathering and data was handled by Kennedy.¹⁴⁰ Five days later, Krock hammered away again at the President with a column that demanded "full surveillance of the pledged dismantling by sea and air of the offensive missile installations in Cuba."¹⁴¹ Juxtaposed against Krock, James Reston's October 28th column noted that the U.S. is selective in how it uses the word offensive. Borrowing from inside sources, Reston noted that if the same definition was applied to Turkey, the U.S. would have to remove Jupiter missiles and most aircraft.¹⁴²

Kennedy personally invited Luce to Washington for a briefing. McCone gave the publisher missile photographs and ushered him to the Oval Office. The White House was very worried about Khrushchev's next move. Luce noted that Kennedy kept repeating, "Berlin, Berlin." "Are you for or against invasion?" Kennedy asked repeatedly, but chose not to reveal that he was also considering diplomacy. Luce assured him that he supported a blockade. After a forty-five minute conversation, Luce thanked Kennedy for giving *Time-Life* access. "Well you have been the strongest advocate of vigorous action in Cuba," Kennedy said, "and you were right." The President infused the publisher with a "sense of tremendous responsibility."¹⁴³

Luce was then ushered over to the Pentagon to look at more reconnaissance photos. He questioned Kennedy on why the missiles were not detected earlier. The White House wanted Luce to see the photos to understand. Kennedy's treatment of Luce did not leave him with the

impression that the White House was trying to "sell *Time* anything." Nevertheless, Kennedy wanted *Time* to explain the crisis to the public and offered copies of the missile photos for the next week's issue. He understood the logistics of publishing *Time* and realized Luce needed advance notice. The publisher left with the impression that the Cuban Missile Crisis would involve long protracted negotiations or war. He was later amazed that the same President who had hesitated at the Bay of Pigs could sleep calmly while Khrushchev backed down.¹⁴⁴

Sidey offered Luce minute by minute accounts that the White House provided. Kennedy encouraged Sidey to write a campaign biography which he reviewed before it was released in the summer of 1963.¹⁴⁵ Throughout the Kennedy years, Sidey's dispatches always went to *Time's* New York office for re-editing. The book resolved the ongoing problem of getting Sidey's dispatches published without *Time-Life's* editorial perspective.¹⁴⁶

After the Cuban Missile Crisis, Kennedy wanted to get the spin out that he had learned from the Bay of Pigs and made Khrushchev blink at the Cuban Missile Crisis. For the Bay of Pigs, Kennedy wanted Sidey to ask how the review process failed to prevent the invasion. "I take responsibility, but the point of it was that it was just such a staggering miscalculation all down the line," Kennedy said. "There was nobody in that whole group that suddenly really said, 'Let's stop,' or 'This can't work.'" In writing the book, Sidey performed a dual role as a *Time* reporter and an unwitting but enthusiastic campaign operative for Kennedy's re-election. Sidey naively recalled that Kennedy's advice on writing the book was so useful that they only changed one sentence. Kennedy had second thoughts about letting Sidey announce his re-election campaign as the last sentence in the book. "You'd better let me make that announcement," Kennedy said.¹⁴⁷

Alsop was the next target of Kennedy's access strategy during the Missile Crisis. The President had a long standing dinner invitation to the columnist's home which he did not cancel for fear of letting the Soviets know something was unusual. Nevertheless, Kennedy chose to make a scene during dinner to talk about the odds of a nuclear war and then fighting in front of guests with Chip Bohlen, the Ambassador to France. The scene suggested to the guests that there was a mysterious crisis in the White House. Alsop was briefed on the details the following day.¹⁴⁸

On October 20th, Kennedy learned from Pierre Salinger that Edward Folliard of the *Washington Post* called to confirm a rumor by Walter Lippmann that the country was preparing for war. "How much longer do you think it will hold?" Kennedy asked.¹⁴⁹ Kenneth O'Donnell, a political adviser to the president, also called Kennedy to warn that the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* were working on the story, but still lacked all the details. "This White House is like a sieve," Kennedy said. His adviser reminded him that the closed access strategy had kept the story out of the papers for five days. "Now you'd better get somebody to call the *Post* and the *Times* and ask them to hold on it until Monday night," O'Donnell said. "Are you kidding?" Kennedy exclaimed. "I'll call them myself, right now."¹⁵⁰

Kennedy contacted Dryfoos to inform the *New York Times* that there was a crisis on the New Frontier. The publisher agreed to help the White House by not mentioning the discovery of the missiles until after Kennedy made an announcement.¹⁵¹ The President later noted that there were two experiences that shaped his opinion of Dryfoos: "One involved national security—the other his decision to refrain from printing on October 21st the news, which only the man for the *Times* possessed, on the presence of Russian missiles in Cuba, upon my informing him that we needed twenty-four hours more to complete our preparations. This

decision....contributed greatly to our national safety.”¹⁵² The President viewed the decision by Dryfoos to hold back the information on the Cuban Missile Crisis as an important one, but chose to make a distinction between national security and national safety.

The President also called the *Washington Post* and received assurances that the discovery of missiles would not be mentioned in stories about Cuba.¹⁵³ Kennedy's phone call did not stop the *Post* from publishing an unsigned story about the unusual movement of ships and troops in the southeast, "believed to be in connection with the Cuban situation."¹⁵⁴

As Roberts, a reporter at the *Post*, later recalled, "the White House had waved off the *New York Times* but failed to call *THE POST*; only *THE POST* had even this part of the story on Sunday."¹⁵⁵ Although the *Post* story did not specifically mention the discovery of missiles in Cuba, Kennedy failed to call Graham.

On Sunday, Kennedy received four phone calls from Salinger warning that reporters had confirmed enough information to publish a full story on the missiles in Cuba and the decision to respond with a blockade. Kennedy wanted to be the first to make the announcement and called the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* to stop the story. He also worried that publishing information the U.S. response to missiles in Cuba would give Khrushchev enough warning to respond with an ultimatum.¹⁵⁶

Kennedy then called Reston. Reston had earlier called Bundy asking for details regarding unusual troop movements throughout the southeast. The President warned Reston not to print what he had learned because Khrushchev might issue an ultimatum before Kennedy went on television to explain the crisis to the country. The White House also worried about setting off a panic. Rather than argue that the *New York Times* clearly had information that any Soviet spy

or cab driver working near a military base already knew, Reston agreed to help the President out of "a very sticky situation." He told Kennedy to call Dryfoos in New York.¹⁵⁷

Dryfoos only wanted assurances that Kennedy did not plan to take action before going on the air.¹⁵⁸ With Kennedy's promise not to take any action until after his television announcement, Reston's editors in New York "spiked the story." This access strategy bought an extra day to plan how to deal with Khrushchev's next move. Kennedy wanted to be the first to notify the public that the country faced a crisis and offer reassurances that he had already responded with a blockade to prevent Khrushchev from bringing missiles into Cuba. Kennedy also did not want his response to the missiles to be misinterpreted as a response to the *New York Times* and political pressure.¹⁵⁹

During his phone conversation with the publisher of the *Washington Post*, Kennedy explained that the White House needed the press to cooperate in order to win the latest battle in the Cold War.¹⁶⁰ Phil Graham shared Kennedy's belief that Communism in Cuba threatened American interests and the missiles posed an imminent danger. The publisher also believed that the *Post* had an obligation to help fight the Cold War and maintain national security.¹⁶¹ Graham agreed to wait for Kennedy's prime time television announcement before publishing the news of the Cuban Missile Crisis in the next morning's edition of the *Post*.¹⁶² The *Post's* editors resisted, but settled on a headline that read, "Major U.S. Decision is Awaited."¹⁶³

Lippmann anticipated that war would break out over the missiles in Cuba and thus to put his access and insider's knowledge of the crisis into motion. Angry at Kennedy, he questioned the accuracy of U.S. intelligence. During the summer, Lippmann had received two briefings with assurances that missiles were not being constructed in Cuba and that the Republicans were only playing politics by claiming otherwise. The columnist was concerned about the ability of

the White House to resist pressure to escalate decided to pressure Kennedy by publishing a column calling for pragmatism. He suggested that the White House follow the British government's proposal to trade the missile base in Cuba for the missile base in Turkey. Kennedy did not call Lippmann to demand a retraction or warn him not to interfere with foreign policy.¹⁶⁴

Khrushchev also read the column with interest and concluded that a missile trade was Kennedy's proposal after the White House did not disavow Lippmann. On October 26th, John Scali of *ABC News* was contacted by Alexander Fomin, an attaché at the Soviet Embassy. He wanted Scali to tell Kennedy that Khrushchev was interested in trading missile-bases.¹⁶⁵ The State Department prepared a response for Scali to give Fomin at 7:45 on October 26th. "I have reason to believe that the United States Government sees real possibilities in this," Scali said, "...representatives of the USSR and the United States in New York can work this matter out with U Thant." After Fomin asked several times, Scali assured him that the message came from "very high sources."¹⁶⁶

Throughout the Cuban Missile Crisis, the main conduit of Kennedy access strategy was through his friend Charles Bartlett, a syndicated Pulitzer prize winning columnist for the *Chattanooga Times*. During the week before the U-2 photographs were available, Kennedy invited Bartlett over to the White House three times for dinner. During the crisis, Bartlett accompanied the President while he read cables that reported Russian ships were not challenging the blockade. Kennedy told his friend not to celebrate because it was impossible to predict Khrushchev's next move.¹⁶⁷

Kennedy also used Bartlett to receive a message from Khrushchev. The President's brother told Bartlett that Georgi Bolshakov had a message from Khrushchev, but he did not

want to meet with his friend because of what the Soviet Union was trying to do in Cuba. Bartlett thereupon received the message from Bolshakov, but found Kennedy already had communicated with Khrushchev through other channels.¹⁶⁸

The announcement that Khrushchev planned to withdraw the missiles came as a surprise to the Washington press corps. Shortly after the announcement, *Time* went to press with articles that applauded Kennedy's handling of the missile crisis.¹⁶⁹ Kennedy then offered another exclusive insider's account of the New Frontier's handling of the crisis to his close friend, Charles Bartlett and Stewart Alsop, the brother of Joseph Alsop and managing editor of the *Saturday Evening Post*.¹⁷⁰

The exclusive was offered after the President received written and verbal assurances from Bartlett that the goal of the story was to show "an effective operation." He was also willing to arrange for Kennedy's indirect involvement in writing the story. The act of friendship was a public relations coup for the New Frontier. The President refused to be the main source, so Bartlett and Alsop were briefed by advisers. "There's no point in sitting around patting myself on the back," Kennedy said. The President had cut off access to other journalists and was positioned to edit the first insider's account of the Missile Crisis. Details that contradicted the 'Profile in Courage' were kept away from ExComm or classified and did not threaten Kennedy's image unless his brother talked. Bobby eventually did talk, but the first draft of Camelot's history had already been written.¹⁷¹

"I heard this amazing story about Adlai," Bartlett said to Kennedy over dinner at the White House. "Oh, you got that, huh?" Kennedy said. "I wasn't sure you'd get that," he added.¹⁷² An aide had told Bartlett that Stevenson was yellow and ready to negotiate a deal, but Kennedy had over-ruled appeasement. "Are you going to put it in the article?" he asked.

Bartlett said, "Yes." Kennedy just shook his head, but was not displeased. The Attorney General added further confirmation by fuming to Bartlett about Stevenson's allegedly naive cowardice.¹⁷³

Before the article was ready for publication in the *Saturday Evening Post*, it had to first be cleared by the White House. Kennedy edited out references to Sorensen because of his wartime record as a conscientious objector, but chose to retain the attack on Stevenson. The President did not want to be criticized for taking military advice from someone with Sorensen's dovish views.¹⁷⁴

The article used the phrase "eyeball to eyeball" to emphasize drama and "hawks and doves" to divide Kennedy's advisers.¹⁷⁵ Hawks wanted a military strike against Cuba, while Doves wanted a blockade first to give Khrushchev time to back down. According to the article that the President edited, Stevenson was the only exception because he wanted to trade the Cuban missile base for Turkish, Italian and British bases. "Adlai wanted a Munich," read one of the quotes that Kennedy approved. The charges against the UN Ambassador created a controversy, but the White House immediately denied any responsibility.¹⁷⁶

Despite Kennedy's efforts, the White House faced criticism from Barry Goldwater and other political opponents who questioned whether all of the missiles were really out of Cuba. In November 1963, President Kennedy admitted to Bradlee that his opponents had legitimate ground: "they had never seen those missiles without the covers on, and they looked the same leaving Cuba as they had en route to Cuba." He was confident that Khrushchev and Castro did not have telephone poles under the tarps because they understood that if "offensive" missiles remained behind in Cuba's caves it would eventually become known and the U.S. would invade.¹⁷⁷

In February 1963, over dinner at the White House President Kennedy told Bradlee that there were 17,000 Soviet troops in Cuba (in fact, they had 40,000). From Khrushchev's perspective, the U.S. had 27,000 troops in Turkey, but the White House had no plans to make a public comparison. "It isn't wise politically to understand Khrushchev's problems in quite this way," Kennedy said. Bradlee agreed, and the President's secret remained safe as the New Frontier basked in glowing press coverage of the Missile Crisis.¹⁷⁸

Nevertheless, Kennedy's domestic political problems with Cuba were not over. Senator Mike Mansfield revived the Bay of Pigs issue by telling reporters that four airmen from the Alabama National Guard had been killed. Reporters raised the issue at a press conference in March 1963. The lingering questions about the Bay of Pigs upset Kennedy. Following the press conference, Bradlee was invited to spend the evening watching movies in the President's living quarters. Kennedy confided that his answers to the awkward questions were not glib enough to make them go away. "There was not enough zip," he said. "What the hell am I going to tell them?" Bradlee sympathized, but had no useful advice for his friend.¹⁷⁹

"Why don't you write a story about how many people have been killed working for the CIA?" President Kennedy said. "There's a hell of a lot, I can tell you that." His pal saw an opportunity for a great story, but asked the President for help with information. Bradlee recalled, "His smile told me that *he* wouldn't."¹⁸⁰ Kennedy had stopped himself before blowing the cover of Operation Mongoose. Nevertheless, Bradlee already had enough material to write a story, but decided against going public. Kennedy made sure Bradlee knew that the Bay of Pigs had not resulted in a change in his strategy to use the CIA to fight Communism.

Long term cynicism and distrust were the costs of Kennedy's secrecy and access strategy to feed favored reporters stories on the New Frontier's handling of Cuba policy. In the aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Washington press corps emerged as a more

aggressive unit and attacked Kennedy by raising charges of “managed news.” At the end of the crisis, Arthur Sylvester, a Pentagon spokesman, unwittingly sparked the controversy by asserting that the government had a ‘right to lie’ to protect the country.¹⁸¹

Kennedy's information policies had created an organizational culture in the New Frontier where the public relations function of the press to protect national security and a political image mattered more than an informed public. From President Kennedy's perspective, Khrushchev had an advantage in the Cold War because the Kremlin did not have to deal with hungry reporters and the political demands of democracy.¹⁸²

Lippmann criticized Sylvester for “violating the first principle of managed news.” Nevertheless, the columnist became one of Kennedy's most ardent defenders in the news management battle with the press. Lippmann argued that Washington's press corps was too large and too expert for politicians to get away with lying. “What lying there is comes for the most part out of the need of the armed forces and the intelligence services to hide their own secrets and deceive the adversary.” He agreed with Kennedy that news management was a necessary part of the Cold War, “a necessary part of the unpretty business.”¹⁸³

In April 1963, Bradlee breathed new life into the managed news controversy with a *Newsweek* cover story. Kennedy liked the article, but was disappointed because Bradlee did not get the story right. The article had used the word “lie” instead of “fib” to describe the decision to delay telling the public about the missiles during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Kennedy also criticized Bradlee for not attacking Arthur Krock and the *New York Times* for coining the phrase ‘news management.’¹⁸⁴

President Kennedy stubbornly believed that he was not managing the news, but only performed advisory duties by giving performance reviews to Bradlee and Luce. The access strategy was an instinctive response for dealing with press coverage of Cuba, but it backfired so

often that even Kennedy could not accept the news management charges. Nevertheless, the access of reporters and publishers to information on Cuba policy was managed to fight the Cold War against Castro and protect President Kennedy's political image. For the New Frontier, the access strategy was an opportunity to quietly argue for bringing Castro into the American sphere, but Kennedy chose not to take the political risk.

President Kennedy's use of the access strategy resulted in continuity for Cuba policy. He glossed over his hesitance at the Bay of Pigs while downplaying Operation Mongoose and any hint of diplomacy during the Cuban Missile Crisis. For the 1964 election, Kennedy planned to use his access strategy to ride the wave of conventional wisdom on his handling of Cuba policy, rather than go down in history as another Fitzroy Maclean. Sidey's 'starry eyed' campaign biography offers insight into how Kennedy wanted the New Frontier's handling of Cuba policy portrayed for his re-election campaign. Kennedy did not argue with Sidey's caricature of the Cuban Missile Crisis as a tale of heroic military leadership and the Bay of Pigs as a learning experience.¹⁸⁵ "The country rather enjoyed the Cuban quarantine," Kennedy told Sidey. "It was exciting; it was a diversion; and there was a feeling we were doing something. But that was an easy one."¹⁸⁶

The President obviously saw entertainment value in the Cuban Missile Crisis and could describe it as 'an easy one,' but Sidey never asked why. He did not write about Operation Mongoose as one of the events leading up to the Cuban Missile Crisis or how diplomacy became possible after Kennedy brought the world to the brink. President Kennedy wanted it that way. The access strategy formed a protective moat guarding Camelot's secrets while Kennedy reinvigorated his strong Cold Warrior image for the 1964 election by portraying the New Frontier's handling of Cuba policy as a fairy-tale legend.¹⁸⁷

Tactical Use of Press Conferences:

President Kennedy's press conferences placed his information strategy for Cuba in the White House press corps's bulls-eye and in the center of international diplomacy. The information the President chose to reveal on Cuba policy was important for shaping his domestic political image and making foreign policy. Cuba was a testing ground for the New Frontier's image: as a result, forthrightness was never the watchword for Kennedy's Cuba policy.

The President's comments to Bradlee on the amount of "zip" in his answer to a question on the Bay of Pigs reflected a philosophy that viewed the press conference as a forum that merged information and entertainment. The phrase 'infotainment' had yet to be coined, but Kennedy instinctively wanted to avoid becoming a public bore and was concerned about overexposure on television. He frequently used glib humor to deflect tough questions with the quick "zip" Americans were accustomed to seeing celebrities perform on variety and game shows. The press corps dutifully delivered the straight-lines while the President cast himself as a quick-witted television host with expert answers and funny punch-lines. The novelty and drama of presidential infotainment suggested Groucho Marx and Jack Benny had taken over the White House. It is in this sense that Kennedy is considered to be the first television president, but the categorization is misleading because the White House still considered print to be a principal medium.

Beneath the spectacle of confident television showmanship, President Kennedy felt awkward handling questions on Cuba policy and the core of New Frontier's information strategy relied upon a behind-the-scenes Roosevelt-style access strategy. At press conferences, Kennedy wanted to portray the New Frontier's handling of Cuba policy as a type of learning curve progressing from early failure to the Cuban Missile Crisis triumph. In portraying the

story-line, a pattern emerged at press conferences where questions on Cuba went unanswered because Kennedy chose to leave out key details. The tactic meant that access for selected reporters was more important because they would get stories that the President did not always reveal in public. Kennedy's tactic at press conferences worked only because reporters were lapdogs and did not cry foul.

Kennedy's remarks in January 1961 at his first news conference were designed to reassure reporters and the international community that the New Frontier planned to continue Eisenhower's Cuba policy. He emphasized that the White House had no plans to re-open diplomatic relations with Cuba, send humanitarian aid, or stop refugees from leaving.¹⁸⁸ A week later on February 1st, Kennedy told reporters that the situation in Cuba was worse than it had been during the election. Castro receiving shipments of arms and becoming a threat to U.S. security. Nevertheless, the President chose not to tell the Soviets and other countries to stop shipping arms to Havana.¹⁸⁹

The President also used his press conferences to demonstrate his sense of humor and showmanship. At the February 15th press conference, reporters asked about a U.S. distilling company's plans to purchase molasses and whether the White House planned to stop all trade with Cuba. Kennedy observed that the molasses had not been purchased, but was intended to make gin. "I am not sure...that is in the public interest," he said.¹⁹⁰

On April 12th reporters asked Kennedy to discuss rumors regarding plans to invade Cuba. The questions indicated that the plan to overthrow Castro was no longer a secret, but the President chose to continue the charade. "The basic issue is not one between the United States and Cuba." Kennedy said. "It is between Cubans themselves." The President was gambling that plausible deniability would work.¹⁹¹

“Is it your view that Fidel Castro is personally a Communist?” a reporter asked. Kennedy noted that Castro admired Communist revolutions, appointed Communists, and associated with the Sino-Soviet bloc. “I would not want to characterize Mr. Castro,” he said. Nevertheless, his answer made it clear that Castro had turned to Khrushchev. Kennedy chose not to underscore Cuba’s interest in trading molasses and sugar cane with American companies as an example of Castro’s ambivalence toward the Soviet sphere. Thus, the New Frontier lost an opportunity to outline a policy for Cuba to follow in exchange for U.S. trade.¹⁹²

At the first press conference following the Bay of Pigs, Kennedy used his opening statement to cut off all questions: “I do not think that any useful national purpose would be served by my going any further into the Cuban question this morning.” Nevertheless, Sander Vanocur of *NBC News* complained half-way through the press conference that “there’s been a clamming up of information from formerly reliable sources.” “One of the problems of a free society, a problem not met by a dictatorship, is this problem of information,” the President explained while assuring reporters that the White House planned to give background briefings. “There’s an old saying that victory has 100 fathers and defeat is an orphan,” Kennedy said. He was taking responsibility, but laying blame in the same statement. The White House chose not to use television to make specific claims and used the access strategy to resolve the political paternity for the Bay of Pigs.¹⁹³

In a subsequent press conferences, Kennedy emphasized that the U.S. did not plan to use Cuban exiles to attack Castro. Plausible deniability meant President Kennedy never mentioned planning for Operation Mongoose, but assured reporters that the Monroe Doctrine was still the principle philosophy shaping Cuba policy. In response to a question asking about plans to enforce the Monroe Doctrine, Kennedy did not answer the question. The lapdogs in the White

House press corps accepted the President's vague assurances regarding the plans to enforce U.S. hegemony without insisting upon details.¹⁹⁴

The press corps overlooked the flaws in Cuba policy. They never pressed the White House for details on the tractors-for-freedom proposal. Kennedy was asked to discuss the deal, but was never asked about the role of the White House in allowing negotiations to take place. He also chose not to condemn the negotiations with Castro. The President also benefited from the lack of aggressive questioning regarding General Taylor's final report on the Bay of Pigs.¹⁹⁵

The press asked Kennedy to comment after Luce published an expose on the Bay of Pigs, but he laughed it off. The President chose not to reveal that the White House had written a long critique and was sending Taylor to lobby Luce for better coverage. "I'll merely say that his is the most inaccurate of all the articles that have appeared on Cuba," Kennedy quipped. It was clear that the President did not want to talk about the Bay of Pigs on television, but the quick answer left the lapdogs howling with laughter.¹⁹⁶

In 1962, Kennedy used press conferences to applaud the Organization of American for expelling Cuba.¹⁹⁷ He portrayed it as a victory for stopping the spread of Communism in the hemisphere and disagreed with Rockefeller's charges that there had been a diplomatic failure in the New Frontier's Cuba policy.¹⁹⁸ Kennedy emphasized that the White House did not have any suggestions for positive actions to make Cuba less dependent on the Communist bloc.¹⁹⁹

The negotiations for the release of the Cuban Brigade were cited three times in the spring of 1962. Kennedy described the prisoners as a matter of "personal distress."²⁰⁰ Nonetheless, the U.S. Government was not involved in negotiations with Castro or helping to raise money.²⁰¹ The President gave a strong endorsement to his sister-in-law, Lee Radziwell's decision to donate to the ransom fund. "She is a good citizen and is free to make a judgment and anyone

who wishes to contribute is certainly free to do so," Kennedy said.²⁰² But reporters chose not to press Kennedy.

The first question regarding the Soviet arms build-up in Cuba came in August 1962 after Republican Senator Homer Capehart warned that the U.S. ought to invade as a preemptive measure. Kennedy acknowledged that Castro had received supplies from the Soviets, but emphasized that Khrushchev was only sending technicians. "We've no evidence of troops," he said. "I think in considering what action to take, we have to consider the totality of our obligations, and also the responsibility which we bear in so many parts of the world."²⁰³ Kennedy's response was not clear enough for Khrushchev to know what the U.S. planned to do. It arguably suggested that the White House felt checked by the Soviets in Berlin and was not prepared to act in Cuba to stop the Soviet advance into the Western Hemisphere.

The President devoted his opening statement of his September 13th press conference to the situation in Cuba. Kennedy said that the White House could not justify or be forced into taking military action against Castro. Soviet charges that Cuba was a matter of concern because of the election were dismissed. He promised to take action if Cuba became an offensive military base, but did not make it clear to Khrushchev that the U.S. would not tolerate any nuclear weapons in Cuba.²⁰⁴

The next time Kennedy held a press conference with the White House press corps was after the Cuban Missile Crisis on November 20th. Reporters wanted to know about the secret exchanges with Khrushchev, the non-invasion pledge, but Kennedy declined to comment and told them to re-read the White House statements. He assured reporters that although Castro refused to allow inspections the U.S. had the technology to inspect anyway.²⁰⁵

After a reporter criticized how information was handled during the crisis, Kennedy said, "I have no apologies for that." The President emphasized that revealing what the U.S. knew

would have invited disaster. “We attempted to have the government speak with one voice,” he said. Kennedy announced that the White House was now prepared to talk to the press about everything except for matters that involved intelligence. Obviously, the question of inspection was not open to reporters.²⁰⁶

Thirteen days before Christmas, at the President’s last press conference for 1962, the question of ‘Adlai’s Munich’ was raised by reporters. “I think this matter should be left for historians,” Kennedy said. Reporters wanted the White House to investigate the leak to find who had breached ExComm’s security, but the President demurred. The President refused to comment after reporters asked about Khrushchev’s announcement that the Soviet Union expected the U.S. to live up to the non-invasion pledge. In response to a question on the missiles in Cuba, Kennedy assured reporters that Khrushchev had removed all of the missiles and bombers from Cuba. He also applauded the efforts by private citizens to negotiate the release of the Cuban Brigade: “I’m very sympathetic to their efforts.”²⁰⁷ After the prisoners were released on Christmas Eve, Kennedy did not discuss the issue at a press conference.

The first press conference for 1963 raised questions about whether air cover was planned for the Bay of Pigs. Kennedy insisted U.S. air cover was not planned. It was the first time the President had chosen to talk about the details of the Bay of Pigs at a press conference. “As I’ve said from the beginning, the operation was a failure and the responsibility rests with the White House.” The Cuban Missile Crisis arguably made it politically possible for Kennedy to make the White House publicly responsible for the Bay of Pigs.²⁰⁸

The lingering question of the Soviet presence in Cuba and whether offensive weapons remained in Cuba continued to dog Kennedy, who complained to reporters on February 7th that they were not letting the story about missiles in Cuba go away. “I would think a good many Americans, after the last 3 weeks of headlines, have the impression that there are offensive

weapons in Cuba,” President Kennedy said. He warned that if reporters kept printing stories about missiles in Cuba the White House would put McNamara on television for a two hour program to debunk the rumors. If that happened the President planned to blame the press for forcing him to reveal information about U.S. intelligence gathering capabilities. The tactic left reporters with a choice between supporting the U.S. or the Soviet Union in the Cold War.²⁰⁹

President Kennedy considered calling the Washington press corps into the State Department for a closed door background press conference to review reconnaissance photographs that would prove missiles were no longer in Cuba. But the President decided television would be more effective to bring his message to the American people. The White House planned for a two hour presentation broadcast live during the afternoon that would bombard a mostly female audience with photographs of Cuba. Kennedy decided against making the presentation himself, but cast McNamara to narrate the official history of the New Frontier’s handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis. According to Sidey, the television broadcast helped make the issue “fade,” but there was still “some disbelief on Capital Hill.” After the broadcast, however, Kennedy was unable to prevent reports that Soviet troops were still in Cuba and surface to air missiles had prevented one spy plane from completing its mission.²¹⁰

The lesson for Kennedy in 1963 was not to use press conferences to define Cuba as an offensive military threat. Reporters stopped asking specific questions about whether missiles were in Cuba, but continued to ask whether the presence of Soviet troops were a threat. “I think we have made it clear that we will no permit Cuba to be an offensive military threat,” Kennedy told reporters on March 3rd. Nevertheless, at the same press conference after a reporter asked whether the U.S. had accurate information on the number of Soviet troops in Cuba, the President was not reassuring. “No, the answer to your question would really be no to

all of them,” Kennedy quipped. The unnerving response filled the room with dangerous laughter; the lapdogs thought the President was joking and seemed to eat out of his hand.²¹¹

For the remainder of 1963, President Kennedy used his press conferences to insist that the U.S. had no plans to resume friendly relations with the Cuba.²¹² By July 1963, the White House was frustrated by the situation in Cuba. “The fact of the matter is the Soviet troops are there,” Kennedy said. “I would hope that the situation some day will change.”²¹³

Nevertheless, the reporters did not question the President whether Cuba had become a hopeless situation on the New Frontier. By the fall the issue of Soviet troops in Cuba continued to follow Kennedy, but he refused to give estimates on how many had left: “No, I don’t think I can give a precise figure. All I can say is that the numbers have steadily reduced.”²¹⁴ The question of Soviet troops in Cuba promised to continue following the New Frontier into the election, but Kennedy died before having a chance to put the matter to rest.

Tactical Use of Speeches:

President Kennedy's references to Cuba in speeches reflect an information strategy that downplayed the issue of the Bay of Pigs and Tractors for Freedom in 1961. He referred to Cuba in only two speeches in 1961. The first time was in March 1961 when he emphasized that the U.S. government was a friend of the Cuban people and wanted them to be free: “progreso sí, tiranía no!”²¹⁵ In the second speech, Kennedy spoke before the American Society of Newspaper Editors after the Bay of Pigs and called for a fundamental reexamination of the role of the press. The President urged the press to consider the national interest and exercise restraint when reporting the news in order to win the Cold War. “I have emphasized before that this was a struggle of Cuban patriots against a Cuban dictator,” Kennedy said. Nevertheless, the President’s backgrounders and press statements made it clear that the U.S. was involved.

At the end of the speech, Kennedy reassured the press that the White House planned to “reorient our forces” to win the Cold War.²¹⁶

In 1962, Kennedy referred to Cuba in eleven speeches that included passing references at awards ceremonies and commencement addresses. At the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis, Kennedy used television to announce to the world that the U.S. planned to blockade Cuba to keep Khrushchev from placing missiles in the Western Hemisphere. He used television again on November 2nd to make a brief announcement that the crisis was over. Kennedy issued nine formal policy statements on Cuba that ranged from announcing a trade embargo to public diplomacy with Khrushchev during the Missile Crisis. The formal policy statements were opportunities to deliver a speech, but Kennedy opted for press releases.

Cuba was a regular theme mentioned in passing in Kennedy's 1963 stump speeches. He made it clear that the Communism had been dealt a series of setbacks by the New Frontier, but it still remained a global threat. He referred to Cuba in ten speeches and planned to mention Cuba in a speech at the Dallas Trade Mart on November 22nd. Television speeches were not the main focus of the effort to promote the New Frontier's handling of Cuba policy. One passing reference was made to Cuba in Kennedy's televised address to promote support for the Test Ban Treaty.

The Cuban Missile Crisis was a great triumph, but Kennedy chose not to mention the issue of on-site inspection and whether or not missiles or Soviet troops were still in Cuba. He realized from press conferences that both issues were not resolved, but pragmatically wanted to end the Cuban Missile Crisis without revealing U.S. intelligence capabilities. Nevertheless, Kennedy's sudden death came before there was time to assess whether tactics to downplay the unresolved questions in Cuba would have worked during the 1964 election.

Testing Ground for An Image:

At the time of Kennedy's death Castro was stronger than ever and Cuba remained a testing ground for the New Frontier's Cold War image. Unresolved questions for Kennedy's Cuba policy arguably would have followed the New Frontier into the 1964 election. His reliance upon instincts resulted in an information strategy for Cuba that sometimes worked, but frequently backfired. The heavy reliance upon access created news stories that Kennedy wanted as in the case of the Cuban Missile Crisis and the lack of news for Operation Mongoose. Nevertheless, the Bay of Pigs clearly showed that President Kennedy operated a step ahead of advisers and did not always consider the consequences or establish clear goals.

At press conferences, the lapdog instincts of the White House press corps benefited Kennedy. Initially, the President lied about U.S. involvement in the Bay of Pigs and then simply refused to answer difficult questions. Before the Cuban Missile Crisis, the President failed to issue strong enough warnings to Khrushchev that arguably would have made the Kremlin think twice. In the aftermath, Kennedy simply told reporters that he expected them to stop printing stories speculating about whether missiles were still in Cuba. Kennedy wanted to downplay the issue, but reporters reformulated the question in terms of Soviet troops. Whether Kennedy eventually would have been forced to reveal reconnaissance photos to reassure the public is unclear because of his sudden death.

Speeches were used to maintain plausible deniability for the Bay of Pigs and Operation Mongoose. Kennedy blamed the press in a major speech in the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs. Faced with rumors of missiles in Cuba, Kennedy elected not to give a major speech outlining the U.S. response toward nuclear weapons in Cuba. He used television to announce the

beginning and the end of the Missile Crisis, but failed to erase doubts about whether missiles were still in Cuba.

President Kennedy's information strategy for Cuba was driven by a Cold War crisis manager's philosophy that worried about the image of the New Frontier in domestic and international politics. The strategy created short term results that the New Frontier wanted for Cuba policy, but Kennedy failed to consider the long-term consequences. The information strategy for Cuba asserted the government's right to manage, even censor, the news in the Cold War. The press supported the goals of the Cold War, but lying about the Bay of Pigs and playing favorites with reporters eventually created cynicism in the long term.

President Kennedy chose not to tell the press all of the details of Cuba policy to enhance a strong profile as a Cold Warrior. The release of classified documents detailing Operation Mongoose and White House involvement in secret deals during the Cuban Missile Crisis and the release of the Cuban Brigade eventually added more tarnish to Camelot's legacy of distrust.

Notes

¹Robert H. Ferrell, The Eisenhower Diaries, (New York, 1981), p. 390.

²Ibid., p. 390.

³Ibid., p. 390.

⁴Ibid., p. 389.

⁵Ibid., p. 390.

⁶ Trumbull Higgins, The Perfect Failure: Kennedy, Eisenhower, and the CIA at the Bay of Pigs, (New York, 1987), p.66. Nixon would dispute whether or not this was Kennedy's first knowledge of the invasion plans for Cuba.

⁷Theodore Sorensen, Kennedy, (New York, 1966), p. 295.

⁸Peter Grose, Gentleman Spy: The Life of Allen Dulles, (New York, 1994), p. 523.

⁹ Higgins, Perfect Failure, pp. 90-93.

¹⁰Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Eighty Seventh Congress First Session 1961 Part I. (Washington D.C., 1986), pp. 472-473.; Kenneth O'Donnell, David F. Powers, and Joe McCarthy, "Johnny, We Hardly Knew Ye." Memories of John F. Kennedy, (Boston, 1970), p.271; and Arthur Schlesinger, A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House, (Boston, 1965), pp.239-240.

¹¹ Higgins, Perfect Failure, p. 93.

¹² Lucien Vandebroucke, "Confessions of Allen Dulles," *Diplomatic History* (Winter 1984), pp.365-376. Dulles noted that Kennedy's reluctance to move forward shaped the Cuban invasion: "(He) proceeded uncertainly toward defeat - unable to turn back - only half sold on the vital necessity of what he was doing, surrounded by doubting Thomases among his best friends.....there were enough doubting Thomases to dull the attack, but not enough to bring about its cancellation."

¹³ Richard Bissell, "Response to Lucien Vandebroucke, "The 'Confessions' of Allen Dulles" New Evidence on the Bay of Pigs," *Diplomatic History* (Winter 1984) pp. 377-380.

¹⁴ Vandebroucke, "Confessions of Allen Dulles," pp. 365-376.

¹⁵ Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant (Schlesinger) to the President, April 5, 1961, U.S. Department of State, Freedom of Information Reading Room (hereafter cited as FOIRR). Schlesinger underscored the warning regarding the U.S. role.

¹⁶ Vandebroucke, "Confessions of Allen Dulles," pp.365-376.

¹⁷General Anatoli I. Gribkov, General William Y. Smith, Alfred Friendly editor, Michael R. Beschloss foreword, Operation ANADYR: U.S. and Soviet General Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis, (Chicago, 1994), pp. 89-90.

¹⁸ Telegram from Khrushchev to President Kennedy April 18, 1961, FOIRR.

¹⁹ Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev, (Boston, 1996), p. 242.

²⁰ Telegram 12367 & 12444 from Freeman in Bogota to Rusk, August 17, 1961, National Security File Cuba, John F. Kennedy Library declassified October 18, 1996.

²¹ Memorandum from the President's Deputy Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Rostow) to President Kennedy, April 21, 1961, FOIRR.

²²Gribkov, Operation ANADYR, pp. 89-90.

²³ Thomas G. Smith, "Negotiating with Fidel Castro: The Bay of Pigs Prisoners and a Lost Opportunity," *Diplomatic History*, Winter 1995, pp. 59-86.

²⁴ Richard M. Bissell, Jr. with Jonathan E. Lewis and Frances T. Pudlo, Reflections of a Cold Warrior: From Yalta to the Bay of Pigs, (New Haven, 1996), p. 201.

²⁵Smith, "Negotiating with Fidel Castro," pp. 59-86.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 59-86.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 59-86.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 59-86.

²⁹Luis Aguilar, Operation Zapata: The Ultrasensitive Report and Testimony of the Board of Inquiry on the Bay of Pigs, (Fredrick, MD, 1981), pp. 44-53.

³⁰Bissell, Reflections of a Cold Warrior, pp. 202-203. "The pressure from Bobby Kennedy was daily," Richard Helms, a deputy to Bissell, recalled.

³¹ Thomas G. Paterson, et al., Kennedy's Quest for Victory: American Foreign Policy, 1961-1963, (New York, 1989) p. 138.

³² Bissell, Reflections of a Cold Warrior, pp. 202-203.

³³Paterson, Kennedy's Quest, p. 138.

³⁴Gribkov, Operation ANADYR, p. 84.

³⁵Ibid., p. 84.

³⁶ Memorandum of Admiral Burke's conversation with President Kennedy July 26, 1961, FOIRR.

³⁷ Gribkov, Operation ANADYR, p. 93.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 95.

³⁹ Ibid., p.122; Laurence Chang and Peter Kornbluh, The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962: A National Security Documents Reader, (New York, 1992), pp. 4-5;.

⁴⁰ Gribkov, Operation ANADYR, p. 95; Theodore Sorensen, Kennedy, (New York, 1966), p. 630.

⁴¹ Michael R. Beschloss, The Crisis Years: Kennedy and Khrushchev 1960-1963, (New York, 1991), Summary based upon chapters 16-18.

⁴² Peter Kornbluh interview at National Security Archives, George Washington University, May 17, 1996.

⁴³ Peter Kornbluh, May 17, 1996; Memorandum for the Honorable Attorney General from John McCone, August 21, 1962, FOIRR. Donovan realized that if the U.S. agreed to pay-off Castro in food it would require an armada of thirty to forty ships which was out of the question because the White House wanted to downplay involvement.

⁴⁴ John McCone Discussion with Attorney General Robert Kennedy on Monday, 24 September, Subject "Donovan Negotiations;" John McCone Memorandum of Conversation with General Eisenhower, on Wednesday, September 26, 1962; Memorandum for the Record by the President's Deputy Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kaysen), September 27, 1962, FOIRR.

⁴⁵ Peter Kornbluh, May 17, 1996.

⁴⁶ President's Office Files, Presidential Recordings Tape 31.2, October 19, 1962 (hereafter cited as Missile Tape # date), John F. Kennedy Library (hereafter cited as JFKL) ;Peter Howe, "JFK Tapes Show Criticism for Refusal to Invade Cuba," *Boston Globe* October 25, 1996; *ABC Nightline* Transcript from October 24, 1996.

⁴⁷ Missile Tape 31.2, October 19, 1962; *Boston Globe* October 25, 1996; Ibid.

⁴⁸ Beschloss, The Crisis Years, summary based upon chapters 16-18.

⁴⁹ Missile Tape 34.1 October 23, 1962.

⁵⁰ Missile Tape 36.1 October 24, 1962; *Boston Globe* October 25, 1996; Michael Ellis, "Cuba Missile Crisis Tapes Reveal a Cautious Kennedy," *Reuters North American Wire* October 25, 1996.

⁵¹ Beschloss, The Crisis Years, summary based upon chapters 16-18.

⁵² Missile Tape 40 October 26, 1962.

⁵³ POF, Missile Tape 40.2 October 26, 1962, JFKL.

⁵⁴ Bruce J. Allyn, James G. Blight and David Welch, "Essence of Revision: Moscow, Havana, and the Cuban Missile Crisis," *International Security*, Winter 1989/90 (Vol. 14, No. 3), p.158.

⁵⁵ Beschloss, The Crisis Years, Summary based upon chapters 16-18; Allyn, "Essence of Revision," pp. 158-159.

⁵⁶ Cuban Missile Crisis Meetings October 27, 1962, Presidential Recordings Transcript JFKL, pp. 1-13.

⁵⁷ Missile Tape 41 October 27, 1962.

⁵⁸ ABC Nightline October 24, 1996.

⁵⁹ Cuban Missile Crisis Meetings October 27, 1962, Presidential Recordings Transcript JFKL, pp. 15-16; Allyn, "Essence of Revision," pp. 158-159.

⁶⁰ Beschloss, The Crisis Years, chapters 16-18.

⁶¹ Zubok, Inside the Kremlin's Cold War, p. 266; Roger Hilsman, The Cuban Missile Crisis: The Struggle Over Policy, (Westport, 1996), p. 129. Khrushchev later wrote, "We knew perfectly well that this pledge was of symbolic nature: the American rockets in Turkey and Italy were already obsolete, and the Americans would promptly replace them with more modern ones. Besides, the US was already equipping its navy with Polaris missiles. Nevertheless, by agreeing even to symbolic measures, Kennedy was creating the impression of mutual concessions."

⁶² Hilsman, Cuban Missile Crisis, pp. 116-118, p. 140. The Soviets later claimed that they had 42,000 troops in Cuba, while U.S. intelligence had estimated 20,000. Hilsman argued that the Soviet claim was persuasive because American intelligence learned in 1979 that 2,600 Soviet troops stayed in Cuba after the crisis. In 1962, the U.S. estimated that the Soviets had fourteen launchers for battlefield nuclear weapons. The U.S. felt confident that the Soviets did not have nuclear warheads for the missiles, but learned in October 1992 that the warheads were deployed in Cuba.

⁶³ Beschloss, Crisis Years, pp. 639-640.

⁶⁴ Former Assistant Attorney General John Douglas speaking at The Remembering Robert F. Kennedy Conference, April 12, 1996 at Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, C-Span Videotranscript.

⁶⁵ Richard Reeves, President Kennedy: Profile of Power, (New York, 1993), p. 445.

⁶⁶ Douglas speaking at The Remembering Robert F. Kennedy Conference.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Peter Kornbluh, May 17, 1996; The Archbishop also had strong ties to Joseph Kennedy because of his willingness to funnel tax-deductible contributions through the Church toward his son's Senate campaign expenses. Ronald Kessler, Sins of the Father: Joseph P. Kennedy and the Dynasty He Founded, (New York, 1996), pp. 379-381.

⁶⁹Smith, "Negotiating with Castro," p. 86; Reeves, Profile of Power, p.445; *Time* December 28, 1962; Beschloss, Crisis Years, p.574; Peter Kornbluh interview May 17, 1996.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 574.

⁷¹ Reeves, Profile of Power, p. 445.

⁷² Public Papers of the President of the United States: John F. Kennedy 1962, Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, (hereafter cited as JFKPP62), pp. 911-913.

⁷³ Paterson, Kennedy's Quest, pp. 152-155; Charles Porter interview with Fidel Castro, *Northwest Review*, Fall 1963, pp. 73-110; Box 27, Herbert Matthews Papers, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York City, N.Y.

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp.152-155.

⁷⁵ Roger Hilsman Oral History, (hereafter cited as OH), 1981, Columbia University. Hilsman noted that Kennedy made "inconsistent decisions on the Bay of Pigs and Vietnam. "So there were lots of times that he did things because the political situation permitted nothing but a unhappy compromise," Hilsman said.

⁷⁶Chester Bowles, Promises to Keep: My Years in Public Life 1941-1969, (New York, 1971), pp. 449-451.

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 449-451.

⁷⁸Dean Rusk OH JFKL, declassified 7/11/95, pp. 92-93.

⁷⁹Sorensen, Kennedy, p. 295.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 297.

⁸¹ Edwin O. Guthman, and Jeffrey Shulman, Robert Kennedy In His Own Words, (New York, 1988), p. 247.

⁸² Gerald and Deborah Strober, "Let Us Begin Anew" An Oral History of the Kennedy Presidency, (New York, 1993), p. 334.

⁸³ Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, p.287; The effort to contain the political fallout after the Bay of Pigs may have influenced Kennedy's decision to challenge the Soviet Union to a rocket race with the moon as the finish line. See John M. Logsdon, The Decision to Go to the Moon: Project Apollo and the National Interest, (Cambridge, MA: 1970), pp.111-112. Logsdon wrote, "How much of Kennedy's state of mind resulting from the Cuban fiasco influenced or

reinforced his resolve to proceed rapidly in space is not clear. The Bay of Pigs was never explicitly linked to the acceleration of the space program in any meetings on space held at this time; Edward Welsh maintains that the invasion was in his judgment "not a factor at all." But Wiesner says of the Bay of Pigs, "I don't think anyone can measure it, but I'm sure it had an impact. I think the President felt some pressure to get something else in the foreground." Sorensen explained the decision to go the moon in terms of the success of the Gagarin flight and the Bay of Pigs which meant that the U.S. "suffered a loss of prestige." Bundy told Logdson that "if the Bay of Pigs had been a resounding success, the President might have dawdled a little longer on the space decision." See also Walter McDougall, The Heavens and the Earth: A Political History of the Space Age, (New York, 1986), p.318, p.508. McDougall noted that Kennedy was not an enthusiastic supporter of the moon mission before the Bay of Pigs and the documentary record does not explain his transformation after the mission failed. See also Hugh Sidey, "Why We Went to the Moon," *Time*, July 25, 1994. On April 14th, two days after Gagarin's flight, Kennedy invited Sidey to the White House to watch him in action while he decided the future of the space program. "The timing and rationale of the decision are disputed by historians and other experts," Sidey later wrote. "Many feel Kennedy's commitment was a desperate political maneuver to lift himself out of the calamity of the Bay of Pigs and rally a nation nervous from escalating tension with the Soviet Union in Berlin. But I saw something more that night, when Kennedy's novice government still thought it would win at the Bay of Pigs, still had not encountered Nikita Khrushchev's table pounding at the Vienna summit in June. I saw a very young American awed by the romance of the high frontier."

⁸⁴O'Donnell, "Johnny, We Hardly Knew Ye." p. 307.

⁸⁵ Missile Tape 36.2 October 24, 1962.

⁸⁶ Missile Tape 36.2 October 24, 1962.

⁸⁷ Sorensen, Kennedy, p. 320; Robert Manning, The Swamp Root Chronicle: Adventures in the Word Trade, (New York, 1992), p. 251; Pierre Salinger, With Kennedy, (New York, 1966), p.286.

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 289-293.

October 24, 1962

Memorandum to Editors and Radio and Television News Directors:

The following information is considered vital to our national security and therefore will not be released by the Department of Defense. Despite this fact, it is possible that such information may come into the possession of news media. During the current tense international situation, the White House feels that the publication of such information is contrary to the public interest. We ask public information media of all types to exercise caution and discretion in the publication of such information.

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- (1) Any discussion of plans for employment of strategic or tactical forces of the United States including types of equipment and new or planned location of command or control centers or detection systems.
 - (2) Estimates of United States capability of destroying targets, including numbers of weapons required, size and character of forces required, ability of these forces to penetrate defenses, and accuracy or reliability of our forces or weapons systems.
 - (3) Intelligence estimates concerning targets or target systems, such as numbers, types and locations of aiming points in the target system, enemy missile and bomber forces, etc.
 - (4) Intelligence estimates of enemy plans or capabilities, or information which would reveal the level of success of United States intelligence efforts or operation with respect to Cuba or the Communist bloc.
 - (5) Details as to numbers or movements of United States forces, including naval units and vessels, aircraft, missile forces or ground forces, ammunition, equipment, etc. Announcement may be made of such unit movements after the movement has been completed.
 - (6) Degree of alert of military forces.
 - (7) Location of aircraft or supporting equipment. Presence of aircraft observable in the public domain may be confirmed.
 - (8) Emergency dispersal plans of aircraft units including dispersal capabilities of missile forces.
 - (9) Official estimates of vulnerability to various forms of enemy action, including sabotage, of United States Armed Forces, and installations.
 - (10) New data concerning operational missiles distribution, numbers, operational readiness. Estimates of effectiveness of strike capability of missile forces.
 - (11) Details of command and control systems, including new or planned posts and facilities, estimates of ability to survive enemy attacks, security measures, etc., including sea or airborne command posts.
 - (12) Details of airlift or sealift capabilities, including size and nature of forces to be lifted, time limits for such lifts, and supply capabilities, with respect to possible specific areas of operation.

Editors having doubts about information and wanting to establish whether or not it is within the purview of this memorandum should contact the News Desk, Department of Defense, at Oxford 5-3201, Washington, D.C. Such advice will be on an advisory basis and not considered finally binding on the editor(s).

⁸⁹ McGeorge Bundy, Memorandum for the Record, November 12, 1963, National Security Files, JFKL, declassified for author May 7, 1996.

⁹⁰ Strober, "Let Us Begin Anew." pp. 334-335.

⁹¹ Cuba File, Box 27, Herbert Matthews Papers; Kennedy also spoke with Laura Berquist Knebel after she had interviewed Fidel Castro for *Look* magazine. "Why does he make long speeches?" he asked. "Who does he sleep with? I hear he doesn't even take his boots off." "I haven't a clue," Knebel replied. The President remained "baffled" about Castro's appeal in Cuba, but only wanted to know about his love life. "Something gives me the feeling you've the hots for the Che," Kennedy exclaimed. The experience made Knebel bitter. She thought that the New Frontier gave her a "certain stake" in the White House because Kennedy had an open mind about Latin America. The President was not interested in Knebel's advice and never made her a "chosen Kennedy." Laura Knebel OH, JFKL.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Kessler, Sins of the Father, p.367.

⁹⁷ Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, p. 261.

⁹⁸ Harrison E. Salisbury, Without Fear or Favor: The New York Times and Its Times, (New York, 1980), pp. 151-156.

⁹⁹ James Aronson, The Press and the Cold War, (New York, 1970), p. 167.

¹⁰⁰ Chalmers Roberts, First Rough Draft: A Journalist's Journal of Our Times, (New York, 1973), p. 189; James Reston, Deadline: A Memoir, (New York, 1991), p. 326; Salisbury, Without Fear or Favor, pp. 151-156.

¹⁰¹ Roberts, First Rough Draft, p. 191.

¹⁰² Howard Bray, The Pillars of the Post: The Making of a News Empire in Washington, (New York, 1980), p. 34.

¹⁰³ Roberts, First Rough Draft, p. 191.

¹⁰⁴ Arthur Schlesinger Memorandum to President Kennedy, "Protection of the President," April 10, 1961, Box 62, President's Office Files, (hereafter cited as POF), JFKL.

¹⁰⁵ Roberts, First Rough Draft, p. 191.

¹⁰⁶ Reston, Deadline, p. 326; Salisbury, Without Fear or Favor, p. 158.

¹⁰⁷ Bray, Pillars of the Post, p. 32.

- ¹⁰⁸ Benjamin Bradlee, A Good Life: Newspapering and Other Adventures, (New York, 1995), p.219.
- ¹⁰⁹ Strober, "Let Us Begin Anew," pp. 334-335.
- ¹¹⁰ Benjamin Bradlee, Conversations With Kennedy, (New York, 1975), p. 10.
- ¹¹¹ Bradlee, A Good Life, pp. 219-221.
- ¹¹² David Lawrence, Six Presidents, Too Many Wars, (New York, 1972), p. 261.
- ¹¹³ John Luskin, Lippmann, Liberty, and the Press, (Alabama, 1972), p. 209.
- ¹¹⁴ Lucien Vandenbrouke Perilous Options: Special Operations As An Instrument of U.S. Foreign Policy, University of Connecticut, Doctoral Dissertation, 1991, p. 171.
- ¹¹⁵ Arthur Schlesinger Lunch Notes June 30, 1961 Herbert Matthews Papers, Box 27; Background Dinner with Arthur Schlesinger, May 10, 1961, Box 1, Robert Estabrook Papers, JFKL.
- ¹¹⁶ Hugh Sidey, John F. Kennedy, President, (New York, 1964), p. 127.
- ¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 135.
- ¹¹⁸ Arthur Krock, Memoirs: Sixty Years on the Firing Line, (New York, 1968), p.371; see also Krock Notes On Conversation with Kennedy May 5, 1961, Box 31 Krock Papers, Princeton University Library.
- ¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 377.
- ¹²⁰ Joseph Alsop with Adam Platt, "I've Seen the Best of It," Memoirs, (New York, 1992), pp. 443-444.
- ¹²¹ Bray, Pillars of the Post, p. 33. Bray noted that Stewart Alsop later wrote, "It's garbage to think he knew about the Castro assassination plot. No one wanted to know about dirty, tricks, and if you did you kept your mouth shut about them."
- ¹²² Joseph Alsop OH, JFKL, pp. 32-36.
- ¹²³ Salisbury, Without Fear or Favor, pp. 159-160.
- ¹²⁴ Salinger, With Kennedy, pp. 148-151.
- ¹²⁵ Ted G. Carpenter, The Captive Press: Foreign Policy Crises and the First Amendment, Washington, D.C.: The Cato Institute, 1995, p. 61.
- ¹²⁶ Salinger, With Kennedy, pp. 148-151.

¹²⁷ Henry Luce OH, Henry Luce Estate Papers, (hereafter cited as HLEP), Time Life Archive, (hereafter cited as TLA), pp. 28-29.

¹²⁸ Robert McNamara memorandum to President John F. Kennedy, August 30, 1961 Box 65, POF, JFKL.

¹²⁹ Letter from President John F. Kennedy to Henry Luce September 12, 1961, Box 31, POF, JFKL.

¹³⁰ Henry Luce OH, TLA, pp. 24-25. "I said when we broke up the meeting here and went upstairs for lunch there absolutely was not question of our having to make any corrections because, what the hell, corrections couldn't be made when the article was correct. And, in general, the attitude was all right, the incident is closed; the less said the better about it."

¹³¹ Letter from Henry Luce to John F. Kennedy September 14, 1961, 1961-1963 Folder, HLEP, TLA.

¹³² Henry Luce OH, HLEP, TLA, pp. 24-25. "And, in general, the attitude was all right, the incident is closed; the less said the better about it."

¹³³ Memorandum to the President, August 3, 1961, HLEP, TLA.

¹³⁴ Herbert L. Matthews, Revolution in Cuba: An Essay in Understanding, (New York, 1975), p.195.

¹³⁵ Salisbury, Without Fear or Favor, pp. 160-161.

¹³⁶ Bradlee, A Good Life, pp. 244-245; In September 1962, as the Cuban Missile Crisis and the 1962 election loomed on the horizon, Kennedy discussed with the publisher a content analysis Sorensen asked his sister to organize. The President was busy ordering increased U-2 surveillance of Cuba and dealing with other issue, but apparently decided the moment was right to prod Luce for better coverage in future issues of *Time*. Luce considered the White House criticism to be unfounded because *Time* had printed, "hopeful and admiring" stories about Kennedy. Luce made Kennedy the 'Man of the Year' for 1962, but the White House was still not satisfied with the publisher's coverage of the New Frontier. Henry Luce OH HLEP, TLA, pp. 31-32. Brian Lamb C-Span Booknotes interview with Theodore Sorensen, June 5, 1996; Sorensen revealed that he had actually asked his sister to conduct the content analysis, but told Luce that it was a student's submission.

¹³⁷ Missile Tape #34, October 23, 1962.

¹³⁸ Arthur Krock, "The Preparations Were Anything But Secret," *New York Times* October 23, 1962.

¹³⁹ Missile Tape #34.

¹⁴⁰ Arthur Krock, "Issue's Death Does Not Preclude An Autopsy," *New York Times*, October 25, 1962.

¹⁴¹ Arthur Krock, "Truce with the Bear in Cuba," *New York Times*, October 30, 1962.

¹⁴² James Reston, *New York Times*, October 28, 1962.

¹⁴³ Hugh Sidey OH, JFKL, pp. 30-38.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 30-38.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

¹⁴⁶ Hugh Sidey's *John F. Kennedy, President* contains accounts of the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis from the perspective of Kennedy's access strategy. Sidey used the notes from his interviews with Kennedy and his aides to compile an official history for Kennedy to point to during the 1964 election. The original book was re-edited after Kennedy's death. Henry Luce kept an August 1963 *Herald Tribune* review of Sidey's original biography that described the work as "hero worship." "A President notably sensitive to what is written about his official performance has nothing to complain about in, at least, this instance," John K. Hutchens wrote. Hugh Sidey Miscellaneous File 1961-1963, HLEP, TLA. By August 1961, Kennedy was so frustrated by Luce's coverage of the New Frontier that he had Sorensen conduct a content analysis of *Time* that compared his coverage to Eisenhower's coverage. Luce was given a copy of the study and the August 3, 1961 memorandum from Sorensen to Kennedy. Theodore Sorensen memorandum to the President, August 3, 1961, John F. Kennedy Miscellaneous File, HLEP, TLA.

¹⁴⁷ Hugh Sidey OH, JFKL, pp. 37-38.

¹⁴⁸ Also, "I've Seen the Best of It," pp. 448-449.

¹⁴⁹ Salinger, *With Kennedy*, pp. 252-253.

¹⁵⁰ O'Donnell, "Johnny, We Hardly Knew Ye," p. 326.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 326.

¹⁵² Clifton Daniel, "National Security and the Bay of Pigs Invasion," in Tom Goldstein, ed., *Killing the Messenger: 100 Years of Media Criticism*, (New York, 1989), p. 117. Dryfoos died months after the Missile Crisis. Kennedy wrote a letter to Marian Dryfoos on May 28, 1963 to express condolences. The letter is important for establishing that Dryfoos also agreed to hold back information on October 21st. "Dear Marian: I want you to know how sorry I was to hear the sad news of Orvil's untimely death. I had known him for a number of years and two experiences I had with him in the last two years gave me clear insight into his unusual qualities of mind and heart. One involved national security -the other his decision to refrain from printing on October 21st the news, which only the man from the Times possessed, on the presence of Russian missiles in Cuba, upon my informing him that we needed twenty-four hours more to

complete our preparations. This decision of his made far more effective our later actions and thereby contributed greatly to our national safety.....Sincerely, John F. Kennedy.”

¹⁵³ O'Donnell, “Johnny, We hardly Knew Ye.” p.326.

¹⁵⁴Chalmers M. Roberts, The Washington Post: The First 100 Years, (Boston, 1977), pp. 351-352.

¹⁵⁵Roberts, The Washington Post, pp. 351-352.

¹⁵⁶ Salinger, With Kennedy, pp.260-261.

¹⁵⁷ Reston, Deadline, p.294.

¹⁵⁸Salisbury, Without Fear or Favor, p.161 Salisbury cited a letter from Kennedy to Dryfoos on October 25, 1962. “I wish to express my appreciation to you and The New York Times for your cooperation last weekend. Events since then have reinforced my view that an important service to the national interest was performed by your agreement to withhold information that was available to you on Sunday afternoon.”

¹⁵⁹ Reston, Deadline, p.294.

¹⁶⁰ Pierre Salinger and Philippe Labro, Je Suis un American: Conversaciones avec Philippe Labro, (Paris, France, 1975), p.221.

¹⁶¹Bray, Pillars of the Post, pp. 31-35.

¹⁶² Salinger, Je Suis un American, p.221.

¹⁶³Roberts, The Washington Post, p. 352.

¹⁶⁴ Luskin, Lippmann, Liberty, and the Press, pp. 211-212.

¹⁶⁵Salinger, With Kennedy, pp.271-279.

¹⁶⁶ Frank A. Sieverts, Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs, “The Cuban Crisis, 1962,” U.S. Department of State, National Security File Cuba, Box 49, JFKL, pp.173-174.

¹⁶⁷ Charles Bartlett OH JFKL, pp. 123-137.

¹⁶⁸ Charles Bartlett OH, JFKL, pp. 141-142; Missile Tape 36.2.

¹⁶⁹ Reeves, Profile of Power, 1993, p. 425.

¹⁷⁰ Robert W. Merry, Taking On the World: Joseph and Stewart Alsop -Guardians of the American Century, (New York, 1996), pp. 387-395; Joseph Alsop was in France during the

Cuban Missile crisis and not available to write a story for Kennedy. Interview with Joseph Alsop, Kern and Levering Papers, Box 1, JFKL, p. 7.

¹⁷¹ Charles Bartlett letter to President Kennedy October 29, 1962, POF, Box 28, JFKL; "This wouldn't be a bad article," Bartlett told Ralph Dungan, "it would be a good magazine article because the President certainly looks good from everything I know." Charles Bartlett OH, JFKL, pp. 128.-129.

¹⁷² Merry, Taking On the World, pp. 387-395.

¹⁷³ Ibid., pp. 387-395; Charles Bartlett OH, JFKL, pp. 130-131; On October 26th Kennedy invited Stevenson to ExComm to discuss U Thant's proposal for the U.S. and U.S.S.R. to negotiate at the UN. Stevenson reported that U Thant wanted to begin negotiations with a 2-3 day standstill that would include suspending the quarantine, no ships moving toward Cuba, no further construction of the missile sites, and keeping the missiles inoperable. Stevenson reported that the long goal would include withdrawing the missiles from the hemisphere, a no invasion pledge, and exploring the possibility of making the Western Hemisphere a nuclear free zone. He noted that the U.S. might have to trade missiles in Turkey and Italy in exchange for the Soviets withdrawing missiles from Cuba. Stevenson was careful to say that missile swaps should not be included in initial negotiations and Italy and Turkey needed to be consulted in advance. John McCone, the director of the CIA, adamantly disagreed with the Ambassador arguing that the quarantine should not be lifted while the missiles are "pointed at our hearts." Other advisers were concerned about how to enforce the standstill and have guarantees that the missiles in Cuba would remain inoperable during negotiations. The President said, "The quarantine itself won't remove the weapons. So you only get two ways of removing the weapons: one is to negotiate them out, in other words trade them out, and the other is to go in and take them out. I don't see any other way you're going to get the weapons out." After advisers expressed more concerns about monitoring whether the weapons were operable or inoperable, Kennedy added, "I'm not saying we should lift the quarantine or what we should do about the quarantine, but we all have to now realize that we are going to have to trade them out or go in and get them out." POF, Missile Tape 39.1 October 26, 1962, JFKL. On December 2nd 1962, Schlesinger sent Kennedy a memo questioning the accuracy of the Alsop-Bartlett story. "The story states "only Adlai Stevenson...dissented from the Executive Committee consensus." This is false," Schlesinger wrote. "The following statement: "Adlai wanted a Munich. He wanted to trade the Turkish, Italian and British missile bases for the Cuban bases." This statement is wholly wrong," he noted. Schlesinger reminded Kennedy that Stevenson never mentioned British bases and did not want Italy and Turkey included in any initial offer because they needed to be consulted in advance. He also reminded Kennedy that Stevenson wanted the political route explored within the context of "vigorous U.S. military action to defend our security." Schlesinger also noted that Stevenson's position paper called for an Austrian style neutralization of Cuba. "Such neutralization and demilitarization would immediately and drastically reduce the troublemaking capability of the Cuban regime, and would probably result in its early overthrow," Stevenson wrote. Neutralization meant "a trade of Guantanamo for the Soviet bases," Schlesinger noted. "Stevenson also favored making this proposal in the initial presentation before the security Council rather than at a later stage in the discussions. Both the proposal and the timing were rejected — and rightly so. But the suggestion in the Alsop-Bartlett story that Stevenson favored a Caribbean Munich is grossly

unfair — and shows the number of people who still have their knives out for him.” Schlesinger Memorandum to President Kennedy December 12, 1962, NSF Cuba, Box 57, JFKL.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 387-395; Stewart Alsop, The Center: The People and Power in Political Washington, (New York, 1968), p. 191.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

¹⁷⁶ Merry, Taking On the World, pp. 387-395

¹⁷⁷ Bradlee, Conversations With Kennedy, pp. 119-120.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 131-132.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.145.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.145.

¹⁸¹ Luskin, Lippmann, Liberty, and the Press, p.213.

¹⁸² John F. Kennedy Public Papers of the President of the United States 1961, (Washington, D.C.: 1962), (hereafter cited as JFKPP61), pp. 304-306; Pierre Salinger, With Kennedy, pp.155-160; Sorensen, Kennedy, pp.310-326.

¹⁸³ Luskin, Lippmann, Liberty, and the Press, p.213.

¹⁸⁴ Bradlee, Conversations With Kennedy, pp. 163-164.

¹⁸⁵ Hugh Sidey OH, JFKL Library, p. 40.

¹⁸⁶ Sidey, John F. Kennedy, President, p.321.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, Chapters 9 and 25.

¹⁸⁸ JFKPP61, pp. 10-15.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 34-38.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.91-99.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 258-265.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 258-265.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 307-315.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 354-362.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 477-484.

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- ¹⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 580-581.
- ¹⁹⁷ John F. Kennedy, Public Papers of the President of the United States, 1962, (Washington, D.C.: 1963), pp. 90-98.
- ¹⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 134-141.
- ¹⁹⁹ Ibid., pp.225-232.
- ²⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 254-261.
- ²⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 315-322.
- ²⁰² Ibid., pp. 509-517.
- ²⁰³ Ibid., pp. 631-639.
- ²⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 674-681.
- ²⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 830-838.
- ²⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 830-838.
- ²⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 866-874.
- ²⁰⁸ President's News Conference Remarks, January 24, 1963, John F. Kennedy, Public Papers of the President of the United States, 1963, (hereafter cited as PPJFK63), (Washington, D.C.: 1964), pp. 92-100.
- ²⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 148-154.
- ²¹⁰ Sidey, John F. Kennedy, pp.315-316.
- ²¹¹ PPJFK63, pp. 236-244.
- ²¹² Ibid., pp. 236-244.
- ²¹³ Ibid., pp. 566-574.
- ²¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 826-834.
- ²¹⁵ PPJFK1961, p.174.
- ²¹⁶ Ibid. pp.304-306.

Chapter Four

Naive Pragmatism:

Laos, Vietnam and Kennedy's Information Tactics

On September 2, 1963, Walter Cronkite interviewed President Kennedy for *The CBS Evening News*. In response to a question about Vietnam, Kennedy said, "In the final analysis, it is their war...All we can do is help." But he left room for future escalation: "We also have to participate — we may not like it."¹ One week later, *NBC's* Chet Huntley and David Brinkley interviewed Kennedy and asked about Vietnam. "I think we should stay," he said.²

There were contradictions in Kennedy's comments because his policy was guided by ambivalence and naive pragmatism that sought to finesse the question of escalation. Unsure whether to treat Vietnam as a purely military or a political problem, his political instincts sought a middle ground to protect his image and hedge his bets for the 1964 election. This led to a Janus-like approach to Vietnam in which escalation and withdrawal were concurrently considered.

During his first week in office, advisers brought Vietnam to Kennedy's attention. "This is the worst one we've got, isn't it?" he said. "You know, Eisenhower never mentioned it."³ Ike had warned that unilateral intervention in Laos might be necessary: "It was the cork in the bottle."⁴ The Joint Chiefs of Staff objected to American involvement and told Kennedy the

French had failed with an army of nearly half a million and, when pressed, insisted upon an open-ended "all or nothing" commitment that included nuclear weapons.⁵

The President quickly concluded that escalation was impossible and wrote Khrushchev to propose a neutral Laos.⁶ In March 1961, he instructed Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson to talk with Khrushchev about the proposal.⁷ Kennedy pushed a neutral Laos at the Geneva Conference in May 1961, and protracted negotiations continued until May 1962.⁸ To demonstrate American preparedness to use both the carrot and the stick, he maneuvered American forces into positions around Laos.⁹ But Kennedy could not afford to bluff.¹⁰ Hawkish advisers urged stationing an allied force into the Mekong Valley.¹¹

Any momentum building to commit combat troops into Laos died, however, after the failure at the Bay of Pigs in April 1961. "Thank God, the Bay of Pigs happened when it did," Kennedy later remarked.¹² "I don't see how we can make any move in Laos, which is 5,000 miles away, if we don't make a move in Cuba, which is only 90 miles away," Kennedy said when he rejected Richard Nixon's advice to escalate in Cuba and Laos.¹³ "I don't think there is any question that if it hadn't been for Cuba, we would have sent troops into Laos," he told his brother Robert.¹⁴

His reluctance to fight Communism in Laos and at the Bay of Pigs drew strong criticism from the press and damaged his image as a Cold Warrior. Determined to demonstrate firmness, Kennedy asked, "Where would be the best place to stand and fight in Southeast Asia?"¹⁵ The eventual answer became Vietnam.

In the spring of 1961, the military viewed Vietnam as a policy area overseen by the State Department. Agencies operated in Vietnam, however, in an ad hoc approach with independent projects and points of view being pursued without a unified policy.¹⁶ Vietnam became a

proving ground for new ideas, tactics, and equipment and thus attracted policy-makers interested in rapid career advancement.¹⁷

Vice President Lyndon Johnson visited Saigon in May 1961 with a message for President Ngo Dinh Diem that Washington wanted to increase military and economic aid.¹⁸ Always the high-profile, Johnson told reporters that Diem was the Churchill of Southeast Asia.¹⁹ Diem thereupon requested increased military assistance and American advisers to expand his army to 100,000.²⁰ Kennedy was not pleased with Diem's request; nevertheless, he approved National Security Action Memorandum 52 in his first significant step toward escalation.²¹ This declared that U.S. policy was to prevent South Vietnam from being taken over by Communism and authorized sending 400 troops to Vietnam as trainers. He nonetheless rejected large scale escalation.²²

The President viewed the increase in advisers with hesitation, fearing that it would lead to further escalation or making an open-ended commitment. The Assistant Secretary for Policy Planning Walter Rostow later observed, "His attitude was colored strongly by his memories of having seen the French in Viet Nam...he kept coming back to the fact that the French put in more than 250,000 good troops, and were run out."²³ Rostow later wrote: "(Kennedy) took the minimum steps he judged necessary to stabilize the situation, leaving its resolution for the longer future, but quite conscious that harder decisions might lie ahead."²⁴

He readily embraced non-military assistance for economic development and social reform, but rejected advice from Elbridge Dubrow, Eisenhower's ambassador to South Vietnam, to pressure Diem for reforms before increasing assistance.²⁵ Some high ranking military officials were left with the impression that Kennedy wanted them to take the lead on Vietnam. General Maxwell Taylor soon adopted Vietnam as a personal project. Similarly, Defense Secretary McNamara noted Kennedy's reluctance and assumed it was his responsibility

to take charge after the initial steps towards escalation had been taken. McNamara and Taylor both lobbied for a stronger stand in Vietnam. As Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric later observed, "nobody in State really had the stomach or the capacity to stand up."²⁶

The pressure to introduce more advisers increased throughout 1961 as Kennedy struggled to deal with a new series of foreign policy crises: the Vienna Summit, Berlin, and nuclear testing. These apparent setbacks created negative press which added more tarnish to the credibility of Kennedy's image as a Cold Warrior and increased the pressure to demonstrate U.S. resolve in South Vietnam.²⁷

During the summer of 1961, Kennedy's foreign policy difficulties became more complicated. By August, the Soviets had raised the Berlin Wall and in South Vietnam the Viet Cong were launching a more aggressive campaign. By September 18th, the Viet Cong had captured and beheaded the local political leader of Phouc Vinh, a provincial capital.²⁸

Undersecretary of State Chester Bowles recommended a diplomatic solution that would make Southeast Asia a neutral zone. Kennedy considered the recommendation "a farseeing expression of his ultimate goal...but that its time had not yet come."²⁹ The plan failed to gain support within the administration. "You're spouting the Communist line," Rusk told Bowles.³⁰

By September, increased military assistance to Diem had failed to prevent the Viet Cong from gaining a stronger foothold in South Vietnam.³¹ Taylor and Rostow were sent to study the problem in October. Before they left, Kennedy told Taylor that the responsibility for preventing North Vietnam from overthrowing South Vietnam rested with the people and the government. He also leaked to the *New York Times* that he strongly opposed sending combat troops. Taylor's written instructions from the President, nonetheless, emphasized that he was to assess the effect of introducing SEATO and U.S. forces.³²

On November 15th Kennedy told advisers that, compared with Korea, the crisis in Vietnam did not present a case of clear aggression and the public would criticize unilateral action. Why send American troops to support a country with an army of 200,000 in a war against 16,000 guerrillas? Instead, he approved Operation Ranchhand to use chemical defoliants against the Viet Cong.³³ In pressuring the President to send helicopters and bombers, which meant treating Vietnam as a military problem, Rostow remarked, “we are not saving them for the Junior Prom.”³⁴

Following this meeting, the President approved National Security Action Memorandum 111 which called for more advisers and equipment for Diem, but rejected requests for combat troops.³⁵ “It’s like taking a drink,” Kennedy warned an adviser. “The effect wears off, and you have to take another.”³⁶ Committing combat troops meant Vietnam would become ‘a white man’s war’ and the U.S. would follow in the footsteps of the French.³⁷

Despite the negative arguments the President could not say “no” outright.³⁸ As Theodore Sorensen noted, “In typical Kennedy fashion, he made it difficult for any of the pro-intervention advocates to charge him privately with weakness.” He ordered contingency plans for deploying combat troops and continuously expanded the number of advisers as tactics to deflect criticism.³⁹

The increase in American assistance remained secret both because it violated the Geneva Accords and kept public opinion from rejecting the policy. Throughout 1961, the decision to escalate paid short term dividends. Unfamiliar with helicopters and bombers, the Viet Cong soldiers took fright and ran away from battles. The Viet Cong, however, overcame these initial fears and learned to shoot down helicopters.⁴⁰

Despite the introduction of American technology on the battlefield, Diem ordered officers to avoid casualties, fearful that heavy casualties would lead to a coup attempt. The South

Vietnamese quickly developed a reputation for avoiding the enemy. Avoiding direct confrontations with the enemy, the South Vietnamese army used bombing raids to warn the Viet Cong to flee from an area before they arrived. Once an area appeared safe, the South Vietnamese invaded with weapons blazing.⁴¹ As a result, the Viet Cong grew in strength in the countryside.⁴²

U.S. advisers developed the strategic hamlet program as a response to the capability of the Viet Cong to advance in the countryside. This program called for destroying indigenous villages and moving peasants into new fortified complexes. The relocation program and crop defoliation disrupted normal life and created resentment which furthered support for the Viet Cong.

In response to the deteriorating situation, John Kenneth Galbraith, the Ambassador to India, urged Kennedy to consider using the Laotian compromise as a blueprint.⁴³ He warned that leaving Vietnam would be politically difficult: “any form of disentanglement is going to bring criticism from fighting Joe Alsop as it did in Laos.”⁴⁴ Galbraith’s advice was to keep options open for a political solution by reducing the U.S. commitment and keeping advisers out of combat. In terms of information strategy for the troops in Vietnam, this meant “their various roles should be kept as invisible as the situation permits.”⁴⁵

President Kennedy discussed Galbraith's proposals with Ambassador-at-Large Averell Harriman and Michael Forrestal, an aide on the National Security Council. Harriman urged him not to back down. The President said, “be prepared to seize upon any favorable moment to reduce our commitment recognizing that the moment might yet be some time away.”⁴⁶ At a later point, however, he told Galbraith that he had image problems in foreign policy: “There are limits to the number of defeats I can defend.” Kennedy needed to demonstrate his resolve to Khrushchev and the American public if he wanted re-election in 1964. As Schlesinger later

wrote, "The president made a de facto deal with the national security establishment; if it went along with neutralization in Laos, he would do something for resistance in South Vietnam."⁴⁷

The gradual escalation of American involvement made it difficult to back away from Vietnam. Kennedy's public comments revealed public optimism and certainty, not private misgivings about the U.S. commitment in an advisory role. It created a situation comparable to the Bay of Pigs that would make withdrawal difficult and politically risky.⁴⁸

During the spring of 1962, from Kennedy's perspective in the White House, the increased number of American advisers seemed to make progress in South Vietnam. He was very pleased with the reports of progress from the field. Yet when asked about progress in Vietnam during a March 1962 press conference, Kennedy did not dismiss the reports, but attempted to downplay them: "It's very much up and down...so it's impossible to draw any long-range conclusions."⁴⁹

The administration readily accepted the good reports because of "the missionary conviction with which Washington pursued its Vietnam policy." The contradiction between pessimistic news reports and the official version made it difficult to reconcile the differences and ignore the bad news: that the South Vietnamese army was not willing to fight; and that Diem was becoming more repressive as he faced challenges to his regime.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, Kennedy opted to dismiss news accounts and put an optimistic face on the situation in Vietnam. To emphasize that progress, he used the State of the Union Address to announce, "The spearpoint of aggression has been blunted in South Vietnam."⁵¹

The battle of Ap Bac in January 1963 shattered the roseate image of progress that Kennedy created. The South Vietnamese, reluctant to take on casualties, let the Viet Cong escape after having surrounded them with overwhelming force. Reporters now had dramatic proof that the war was not going well and reported the disgust of American advisers. The Joint Chiefs now reported that the real enemy in Vietnam was the American press.⁵²

Prior to the battle of Ap Bac, Senator Mike Mansfield of Montana, an old Asian hand, had warned that South Vietnam was on the brink of a full scale war. Kennedy's ambivalence increased.⁵³ He confessed: "I got angry with myself because I found myself agreeing with him."⁵⁴ Later that spring, when Mansfield publicly opposed more aid to Vietnam, the President told the Montana senator he wanted to withdraw: "But I can't do it until 1965 — after I'm reelected," Kennedy said. "If I tried to pull out completely now from Vietnam, we would have another Joe McCarthy red scare on our hands, but I can do it after I'm reelected."⁵⁵

The Buddhist Crisis, which began on May 8th, entangled Kennedy even more.⁵⁶ Throughout the summer, U.S. escalation increased dramatically from 4,000 to 15,000 advisers between June and October. In July 1963, Louis Harris conducted a poll for Kennedy and asked a question about Vietnam and found strong support for American intervention with combat troops.⁵⁷

At the end of August 1963, Charles DeGaulle called for the U.S. to pursue a negotiated settlement to neutralize Vietnam. The North Vietnamese also released information to the press that they were interested in trying to settle the conflict. Unwilling to accept a negotiated settlement, Kennedy never seriously considered the proposal.⁵⁸

Frustrated by the protests and unwilling to follow the Kennedy administration's diplomatic advice to institute reforms, Diem's brother Nhu developed a plan to suppress the Buddhists. Martial law was declared by Diem on August 21st as a prelude to raids on Buddhist pagodas which resulted in the arrest of 1,400 monks and nuns.⁵⁹

In Washington, Harriman and Hilsman responded by drafting a cable on August 24th: "We must face the possibility that Diem himself cannot be preserved." The President spent the weekend in Hyannis Port, but remained in touch with his aides through Forrestal. After being informed about the proposed cable, he said, "go and see what you can do to get it cleared."

Later in the day, he spoke with Undersecretary of State, George Ball and made it clear that he favored the message and understood that a coup might not result in someone better than Diem. "If Rusk and (Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell) Gilpatric agree, George, then go ahead," Kennedy ordered.⁶⁰

After the August 24th cable, however, the President was surprised to find that his advisers remained divided over what to do in Vietnam.⁶¹ He cabled Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge offering support for the coup, "but this judgment is heavily dependent on your on-the-spot advice."⁶² "We are launched on a course from which there is no respectable turning back: The overthrow of the Diem government," Lodge cabled back.⁶³ That same day, Rusk cabled back to Lodge "the Nhus are by all odds the greater part of the problem in Viet-Nam, internally, internationally and for American public opinion." Rusk instructed Lodge to leave the question of Diem's future up to the Generals and not to approach Diem until it was clear a new government could be formed.⁶⁴ Rusk's orders came with a cable from Kennedy dated August 29th: "I have approved all the messages you are receiving from others today, and I emphasize that everything, in these messages has my full support." He reserved the option to reverse the order.⁶⁵

The strong support the Harris Poll found for intervention during the summer faded by September 1963. Approval of the President's handling of Vietnam fell from fifty-six percent to twenty-eight percent.⁶⁶ On September 3rd, Kennedy and McNamara discussed DeGaulle's proposal. Convinced that neutralization had not worked for Laos, Kennedy did not think it would work for Vietnam. A real opportunity passed.⁶⁷

To assess the situation further, the President sent two advisers to Vietnam, but when they returned they gave very different accounts. Kennedy asked: "You two did visit the same country, didn't you?"⁶⁸ To get better information, he sent McNamara and Gilpatric to Vietnam

and asked them to "come up with a plan to get out of Vietnam."⁶⁹ On October 2nd, McNamara recommended withdrawing 1,000 troops by the end of the year with total withdrawal and victory by 1965. "There is no solid evidence of the possibility of a successful coup, although assassination of Diem or Nhu is always a possibility," he said.⁷⁰ They advised temporarily suspending aid to create the impression that the U.S. supported Diem, but remained unhappy.⁷¹

Kennedy ordered Press Secretary Pierre Salinger to announce the withdrawal plans and not to answer questions from the press.⁷² On October 5th, he approved a cable to Lodge which stated: "no initiative should now be taken to give any active covert encouragement to a coup. There should, however, be urgent covert effort...to build contacts with possible alternative leadership..." The President wanted Lodge to encourage the coup and maintain plausible deniability.⁷³

Still able to remember failure at the Bay of Pigs, Kennedy worried about the coup plans failing. During a meeting with advisers on October 29th, he said, "the burden of proof should be on the coup promoters to show that they can overthrow the Diem government." The President instructed advisers to tell Lodge to review the plans of the Vietnamese generals.⁷⁴ On October 30th, Lodge received instructions from Bundy: "We do not accept as basis for U.S. policy that we have no power to delay or discourage a coup...stop or delay any operation which, in your best judgment, does not clearly give high prospect of success."⁷⁵ Shortly thereafter, the violent forces supporting a coup in Saigon that the White House had unleashed during the summer struck on November 1st and by the following day, Diem and his brother Nhu had been assassinated.⁷⁶

Upset by the murders, the President questioned the advice he was getting on Vietnam.⁷⁷ He confided to his aide Kenneth O'Donnell that he thought about withdrawing from South Vietnam, but the most pragmatic way to get out was to install a government that asked the U.S.

to leave.⁷⁸ He ordered McNamara to hold a conference in Hawaii on November 20th to review U.S. policy. Following the review, a press release announced that withdrawal plans would go ahead as scheduled.⁷⁹ That same day, he told Forrestal to study whether the U.S. should withdraw after the 1964 election.⁸⁰

The President also learned the results of a Harris poll on Vietnam taken one week after the coup. The poll found approval for his handling of Vietnam had risen from thirty-five percent to forty-five percent.⁸¹ The public remained divided over escalation, however, and favored withdrawal by thirty-seven percent to thirty-two percent. Upon learning the news, Kennedy remarked, "That's all well and good, easier said than done. This situation is going to get worse before it gets better."⁸² Two days later, he was assassinated and the ambivalent withdrawal plan died with him.⁸³

Kennedy's Dilemma and Vietnam:

The question of whether the U.S. would have withdrawn or escalated is a source of unending controversy and followed logically from Kennedy's Janus-like approach to Vietnam. As the President scanned the electoral map for the 1964 election, his narrow margin in the 1960 election made him concerned about public opinion. He realized his vulnerability to conservative criticism for setbacks in the Cold War. Decisions to withdraw or escalate were postponed until after the 1964 election to appeal to voters on both sides of the issue.

The seemingly contradictory approach attempted to inoculate the administration from criticism on both the left and the right. To thwart criticism from conservative political opponents, he attempted to neutralize the left and emphasized his commitment to appeal to the right. Unsure about public support for an open-ended commitment, Kennedy opted for a covert strategy of pragmatic incrementalism. Through small steps, the New Frontier's escalation

added 15,000 advisers while maintaining a low profile of official optimism to avoid a public debate. Advisers warned that Kennedy's tactics were evasive and denied reality: nonetheless, getting re-elected in 1964 seemed more important.⁸⁴

The President pragmatically postponed a public debate by downplaying Vietnam. Yet attempting to keep options open was naive because he could not have it both ways in the war. The desire to maintain a winning image for Vietnam policy going into the 1964 election made it difficult to resist escalation, although he approached it hesitantly. Kennedy wanted headlines with glowing news accounts of progress, notwithstanding his reluctance to pay the price of introducing combat troops. In response to pessimistic news, the White House launched a public relations war with the press in Saigon.⁸⁵

For President Kennedy, a public relations war seemed more palatable than introducing combat troops or withdrawing. Alsop noted that Kennedy was a pragmatist who preferred to delay commitment to a policy until it became necessary: "He always left questions open until they were required to be closed, whether by events or because an answer had to be given or some other reason."⁸⁶

Foreign priorities in Europe and Cuba also left Kennedy so preoccupied that he never focused on Vietnam until forced by events in 1963. "Vietnam, Vietnam.....we have thirty Vietnams a day here," Robert Kennedy told *UPI's* Stanley Karnow during an interview in 1961. Although Kennedy placed Vietnam on the back burner, the decision to give primary responsibility for policy to the Pentagon ensured that it would be handled as a military problem.⁸⁷

The President's early decision to downplay the war led to the rejection of a proposal by the State Department to promote American intervention. Developed in July 1961 by the public affairs office of the State Department, the Contingency Information Program outlined an

information strategy for the White House to cultivate support from Congress and public opinion in the United States before using force. The Contingency Information Program called for talks with Congressmen and encouraging leading columnists such as Alsop, Childs, and Reston to write about Vietnam. The State Department wanted other journalists encouraged to write articles in publications that would reach a wide audience such as the *Saturday Evening Post*, the *New York Times Magazine*, and *Parade*. Under this strategy: "It might be profitable for later exploitation to place some profile articles on Gen. Maxwell Taylor as an expert on limited warfare."⁸⁸

In the event that public opinion did not call for action after these steps were taken, the Contingency Information Program recommended using presidential press conferences to create a fall-back position: "we should prepare now the terrain to which we might be obliged to withdraw." : "If on the other hand public opinion has become more receptive, high level officials should move into the open with public statements on the choices facing us."⁸⁹

On the condition that the public supported intervention, the information program called for creating a series of public events designed to "rapidly" create momentum. The scenario envisioned General Taylor and congressional leaders making speeches of support during television interview programs. Asian allies would then publicly request American assistance in the defense of Southeast Asia. On this cue, the President would enter the public stage with a dramatic fireside television speech announcing that the U.S. had an obligation to defend Vietnam. "Finally, we should develop the theme that the Communist propaganda campaigns have often struck Berlin like a gong to distract our attention from the actual exercise of force in Asia, but that we do not intend to be diverted."⁹⁰

Kennedy did not want to give a fireside chat on Vietnam that equated Southeast Asia with Berlin and rejected the Contingency Information Program's approach for rapid intervention. As

an alternative, he developed an information strategy that downplayed the U.S. role in Vietnam and encouraged optimistic news stories about the South Vietnamese. The goal was to encourage Diem privately to adopt political and economic reforms while focusing press attention on favorable stories that would boost his morale. These tactics denied worsening reality and invited trouble with the press. As Sorensen noted, military failure frustrated efforts to downplay the American role.⁹¹

President Kennedy had built a trap that would be very difficult to escape without damaging his credibility as a Cold Warrior. If he exited Vietnam, political opponents would claim he had allowed another domino to fall. As a result of political concerns, decision-making over information policy was centralized in the White House.⁹² Concern over bad news led to the President's strategy to manipulate the press and finesse the question of escalation. The decision to treat Vietnam as public relations and political problems rather than a military problem set the stage for future escalation and revealed a lack of understanding of the media. As a result of the efforts to mislead the Saigon reporters about the progress in Vietnam and attacks on their accuracy, Kennedy magnified their importance by staking his own credibility against their word.

Escalation of U.S. involvement eventually led to increased press attention, but the White House benefited in the short-term from downplaying the story during the initial stages of escalation. Vietnam was not considered front page news throughout most of 1961. The *New York Times* on December 12th placed the story about troops and equipment for Project Beef-Up on page three. The story noted that the Taylor Mission had borne its "first fruits" and the first group of helicopters had arrived in South Vietnam with 400 advisory troops. Three days later, the *Times* placed the story on an inside page when Kennedy exchanged formal letters with Diem and pledged U.S. assistance against the Viet Cong.⁹³ The first American soldier was killed in

Vietnam on December 22nd, but Kennedy never mentioned it or paid public tribute to the soldier and it went virtually unnoticed in the press.⁹⁴

At the end of 1961, he told Schlesinger that the fall of Saigon would upset the balance of power; nevertheless, while continuing to escalate, he downplayed the American role. In terms of escalation, 1962 became a pivotal year because more advisers gradually raised the level of press attention.⁹⁵ In early 1962, Salinger received reports from the U.S. Mission that reporters had become a problem.⁹⁶

In January 1962, McNamara ordered an open news policy, but Ambassador Fredrick Nolting objected and the policy became openness whenever possible. The question of what information to release to the press was left as a judgment call for the U.S. mission. This policy deputized American policy-makers in Saigon as Kennedy's public relations agents. Local commanders and embassy officials had to decide what constituted good public relations. This led to an emphasis on only good news.⁹⁷

Kennedy's unwillingness to apply wartime censorship rules complicated his approach to the press.⁹⁸ Nor did he want to be criticized for violating the Geneva Accords of 1954 which limited the number of advisers in South Vietnam and prohibited combat troops.⁹⁹ Technically, American forces functioned as advisers and noncombatants. Under Eisenhower, the U.S. observed the Geneva Accords which only allowed for 700 advisers. Ike confined the activities of U.S. advisers to Saigon. Kennedy escalated to 16,000 and authorized U.S. advisers to transport the South Vietnamese into combat zones and provide logistical support. In recognition of dangerous battlefield conditions, he ordered U.S. advisers to return fire in self-defense.¹⁰⁰

To keep options open, the White House attempted to conceal the escalation. Although napalm was being used as early as 1961, the U.S. mission denied its use, even after a *Life* cover

photo showed otherwise. Under the U.S. Air Force's FARMGATE program which began in January 1962, Jungle Jim counterinsurgency forces flew old planes on more than 1000 combat missions a month. The press was forbidden from entering the U.S. Air Force base in Bien Hoa because Kennedy did not want the publicity. To conceal that Americans were flying combat missions a Vietnamese enlisted man sat in the backseat whenever the U.S. flew. In the event a U.S. pilot was shot down the press was told it was a training mission.¹⁰¹

In February 1962, the President's brother, Robert, visited Vietnam for two hours and gave a press conference at the airport. "We are here to win and we are going to stay here until we win," the President's scrappy brother declared.¹⁰² He then told reporters the U.S. was involved in a struggle and not a war. "What is the semantics of war and struggle?" one reporter asked. "It is a legal difference...It is a struggle short of war," the Attorney General said.¹⁰³

The President never attempted to downplay his brother's comments, although he privately remained ambivalent about the evolving Vietnam mission. Fredrick Dutton, the Assistant Secretary of State, sent Senator Wayne Morse a letter on March 14, 1962 in response to questions raised at a Senate hearing on February 20, 1962. "There was no formal clearance of his statements. However, his remarks reflect the policy of the Administration toward Vietnam," Dutton wrote. To imply anything else invited political criticism threatening Kennedy's Cold Warrior image.¹⁰⁴

Salinger warned of a collision course with the press in Vietnam and urged 'drastic' changes to avoid a losing battle.¹⁰⁵ In February 1962, Kennedy responded by appointing a new information officer in Saigon and ordering maximum candor and cooperation.¹⁰⁶ The policy created further tensions because it called for the U.S. mission to follow Diem's news guidelines.¹⁰⁷ The guidelines meant optimistic press briefings which downplayed the American role and emphasized South Vietnamese prowess. The American reporters in Saigon saw

firsthand the contradictions between what the U.S. mission said and what actually happened. Inevitably, escalation brought news stories about American helicopters and troops in combat roles, but Kennedy did not want the United States emphasized in news reports. Salinger and Sylvester therefore wrote press guidelines for the U.S. mission that downplayed the American role.¹⁰⁸

Carl Rowan, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs, warned of a domestic backlash because the "secrecy regulations" were designed to "prevent American newsmen from telling our people the truth about U.S. involvement in that war."¹⁰⁹ Under the new guidelines, Kennedy could prohibit reporters from riding in helicopters or going to battlefields.¹¹⁰ Reporters would seek out the stories the White House wanted suppressed, Rowan warned.¹¹¹

Rowan failed to persuade. "Now Carl, isn't that a bunch of shit," Kennedy responded. "When this telegram leaks and your ass is in a sling, you won't think it's a bunch of shit."¹¹² Rowan shot back: "You will never be able to wage a secret war in Vietnam. If you don't give maximum feasible cooperation to the press, the press will give maximum opposition to you. And you won't win."¹¹³

Kennedy nonetheless ordered new guidelines.¹¹⁴ Transmitted on February 21, 1962 in Cable No. 1006, the new policy gave the U.S. mission greater flexibility in dealing with the press and appealed to reporters for "maximum feasible cooperation." For the U.S. officials this meant reporters should 'get on the team.' As a result, rather than increasing openness, the U.S. mission continued to classify information and the antagonism continued.¹¹⁵

Following Cable 1006, Saigon reporters noticed that the U.S. information policy became more restricted. The new policy institutionalized Official Optimism which emphasized the progress of the South Vietnamese and their role in the war while downplaying the American

role. The U.S. mission embellished to reporters that soldiers were advisers and not in combat, napalm was not used, and American helicopters and bombers were not conducting raids on the Viet Cong.¹¹⁶

The policy of Official Optimism had a second layer in the bureaucracy of the Diem regime. In reports to McNamara and the U.S. mission, the South Vietnamese army stressed progress. They quickly discovered McNamara's penchant for statistics and supplied a steady stream of data measuring progress.¹¹⁷

Further complicating U.S. information policy, the standing orders were to follow the directives of the South Vietnamese government at U.S. press briefings. This meant that when the South Vietnamese military did not want news about an operation reported, the U.S. mission was to follow the line. As a result, U.S. policy ultimately became an extension of Diem's censorship policy.¹¹⁸ Despite his pragmatic instincts, Kennedy had bet his own political future on Diem.

As Salinger later admitted, the press policy did not rely upon honesty and left the U.S. mission at odds with American reporters.¹¹⁹ "Kennedy was not anxious to admit the existence of a real war in Southeast Asia," Salinger wrote. "It was my view at the time that we should be prepared to take the good stories with the bad in Vietnam, but the President pushed hard for us to tighten the rules under which correspondents would observe field operations."¹²⁰

Cable 1006 rejected the more moderate approach to the press suggested by Salinger and institutionalized Kennedy's tactics for influencing the press in Vietnam. The President wanted newsmen to exercise self-censorship and to steer away from military missions that would generate bad news. U.S. officials were ordered to downplay the U.S. role and reinforce the claim that Americans were only advising while the Vietnamese did the fighting. Newsmen

should realize that critical stories about Diem hurt U.S. policy. Ambassador Nolting and General Harkins were ordered to cultivate the press to "to adopt self-policing machinery."¹²¹

Cable 1006 became the information policy for Vietnam because Kennedy preferred to blame the media rather than embark on a politically controversial reexamination of foreign policy. Cable 1006 demonstrated that the White House misunderstood how the press operated in Vietnam. The President viewed the press as an aggregate and did not realize such tactics worked only with the tamer members of the Washington press corps. Salinger noted that by the spring of 1962 it became a 'delusion' to argue that the new policy had improved relations with the press or prevented pessimistic reporting.¹²²

Tactical Use of Appointments:

As President Kennedy dealt with information strategy for Vietnam, he was aware of different views on Indochina among policy-makers. A decade earlier, while traveling in the Far East a young foreign service officer named Edmund Gullion had caught Kennedy's eye for his insight into Vietnam. Gullion had warned that the U.S. would lose if it replaced the French colonial presence in Vietnam. Obviously impressed, the young congressman agreed that the struggle in Vietnam was because of the forces of nationalism and decided to deliver a speech after returning to Washington. "We have allied ourselves to the desperate effort of a French regime to hang onto the remnants of empire," Kennedy said. He argued that U.S. military assistance could not save Indochina.¹²³

By 1956, Kennedy's political outlook changed and he helped organize the American Friends of Vietnam who lobbied for U.S. assistance.¹²⁴ After a narrow election victory, President Kennedy reiterated the consensus view that the United States had a responsibility to stop the spread of Communism. His appointments symbolized the New Frontier's commitment

to taking a tough stand in Asia and reflected the Cold War consensus that Washington had a responsibility to lead the world against Communism.

Robert McNamara, a Democrat who had developed a reputation during World War II as a statistician, was appointed as Secretary of Defense. He also earned a reputation in private industry as an effective activist technocratic manager and became the first President of the Ford Motor Company who was not a family member. At the Pentagon McNamara symbolized Kennedy's commitment to action and changing U.S. military strategy to flexible response.¹²⁵

Kennedy appointed liberals such as Undersecretary of State Chester Bowles because he wanted to develop a reputation for listening to advice from all points of view. But Bowles wanted him to drive Communism out of Vietnam by combining a tough military stand with a New Deal strategy.¹²⁶ Adlai Stevenson had a strong following among liberals and was appointed to serve as Ambassador to the UN. He remained at arms length on policy-making while the President privately mocked him for being 'soft' and indecisive about using military action.¹²⁷

Kennedy wanted to be his own Secretary of State and sought out a candidate to head the State Department who would be happy following his lead.¹²⁸ Stevenson hoped to be the Secretary of State to make sure the New Frontier followed up on its promise to reexamine U.S. foreign policy.¹²⁹ He was passed over for Dean Rusk, the head of the Rockefeller Foundation and a former Rhodes Scholar. Rusk was noted for having served in the China-Burma-India theater in World War II and surviving at the State Department unscathed by the McCarthy Red Scare. Reporters at *Time-Life* thought highly of his tough stance on China.¹³⁰

For bipartisanship, Kennedy appointed the establishment Republican McGeorge Bundy as his Special Assistant for National Security Affairs after briefly considering him for Secretary of State. The former Dean of Harvard University was known as a tough-minded intellectual

and outspoken Stevenson critic who advocated a tough uncompromising stance against Communism.¹³¹

Walt Rostow, an economics professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was named as Bundy's assistant.¹³² Rostow had helped the 1960 campaign by coining the phrase "Let's get the country moving again!"¹³³ In Schlesinger's words, Rostow became "the high priest of counterinsurgency." Nevertheless, when Kennedy sent Rostow to Vietnam along with General Maxwell Taylor and General Edward Lansdale, the counterinsurgency experts called for "big battalions." The White House was told that counterinsurgency tactics could not substitute for large units in a war of attrition. Thus, Kennedy eventually rejected expert advice on how to apply counterinsurgency tactics in Southeast Asia.¹³⁴

The President wanted to stop Communism on the cheap and used public relations to gloss over his failure in Vietnam. Strong rhetoric and gradual escalation of U.S. involvement suggested that Kennedy's willingness to 'bear any burden.' His information strategy relied upon the loyalty of his political appointments, enforced silence upon the upper military ranks, and encouraged glowing reports of progress from Saigon. The strategy did not stop junior officers in the field from talking to reporters in Vietnam.

The President believed in the domino theory and remained confident that with his appointments the New Frontier could make a difference in Vietnam. Although Galbraith privately questioned the commitment in Vietnam and urged a negotiated settlement, Kennedy benefited from his loyal decision not to go public with proposals to use Laos as a blueprint for Southeast Asia. In public, his advisers did not question America's responsibilities and radiated confidence that the Vietnam conflict was within the New Frontier's management capabilities. The technocratic image of American power and expertise suggested that Kennedy experts would

'get the country moving again' and Washington would overcome the Communist challenge in Vietnam.

Tactical Use of Access:

The access strategy never worked for President Kennedy in Saigon. Vietnam was a distant and exotic outpost for journalists far removed from the social pleasantries of covering the White House. Throughout his presidency, promising, young, well-educated, and aggressive print and wire service reporters interested in promotion were attracted to Vietnam's backwaters while established mainstream journalists covered front-page events in Washington and Europe.¹³⁵ Television did not focus on the war because of the costs and dangers of sending slow-moving, highly visible camera crews with heavy equipment into hostile country.¹³⁶

The reporters in Saigon questioned the news fed to them at official briefings. Yet despite having an adversarial approach to newsgathering, the resident reporters in Vietnam were children of the Cold War and held strong beliefs in the U.S. obligations to stop Communism. News stories from Saigon pointed out problems while calling for action and better management of the military effort. Not reporting the official line made the situation for American reporters very tense.¹³⁷

The transparent public relations facade could not hide American escalation and involvement. Reporters visiting the field quickly saw that official briefings were lies.¹³⁸ Reporters developed sources among lower ranking officers.¹³⁹ Ongoing disparities diminished the credibility of the White House among reporters stationed in Saigon.¹⁴⁰

Kennedy attempted to improve matters by appointing a new public affairs officer to the U.S. mission. He recruited John Mecklin, a *Time* magazine correspondent who had served as the chief of *Time's* Southeast Asia bureau from 1954 to 1955.¹⁴¹ Mecklin arrived in Saigon on

May 1st with orders to advise Diem on press relations.¹⁴² Diem did not care about persuading the press and viewed him as an exterminator sent to control a bug problem. The U.S. mission exacerbated the problem by viewing reporters as natural enemies of the United States and treating highly visible U.S. involvement in Vietnam as a clandestine operation.¹⁴³

Mecklin later described Cable 1006 as the “codification of the errors the Mission was already committing.” This led to excessive classification to prevent reporters from getting information about the war. He noted, however, that the U.S. mission actually believed what it told reporters: “Our feud with the newsmen was an angry symptom of bureaucratic sickness.”¹⁴⁴

Diem responded to negative stories with a hard-line approach, which in turn angered the press. Francois Sully of *Newsweek* and James Robinson of *NBC* were expelled for critical stories. David Halberstam of the *New York Times*, Neil Sheehan of *UPI*, and Malcome Browne of *AP* were harassed for hinting that the U.S. needed to remove Diem.¹⁴⁵

Frustrated by Diem's unwillingness to follow advice, Kennedy sent Robert Manning to Saigon on July 15, 1962.¹⁴⁶ As Kennedy told him, “this thing is really getting out of hand and something’s got to be done about developing a relationship between the government and the U.S. public in this thing, which meant first trying to do something about the relationship between the government and the U.S. press in Vietnam.”¹⁴⁷

“What I found in Vietnam was a public relations mess,” Manning recalled. He brought Diem a warning from the White House that mistreating reporters undermined public support in the United States.¹⁴⁸ Manning was surprised to find that reporters strongly supported American goals in Southeast Asia, but wanted better management of the war.¹⁴⁹ But the tension level between reporters and U.S. officials was so high that one reporter drove past Harkins’ home had raised his fist and said, “We’ll get that son of a bitch.”¹⁵⁰

The U.S. mission treated reporters as “outsiders” and “mischief makers.”¹⁵¹ U.S. officials saw reporters in Vietnam as too young, naive, and ill-prepared to cover a complicated war. They failed to recognize that young reporters had covered previous wars and, at the same time, there were veteran reporters, such as Homer Bigart, in Vietnam. Those veterans who were ‘not on the team’ were told, “Well, you guys have been covering these old fashioned wars, and this is a little different.”¹⁵²

Manning identified the source of the problem in Washington.¹⁵³ The U.S. mission was asked to carry out “impossible orders” because of the “unrealistic attitude” the White House maintained toward American involvement.¹⁵⁴ He reported to Kennedy that the desire to minimize U.S. involvement distorted the truth and created long-term distrust with the press.¹⁵⁵ The problem went beyond public relations. The South Vietnamese needed a decisive battlefield victory to impress reporters.¹⁵⁶

By the fall of 1962, Kennedy's press relations in Saigon had deteriorated further. Mecklin warned in October that although the military situation had improved, Diem planned to ban all U.S. publications in South Vietnam.¹⁵⁷ Diem had prohibited correspondents from asking informal questions. The new policy required submitting questions to South Vietnamese field commanders for written answers, but reporters were not always told about battles.¹⁵⁸

For Halberstam, the morning of November 22nd became a major turning point in relations with the U.S. mission. An air armada of fifty helicopters ferrying 600 South Vietnamese and 200 Americans flew across downtown Saigon northwards to War Zone D as the entire city watched. It was the largest helicopter assault in history, but the U.S. mission had not told reporters about the big story. Reporters learned the mission had failed and filed stories even though high ranking American and Vietnamese officials refused to give briefings. General

Harkins, the commander of the Military Assistance Command in Vietnam, launched an investigation to determine who had leaked the story.¹⁵⁹

News of this investigation converted Halberstam from “a neutral bystander into an angry man.” He immediately went to Mecklin’s office with a letter of protest which described U.S. efforts at secrecy as “insulting to the patriotism and intelligence of every American newspaperman...you can bet the VC knew what was happening...Only American reporters and American readers were kept ignorant.”¹⁶⁰

Mecklin recognized something had to be done in Washington and forwarded Halberstam’s memo to Murrow in December along with an eight page memo which outlined “the growing press problem.” Murrow forwarded the memo urging Salinger to ask Kennedy to stop Diem from dictating U.S. information policy in Vietnam.¹⁶¹

The President had to deal with the “growing press problem” or face more critical stories about Vietnam. For Kennedy the answer was to apply the access strategy to Saigon, but he was not able to bottle his charisma for Diem and officials in the U.S. mission. Unable to tame reporters in Vietnam, he tried to use Washington reporters to downplay America’s deepening involvement.

To *Newsweek*’s Benjamin Bradlee, Kennedy confided that American involvement needed to be downplayed because it violated the Geneva Accords. “Whatever we have to do we have to do in some kind of secrecy,” he said. President Kennedy felt pressured by domestic politics. “The Republicans want it both ways in Vietnam,” he said, “It’s like Korea for them....the Republicans want us to defeat communism in Vietnam by any means, but when we try to do it quietly, they howl that we are not doing enough.”¹⁶²

Bradlee had an insider’s knowledge of Kennedy’s motive for downplaying Vietnam because of his unique access privileges. His information strategy to downplay Vietnam did not

rule out talking candidly about White House strategy with close friends. The President rarely used the excuse of national security to claim that he could not talk about foreign policy, Bradlee noted.¹⁶³

The access that Bradlee had regarding Vietnam remained on a conditional basis. Once he violated the rules and "Kennedy raised hell with me — in private." This incident occurred when Bradlee brought the President a pending *Newsweek* article regarding a new weapon for Vietnam. "You mean some dumb son of a bitch just handed these things to you?" he said. Always ready to cooperate, Bradlee downplayed the story. President Kennedy ordered McNamara to investigate the leak and the reporter who uncovered the information was "investigated from hell to breakfast."¹⁶⁴

On April 24, 1963, Kennedy confessed to his friend Charles Bartlett of the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* that the U.S. faced a tough problem. "We don't have a prayer of staying in Vietnam," he said. "But I can't give up a piece of territory like that to the Communists and then get the American people to reelect me." According to Bartlett, the President was unsure about what to do in Vietnam. "He's totally out to sea," he recorded.¹⁶⁵

Earlier that day Kennedy seemed assured at his press conference in telling reporters that he believed in the domino theory and the need to take a stand in Vietnam. Bartlett never reported on the contradictions between the President's off-stage and on-stage behavior because he was a "chosen Kennedy."¹⁶⁶

In another example of Kennedy's close-knit relationship with Washington-based reporters, Theodore White visited Vietnam and reported to Schlesinger on August 9, 1961 that he should warn the President: "The situation gets worse almost week by week...despite the optimistic bullshit now hitting the papers."¹⁶⁷ White argued that the White House had to become involved in Saigon politics or risk being held accountable for defeat. He was saying

that Diem was a cancer that had to be treated. Rather than reporting candidly to the American public, White performed an intelligence function and offered advice to Kennedy because they had become friends during the 1960 election.¹⁶⁸

The access strategy also included quietly lobbying Arthur Krock and personally meeting with him to talk about Vietnam. During one such meeting on May 5, 1961, Kennedy told Krock that he expected "a lot of people will be complaining about the Communist representation" that will probably occur in a "neutralist government in Laos." The President also revealed that General MacArthur had told him that all of Southeast Asia would go communist by popular choice. Apparently, Kennedy thought it was important to let Krock personally know MacArthur's opinion on Southeast Asia: "Our chickens are all coming home to roost, and your are in the chicken house."¹⁶⁹

The President then complained about the *Times* printing Halberstam's stories. He pointed out that if the *Times* stopped printing Halberstam's dispatches, the rest of America's editors would downplay the issue. "They follow your selection of what is fit to print in matters of national security," Kennedy said. Krock's next column did not report the blatant attempt to manage the news. But he pointed out that the New Frontier had inherited problems in Southeast Asia from Eisenhower. Nevertheless, Krock never told Kennedy to get out of Vietnam.¹⁷⁰

In another instance, on October 17, 1961, Kennedy confessed that he did not know what to do and hoped Taylor's fact-finding tour would provide an answer. He also told Krock that he still believed in his Senate speech where he had said U.S. troops should not be involved in combat on the Asian mainland. The President did not think the U.S. should interfere in a civil war by guerrillas. He had doubts about the "falling domino" theory and anticipated that China would dominate the region once they developed nuclear weapons.¹⁷¹ Krock did not report Kennedy's doubts about the domino theory and confusion over what to do..¹⁷²

The President's relationship with Alsop provides another example of his use of personal time and attention. Treating the columnist as a special counselor, Kennedy gladly accepted his advice on Vietnam and flattered him by frequently seeking him out in social situations. Following the crisis in Laos, he talked with the President several times about Vietnam. Alsop repeatedly told him that the French were guilty of "the most extraordinary dropping of the mast that I'd ever seen." Kennedy knew his Vietnam policy could not escape Alsop's watchful eye.¹⁷³ After debating Khrushchev at Vienna, he assured him that he was determined to be a strong Cold Warrior. "I will never back down, never, never, never," he said.¹⁷⁴ On October 6th, Alsop called for action in his first important column on Vietnam. The President had talked to Alsop before the Taylor-Rostow mission and left the impression that he was impressed by the columnist's knowledge of the war on the ground in Vietnam. During the conversation Kennedy confided that he was considering the possibility of introducing combat troops into Vietnam.¹⁷⁵

Kennedy also attempted to court James Reston, the Washington Bureau Chief of the *New York Times*. At Vienna, he gave special access to Reston, confided that he had not done well, and needed to take a tough stand. "I'll have to increase the defense budget. And we have to confront them. The only place we can do that is in Vietnam."¹⁷⁶ For Vietnam, Reston resisted the President's cultivation strategy, however, and consequently never enjoyed the same access as the more privileged. Reston frequently criticized Kennedy's policy and information tactics and defended Halberstam.¹⁷⁷

On February 14, 1962, Reston's column in the *New York Times* avowed: "the United States is now involved in an undeclared war in South Vietnam." Harriman responded by proxy for Kennedy that evening at a dinner party. Noting that the Geneva Accords complicated the situation, Harriman told Reston he needed to realize, "that there are conflicting publicity pressures which had to be balanced — not only American opinion, but international

opinion...balancing them is not easy, particularly as the American correspondents' dispatches plus photographs of recent helicopter flights had made the situation look like a U.S. war rather than a Vietnamese conflict which we were assisting." Harriman followed up this conversation with a phone call to persuade Reston to change his attitude about the U.S. role in Vietnam. By the end of the conversation, Reston admitted Harriman was "right."¹⁷⁸

The incidents underscore that Kennedy's strategy with Washington journalists was based upon personal persuasion. Furthermore in Vietnam, Kennedy operated from a position of weakness and could not rely on the close friendship of Bradlee or White to quash news stories from reporters stationed in Saigon. The Krock, Reston, and Alsop examples show that even in Washington there were columnists that Kennedy cultivated, but could not always count on for support.

The reporters in Saigon became a major source of frustration because they challenged Kennedy's established way of doing business with the press. Younger and more aggressive than the Washington reporters, they believed in the purpose of fighting to save Vietnam, but would not accept government handouts at face value. In contrast to tamer reporters in Washington, they did not care what Kennedy thought of their stories.

The resident reporters in Saigon developed a culture with an aggressive esprit de corps that quickly passed on to new reporters who became indoctrinated. Peter Arnett described how this process worked: when he first arrived, Malcome Browne, a veteran of many wars, told him: "Coverage in Vietnam requires aggressiveness...You can expect little help when it comes to official sources, and news comes the hard way."¹⁷⁹

Aggressive reporters on the scene made it impossible for Kennedy to control the images of the war. This offered a very different situation from Cuba during the Bay of Pigs, Operation Mongoose, and the Missile Crisis. Kennedy did not understand the dynamics of his relationship

with the press in Vietnam: "Why are we having so much trouble with reporters over there?" he asked.¹⁸⁰

The problems the White House experienced were compounded by the decision to stake U.S. policy to the Diem regime which viewed reporters with animosity and did not cooperate with suggestions for improving public relations. In one instance, he asked Diem to remove his sister-in-law from Vietnam for insensitive comments to reporters about the Buddhist Crisis. She responded by telling Halberstam that the U.S. Mission was trying to "shut me up."¹⁸¹

Kennedy received some benefit from the culture of news industry in the United States. Stories filed by reporters in Vietnam faced skepticism by editors and managers in the United States. The reporters in Saigon outraged older and more established conservative reporters such as Alsop, and Higgins, who dismissed stories coming from the war as the emotional product of inexperience. Alsop even wrote to Reston to complain about the reporting of Sheehan and Halberstam. Reston tersely replied, "In the face of South Vietnam's uncommitted troops and their indifference to the loss of life, I can't share your estimate of the war or of Sheehan and Halberstam."¹⁸²

Kennedy reacted to negative news reports from Vietnam by attempting to kill the messenger. Using the same approach as the established Washington journalists, he blamed reporters for the bad news. In a Machiavelian strategy that pitted reporters in Washington against reporters in Saigon, Kennedy's tactics attempted to exploit their cultural differences.

Kennedy understood that support for intervention in Vietnam would come readily from editors and reporters in Washington and throughout the United States who rallied for a strong approach to the Cold War. A leader among these ranks was Henry Luce the publisher of *Time*. Through *Time*, *Life*, and *Fortune*, Luce had access to millions of voters throughout the heartland and trumpeted a call for action in Vietnam. The editorial offices of the Luce

publications became a buffer zone in Kennedy's public relations war against the press in Vietnam. Otto Fuerbringer, the managing editor of *Time*, edited dispatches coming from Vietnam which pleased Luce and the White House. Fuerbringer constantly consulted the Washington bureau for guidance on rewriting critical dispatches that were filed by Charles Mohr, *Time's* correspondent in Vietnam. Mohr eventually quit after Fuerbringer wrote a scathing critique in *Time*: "The press corps on the scene is helping compound the very confusion that should be untangled for its readers at home." Fuerbringer continued by dismissing the critical dispatches of the Saigon reporters as the product of inexperienced youth.¹⁸³

Kennedy, however, could not always count on the *New York Times*. Indeed, the *Times* insisted on publishing Halberstam's critical dispatches and hired Mohr after he quit *Time*.¹⁸⁴ He attempted to have Halberstam removed from Vietnam — something he never tried with *Time* correspondents. "Don't you think he's a little too close to the story?" Kennedy asked publisher Arthur Sulzberger during a White House visit, but Sulzberger refused to cave into White House pressure.¹⁸⁵ The *Times* nonetheless protected the President by not publishing anything about his blatant attempt at news management.¹⁸⁶ Halberstam became a major nemesis to the White House as the only full-time reporter stationed in Saigon from a major daily newspaper until 1963.

In 1963, Kennedy paid a great deal of attention to Halberstam's articles because they contradicted information he received through official channels. As a result, the now published minutes of Kennedy's meetings with his advisers contain references to Halberstam's articles on Ap Bac and the Buddhist Crisis. Concerned about the accuracy of the news articles, he ordered McNamara to conduct an investigation in September 1963. Five days later, McNamara

concluded Halberstam's articles are "overly lugubrious" and "should be treated with reserve."¹⁸⁷

The President also had the CIA investigate Halberstam's articles and received a report which concluded: "Mr. Halberstam...is by and large accurate in terms of the facts that he includes." The report noted that Halberstam rarely relied upon optimistic sources and his emphasis on pessimism brought into question his objectivity.¹⁸⁸

In Kennedy's public relations war with the press he also frequently complained about the dispatches of *UPI's* Neil Sheehan, but Sheehan was never replaced.¹⁸⁹ The President understood that most news stories written about Vietnam in newspapers throughout the country relied upon dispatches from wire service reporters.¹⁹⁰

The White House strategy to "manage the news" in Vietnam was unrealistic and created a tense situation. In Saigon, Wilson noted that at the U.S. mission, "It was a very emotional situation...we couldn't do anything about it."¹⁹¹ Rusk admitted that it was difficult to "guide the press" in Saigon because "We were not in, theoretically, a war situation: there was not declaration of war; there was no wartime censorship."¹⁹²

The battle of Ap Bac and the Buddhist Crisis of 1963 were turning points in the public relations war. Both incidents brought into stark contrast the image that the White House wanted to portray and demonstrated the inadequacies of Kennedy's information strategy to influence the reporting on the war.

Following the defeat of the South Vietnamese at Ap Bac, the press in the United States attacked U.S. policy. Usually a Kennedy supporter, Krock wrote, "no amount of U.S. military assistance can preserve independence for a people who are unwilling to die for it." Hanson Baldwin of the *New York Times* noted that high-tech helicopters and other gadgets could not win a war because "legs are a soldier's chief weapon."¹⁹³ The White House quickly concluded

that the problem was the press, not the policy.¹⁹⁴ The President did not realize that reporters actually exercised restraint in reporting on Ap Bac. The more extreme remarks by American officers following the defeat were never published.¹⁹⁵

Captain John Paul Vann coordinated the South Vietnamese attack and vented frustration to UPI's Neil Sheehan. Upon learning that a South Vietnamese commander refused to engage the enemy Vann yelled into his radio, "Then shoot that rotten, cowardly son of a bitch right now and move out." "It was a miserable damm performance," read Sheehan's dispatch on front pages across the country. Sheehan later admitted that he left out Vann's identity and censored remarks to subordinates.¹⁹⁶ Karnow later recorded Vann saying, "A miserable fucking performance, just like always."¹⁹⁷

Kennedy's worsening relationship with reporters in Saigon was exacerbated during Ap Bac because the U.S. mission treated reporters as enemies. Not told in advance about Ap Bac, reporters had to rely upon first hand sources. American officers in the field told reporters that the South Vietnamese had surrounded the Viet Cong at Ap Bac in an ideal position for victory, but failed to engage the enemy and risk casualties. The Viet Cong shot down five U.S. helicopters and killed three Americans. Nevertheless, high ranking U.S. officials called Ap Bac a victory and told reporters to "get on the team." After Ap Bac divisions hardened between reporters and American officials. Reporters began to rely more upon personal information networks while officials in the U.S. mission limited press contacts to formal occasions.¹⁹⁸

After Ap Bac, Kennedy complained about the news coverage to his aides. Forrestal noted a "serious public relations problem" in Vietnam: "Public and Congressional opinion in the United States has been influenced toward thinking that the war effort in Vietnam is misguided, lacking drive, and flouts the counsel of United States advisers." The solution was to encourage tamer responsible newsmen to cover the war.¹⁹⁹

Upset by the news, Nolting told Kennedy that the Saigon reporters were young, inexperienced, and ill prepared to cover even a police beat. The Ambassador warned that inaccurate reporting on Ap Bac was having an incendiary effect on public opinion. The lack of experience among reporters implied that news agencies such as *AP*, *UPI* and the *Times* did not consider the war an important story. Nevertheless, Nolting urged private consultations with ranking editors to get them to send tamer veteran correspondents.²⁰⁰

In February 1963, Mecklin outlined the "press problem" in Vietnam and called for honesty. This memo led to a White House briefing on April 29th where he urged the President to order the U.S. mission to cultivate journalists. Kennedy, although skeptical, decided to follow the advice.²⁰¹

Mecklin's efforts resulted in a cable in May 1963 calling for moderation: "wherever possible taking American reporters in Saigon further into our confidence, particularly on matters they are almost certain to learn about anyway."²⁰² Manning later described the new approach to reporters in Saigon as that of cultivating an "in" feeling. The seduction was to be done on an individual basis by inviting reporters to intimate dinners and official functions.²⁰³

The cable ordered all U.S. officials to follow Kennedy's cautious description of Vietnam during his December 12, 1962 press conference. Neither optimistic or pessimistic, he declared that the tunnel was dark, but getting lighter. While the first two instructions appeared to give the U.S. mission more leeway in what they could say to the press, the third instruction clearly stated, "Nothing in this memorandum should be interpreted as any change in your present policy of discouraging public and private complaints by United States personnel of a derogatory nature about Vietnamese military efforts."²⁰⁴

On May 21st Washington transmitted more fully developed press guidelines to Saigon. The new policy represented a slight modification of Cable 1006 by calling for more

cooperation.²⁰⁵ Ultimately, however, the new press policy ran afoul of the Buddhist Crisis which dampened any momentum for change.

McNamara responded to Ap Bac and the Buddhist Crisis with orders for U.S. officers to limit conversations with reporters and not to make generalizations about the war. This resulted in a training policy with the admonition that soldiers are "oracles" with the capability of influencing public opinion: "You've got to accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative." The order leaked to Halberstam and was published in the *New York Times* on June 24th.²⁰⁶

The Buddhist Crisis revealed the strength of the information networks Saigon reporters had developed in Vietnam. The crisis also revealed the media savvy of the Buddhist leaders, who staged dramatic immolations and demonstrations for reporters that propelled Vietnam into the front pages of American newspapers and magazines. Reporters obtained dates, times, and places for demonstrations in advance. Throughout the summer of 1963, Diem responded to the Buddhist demonstrations with attempts to intimidate and censor reporters. At one point, the U.S. mission feared for Halberstam's life and advised him to stay away from his house.²⁰⁷

The U.S. mission made it difficult for reporters to travel to Hue where the Buddhist demonstrations were centered.²⁰⁸ By July, the Buddhist Crisis had exacerbated Kennedy's relations with the press in Saigon. Manning told Bundy the press problem was due Kennedy's "Alice in Wonderland miasma" which denied reality and forced officials to misrepresent the U.S. role. He argued out that Kennedy "cannot engage in a semi-covert struggle...except in the full glare of the free American press."²⁰⁹

Kennedy decided to encourage veteran correspondents to visit Vietnam to generate optimistic news coverage that would discredit the pessimistic reporting coming from reporters in Saigon. General Earle Wheeler recommended, "A series of sponsored visits to Vietnam by

mature and responsible correspondents and news executives." Eventually, Washington reporters were flown into Vietnam for guided whirlwind tours to demonstrate progress.²¹⁰

The White House encouraged Marguerite Higgins, a conservative reporter from the *New York Herald Tribune*, to visit Vietnam. Robert Kennedy told her to get a briefing from General Victor Krulak. Krulak told her that the Buddhist riot was political and not religious. He noted that the problem with reporting coming from Vietnam was that journalists never left the comforts of Saigon to go out in the field.²¹¹ Higgins attacked the Vietnam correspondents as "typewriter strategists" who never left the bar at the Caravelle Hotel.²¹²

Higgins' first story in a six part series did not appear in the *Herald-Tribune* until August 26, 1963. She did not report on the pagoda raids that took place while she was in Saigon. Her reports contradicted Halberstam's, but did not generate letters of interest from readers.²¹³

Joseph Alsop was also encouraged to visit Vietnam in September 1963.²¹⁴ He quickly concluded "young crusaders" caused the problem.²¹⁵ Kennedy was "reacting like a bee-stung adolescent" and not getting tough enough: "So there will be some changes here."²¹⁶ He later reported to Kennedy that Diem no longer remained a "viable" option in Saigon.²¹⁷ Aware that Kennedy felt pressured by the reporting in the *New York Times*, Alsop added to this pressure by publishing an article stating that Diem's brother was attempting to negotiate a settlement with the North Vietnamese and thus something drastic had to be done.²¹⁸

Kennedy inadvertently increased the pressure on himself to act by giving Alsop the VIP treatment in Vietnam. But he believed offering access to the influential columnist was politically advantageous.²¹⁹ Alsop embraced the war and wrote a series of columns discrediting the reporters in Saigon. Although this tactic raised the long-term stakes, Kennedy seemed pleased with the short-term result.²²⁰

Reston criticized Kennedy's cheerleading. "Why don't you call Alsop off?" he told Bundy.²²¹ Alsop went on the offensive for the White House and lectured reporters in Saigon telling them to cooperate. After one reporter told Alsop the war was not going well, he said, "who cares about that? You're naive to report so pessimistically."²²²

Halberstam was not impressed by Alsop, guessing that Kennedy had sent him to bolster U.S. public opinion with optimistic stories.²²³ The management of the *New York Times* did not appreciate Halberstam's critical stories because they made trouble. Reston had to intervene twice to save stories that Halberstam filed on the battle of Ap Bac and the Buddhist Crisis.²²⁴ As Reston noted of Halberstam, "his function is to be the watchman on the wall, and by those standards Dave has come to the top of foreign correspondents this year."²²⁵ Nevertheless, the administration publicly denied the validity of "the watchman's" articles.²²⁶

But the violent public crackdown on the Buddhists made reality more difficult for Kennedy to deny. Diem's army raided the Buddhist pagodas on August 21, 1963 using U.S. military equipment. To prevent the news from getting to the outside world, Diem closed the wire offices and rigidly censored all news. Despite the problems, reporters found ways to transmit news dispatches to the United States.²²⁷

Francois Sully published an article in *Newsweek* on August 22, 1962, entitled "Vietnam the Unpleasant Truth." This article led to his expulsion from Saigon.²²⁸ Diem also banned correspondents from going into the field to cover the war.²²⁹ Kennedy publicly promised more support to the newsmen in Vietnam, but privately complain to *Newsweek* about Sully's reporting. The publisher Phil Graham sent a more conservative columnist to write a glowing cover story about Diem.²³⁰ Although Kennedy promised more support for reporters, he waited until December 11, 1962 to instruct Diem to lift the ban on reporters in the field. This reversal

came only after Halberstam and other reporters wrote stories exposing what was taking place.²³¹

The *New York Times* published a story by Halberstam on August 22, 1963 reporting that Diem's brother Nhu had overseen the pagoda raids with Diem's secret police force and declared martial law in South Vietnam. Szulc reported in Washington that the U.S. government believed the Vietnamese army had convinced Diem to raid the pagodas and declare martial law. The *New York Times* printed the stories next to each other on the front page. Reston liked Halberstam's reporting and cabled: "KEEP GOING BECAUSE WE'RE ONLY GETTING PROPAGANDA THIS END."²³²

On August 24th the *New York Times* published Hedrick Smith's report from the State Department, "U.S. Reassessing Crisis in Vietnam." Smith's story noted that Nhu was responsible for the pagoda raids and the South Vietnamese generals had approved the plan for martial law. "If the disenchanted generals unite, they would represent a grave threat to the president and Mr. Nhu."²³³

"We are faced with a crisis of credibility," Mecklin wrote in a memo on August 24th to Lodge who was about to be installed as the new ambassador. He advised the Ambassador not to be too accessible to reporters, but to maintain a "gee-what-should-we do atmosphere" when meeting with a reporter. "Most importantly, treat the newsman as an ally, never as an antagonist," he said.²³⁴

The antagonism simmering in Saigon was something that President Kennedy wanted to fix with access, but he was trapped in the White House. He thought access was the answer for dealing with reporters in Washington, but had mixed results. Reston had privately labeled the information coming out of the White House as propaganda, but never pressed Kennedy to withdraw. Alsop and Higgins, as well as the reporters in Saigon, all wanted a tougher stance.

Rather than downplaying Vietnam, Kennedy's tactics had increased press attention and the corresponding pressure not to allow another domino to fall. During the weeks before his death, the President faced a crisis of credibility in Saigon that threatened to spread through the ranks of the American press corps. The sudden and dramatic nature of his death snuffed out the emerging credibility gap crisis over Vietnam policy.

Tactical Use of Speeches:

Since 1961, Kennedy had personally focused his public relations war with reporters in Saigon mainly by trying to influence Washington reporters who worked for newspapers and magazines. Television reporters did not cover Vietnam and were not a major factor in his strategy. The President hesitated at drawing attention to the war and rejected advice to give a major television speech to generate public support.²³⁵

In public statements, Kennedy referred to Vietnam in only forty-six speeches, a figure which excludes press conferences and includes two interviews on *CBS* and *NBC*. In 1961, Kennedy referred to Vietnam in ten speeches. As escalation increased in 1962, he referred to Vietnam sixteen times, and only twenty times his final year in office.

The relative lack of public commentary in speeches by Kennedy exemplified his strategy to downplay the U.S. role. Political necessities made it difficult not to say anything because Kennedy did not want to give opponents ammunition. His statements always expressed a strong desire to stop Communism in Southeast Asia. Although a major television address had been rejected out of fear that it would equate Saigon with Berlin, over the course of three years of speeches Kennedy incrementally staked his image in preventing a Communist takeover.

During the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs, the President promised a renewed commitment to the Cold War. "We dare not fail to grasp the new concepts, the new tools," Kennedy said. A week later, he said, "we will bear more than our share of the burden, but we can only help."²³⁶

In the State of the Union Address, on January 11, 1962, Kennedy announced, "peace in Laos would...safeguard the peace in Viet-Nam...The systematic aggression now bleeding that country...will be resisted."²³⁷ On September 20th, he noted that Khrushchev had promised to expand Communism. "The tide was running against us in Viet-Nam," he said. "But...the decline in our position has been reversed."²³⁸ In the State of the Union Address on January 14, 1963, Kennedy declared "The spearpoint of aggression has been blunted in Vietnam"²³⁹

On May 18th the President noted that since World War II the U.S. has been the "keystone in the arch of freedom" and pledged to defend Vietnam.²⁴⁰ On September 26th, he declared again, "We are the keystone in the arch of freedom." He observed that U.S. freedom was tied to Vietnam's freedom.²⁴¹ On November 22nd, just hours before his tragic death, President Kennedy said, "We are still the keystone in the arch of freedom."²⁴² If withdrawing from Vietnam was the ultimate goal, the rhetoric that the President used seemed to cut-off options. Indeed, Kennedy recognized that he could not propose withdrawing from Vietnam until after the 1964 election.

Press Conferences:

Press conferences presented a challenge to President Kennedy's strategy not to draw attention to Vietnam. In press conferences, he could not control the questions that were asked, yet the war was a subject only infrequently raised by Washington reporters. He was asked thirty-six questions about Vietnam during his sixty-five press conferences. Kennedy's responses again reveal his strategy to downplay the U.S. role.²⁴³

On May 5th when asked about plans to introduce American troops, Kennedy downplayed the possibility. He emphasized that it was a decision that had not been made and was still under consideration.²⁴⁴ By the fall of 1961, Kennedy moved away from his strategy to downplay the possibility of sending troops. The October 11th press conference opened by announcing the Taylor-McNamara mission, but only one question focused on escalation. The President declined to answer.²⁴⁵

After Taylor and McNamara returned with a report, Kennedy opened the November 8th press announcing plans to review recommendations on sending troops. He did not want to be rushed into taking a public position on sending troops by a reporter's question and cut off questions. "I have no public announcement," he said.²⁴⁶

Privately, however, Kennedy preparations for introducing American forces were getting underway. In December 1961, the *U.S.S. Core*, an aircraft carrier arrived in Saigon with forty-seven helicopters and other material. Although the American public was not aware of what was taking place, reporters on the scene had little difficulty observing ships and equipment that towered over Saigon. Karnow grabbed a U.S. press officer and shouted, "Look at that carrier." In accordance with Kennedy's information policy, the officer squinted at the carrier and replied, "I don't see nothing."²⁴⁷

On January 15, 1962, Tom Wicker, the White House reporter for the *New York Times*, asked whether American troops were participating in combat. Kennedy looked at Wicker as if he was crazy and hastily said, "No." To avoid a follow-up question he quickly turned to another reporter for a question on another topic. Surprised by Kennedy's abruptness, Wicker never challenged the answer.²⁴⁸

Wicker later realized that the President's denial that U.S. troops took part in combat relied upon a technical distinction of the military's definition. Troops in combat fight in organized companies and battalions, rather than acting as battlefield advisers.²⁴⁹

The tactic of using language in a misleading way readily exploited the lack of knowledge among reporters in Washington.²⁵⁰ The lack of follow-up on Wicker's line of questioning reflected the fact that, in early 1962, Vietnam was not a highly salient issue for reporters covering the White House. This also reflected the culture of an era where presidents were considered truthful and reporters did not believe there was any reason to suspect that national security would be used for 'self-serving political purposes.'²⁵¹

At a press conference on January 31st, Kennedy emphasized again that U.S. troops only advised the Viet Cong.²⁵² Pressed again on February 7th, Kennedy replied, "We are out there on training and on transportation and we are assisting in every way we properly can." Kennedy's evasive response reflected his concern about publicly admitting the U.S. was violating the Geneva Accords.²⁵³

The President used a similar ploy when asked to respond to Republican charges that he was not being candid on February 14th. Once again, he emphasized that the U.S. provided only assistance and transportation. On March 14th, Kennedy faced another question about whether combat troops which he patiently denied.²⁵⁴

Nonetheless, offering advice and transportation in a combat zoned was hazardous. The April 11th press conference began with on a somber note announcing the death of four soldiers. Asked about what the U.S. planned to do in response, Kennedy compared the situation to the First and Second World War and Korea. "We cannot desist in Vietnam," he said.²⁵⁵

During the December 12th press conference, the final press conference of the year, a reporter asked about the pessimistic news stories on Vietnam. "So we don't see the end of the

tunnel,” Kennedy said, “but I must say I don’t think it is darker than it was a year ago, and in some ways lighter.”²⁵⁶

In 1963, the first question on Vietnam came on May 8th. A reporter asked why the United States had neutralized Laos and decided to take a stand in Vietnam. Kennedy explained that geography and history required the neutralization of Laos and taking a stand in Vietnam. Although this was the first day of the Buddhist Crisis, the lack of instantaneous communications technology protected Kennedy from having to respond to the problem immediately.²⁵⁷

During the next two press conferences reporters did not ask about Vietnam or the Buddhist Crisis. A reporter finally asked about the Buddhist Crisis on July 17th. Kennedy noted that political reforms were needed, but reaffirmed his commitment toward preventing the fall of Southeast Asia.²⁵⁸

There were three press conferences in August 1963, but no one asked about Vietnam again until September 12th. During the interim, Kennedy made statements in televised interviews on *CBS* and *NBC*, but failed to make his policy clear to all reporters. In the fifth question of the press conference a reporter asked for clarification of U.S. policy. Kennedy said, “We are not there to see the war lost.” When asked to offer suggestions for resolving the Buddhist Crisis, the President refused on the grounds that Lodge knew how to handle Diem. He deflected the question when asked whether U.S. policy was based upon inadequate information. “I think we are fortunate....to have Ambassador Lodge there,” he said.²⁵⁹

On October 9th, the President reported that the situation had not changed when asked whether Diem had plans to reform.²⁶⁰ Reporters did not ask Kennedy about Vietnam at the following press conference. At his final press conference on November 14th, a reporter asked

whether Harkins would be removed because he was identified with Diem, but Kennedy had no plans to change U.S. policy.

The President then recognized his first follow-up question on Vietnam and noted that the Honolulu conference would determine “what American policy should be, how we can intensify the struggle, how we can bring Americans out of there.”²⁶¹ He avoided revealing his own preferences because he preferred to wait until experts offered a solution. The tactic was a maneuver Kennedy frequently used to buy time and avoid committing himself to one course of action.

Nevertheless, the decision to announce that experts were studying the problem inevitably brought Vietnam more attention. President Kennedy had defined the question for future action in terms of what Americans should do, rather than the South Vietnamese. Relying upon experts also placed the power of interpreting the situation further away from the White House. The tactics were ill-considered and worked against the goal of downplaying the American role.

Naive Pragmatism:

By August 1963, it had become clear to President Kennedy that the strategy to downplay Vietnam had failed. Unpersuaded by the need to take American direction, Diem had become an annoying public relations problem. On August 26th, the President told advisers that Halberstam was running a political campaign comparable to the reporting of Herbert Matthews during the rise of Castro. In notes from the meeting Hilsman wrote, “Halberstam was a twenty-eight year old kid and he (the President) wanted assurances we were not giving him serious consideration in our decision.” Krulak wrote, “The President observed that Diem and his brother, however, repugnant in some respects, have done a great deal along the lines that we

desire and, when we move to eliminate this government, it should not be the result of *New York Times* pressure.”²⁶²

On August 29th the *New York Times* printed an article by Tad Szulc reporting that “officials in Washington believed the only solution for the Vietnam crisis was...a military coup.” The President read the article and called Hilsman. “We are not making any more press statements, are we?” he said. Hilsman did not confirm or deny his role.²⁶³

The overthrow of Diem was largely an exercise in Kennedy’s information strategy tactics. During the weeks leading up to the coup, the President brought attention to Vietnam by using television interviews during September 1963. The aforementioned interviews with anchors from *CBS* and *NBC* were done to inaugurate the expansion of televised news programs from fifteen minutes to a half hour. By the fall of 1963, he recognized the cresting tide of a new era of electronic communications and began to adjust his information strategy to move away from print reporters.

Kennedy explained his decision to Sidey, noting that the expansion of television news from a fifteen minute to a thirty minute format marked the end of an era where newspapers and magazines were the most important method for politicians to reach the public.²⁶⁴ In order to prepare the agenda for the interviews, the White House told reporters to expect a major statement on Vietnam. In preparation Salinger tried to plant a question with Cronkite. “You can go to hell, Pierre,” Cronkite said. “I’ll ask anything I want to ask.” “You’ll be sorry,” replied Salinger.²⁶⁵

Hilsman, Forrestal and Bundy prepared a memo with talking points for the Cronkite interview. The memo called for Kennedy to say, “our support for the people of South Vietnam against Communist aggressors will continue as long as it is wanted and can be effective.” : “It is important not to forget that President Diem has in the past given outstanding leadership to his

people at a time when many of those in the West who had the most experience in the country thought that everything was lost.” His aides also urged dismissing DeGaulle’s proposal for a negotiated settlement.²⁶⁶

The statement on Diem proposed by the President’s advisers was not aired during the interview with Cronkite. Kennedy’s statement on Diem was more forceful and he either rejected the less militant language or it was edited out. Salinger noted that the virtual ultimatum that eventually aired was accidental because editing left only critical remarks about Diem. This left the television audience with the wrong impression of the President’s full regard for Diem.²⁶⁷

To avoid being victimized by the editing process for the *NBC* interview, the White House insisted on having final approval over what segments would be broadcast.²⁶⁸ Apparently Kennedy rejected or overlooked the opportunity to include a strong statement of support for the Diem regime. But he emphasized his belief in the domino theory and the need to keep supporting Vietnam. “China...looms so high just beyond the frontiers,” he said.²⁶⁹ His use of television interviews leading up to the Diem assassination indicates that he either lacked media savvy or wanted to convey the impression that he did not support Diem.

Diem’s repressive tactics did not fit into the image of the war that the White House wanted to portray for the public in newspapers and magazines. He attracted critical attention that went against Kennedy’s strategy to downplay Vietnam. Removing him marked the culmination of the President’s effort to create leadership in Saigon that was acceptable to the American press. It also marked the beginning of a new chapter of deepening American involvement while postponing a public debate on whether the United States should escalate or withdraw.²⁷⁰

Kennedy was personally involved in overseeing the information strategy for the coup. He did not want U.S. officials talking to the press about antagonisms with Diem. He even called

officials when he was unhappy with news stories. In one instance, Kennedy called Hilsman over a story by Szulc on September 5th in the *New York Times*, entitled "Washington Officials Accuse Nhu of Blackmail." During his phone call to Hilsman, Kennedy said, "We can't have people saying U.S. officials are saying these kinds of things."²⁷¹

On September 11th the *New York Times* published an article by Reston entitled, "On Suppressing the News Instead of the Nhus." He criticized the White House handling of the Buddhist crisis and called for Kennedy to make public the CIA plan for Saigon. At a White House staff meeting, Bundy speculated that Kennedy would probably call a meeting about the Reston article. Bundy had talked to Reston on September 10th and failed to stop the story, but the columnist still supported the war. During a discussion of news coverage, Bundy commented that newspapers were actually giving Vietnam mild treatment under the circumstances.²⁷²

Krock published a column in the *New York Times* on September 22nd which called upon Kennedy to reexamine Vietnam policy. He noted that in the past Kennedy had urged a different approach to Southeast Asia. During a 1954 Senate speech Kennedy had declared: "To pour money, materiel and men into the jungles of Indochina without at least a remote prospect of victory would be dangerously futile and self-destructive." Kennedy demonstrated "perceptiveness" a decade earlier. Involvement in Vietnam now, however, had become the President's "fait accompli."²⁷³

On September 23rd the *New York Herald-Tribune* published a report by Higgins on the August 24th Cable. She revealed a coup plot to overthrow Diem and disagreement within the administration over whether U.S. policy should support the South Vietnamese generals. She did not report on Kennedy's role, but noted that Hilsman, Harriman and Lodge supported plans for the coup and drafted the cable while McNamara was out of town. On October 2, 1963, Higgins wrote a follow-up story which emphasized that the August 24th Cable was drafted and

sent to Vietnam while Kennedy, McNamara, Rusk, and McCone were out of town. She also reported that Lodge cabled back on August 25th that he would instruct the CIA to consult with the South Vietnamese generals. The hawkish Higgins was clearly not interested in the access that came with being one of Kennedy's tame reporters.²⁷⁴

The optimistic report of the Taylor-McNamara mission was released on October 2nd. The *New York Times* responded two days later in an editorial which declared, "Candor Needed on Vietnam." The *Times* criticized the administration's information policy, especially Kennedy's public relations tactic of making optimistic statements without providing substantiating information. The editors argued that Vietnam was a guerrilla war and America could expect a prolonged war of attrition rather than a quick victory. They called upon Kennedy to be more candid with the public, arguing that an informed public was needed to support a drawn-out war.²⁷⁵

By October it was clear that the overthrow of Diem would not solve the public relations problem. "Reporters have unlimited ways of getting material in this city," Lodge reminded Bundy. Lodge realized that reporters needed something to write everyday and the U.S. mission already had trouble finding small stories that would keep reporters from "trying to ferret out the big story."²⁷⁶ Nevertheless, the administration never realized that the press problem would remain after the coup.

In the fall of 1963, the big story was the intrigue leading up to the coup that assassinated Diem on November 2nd. Kennedy downplayed the coup. Richard Phillips, a State Department spokesman, gave the administration's reaction on November 1st. "I can categorically state that the U.S. government was not in any way involved in this coup attempt." A week later, the next public comment came from Rusk at a press conference where he declared the new regime in Vietnam would increase the war effort against the Viet Cong.

In the aftermath of the coup, an angry Higgins contacted Hilsman on behalf of Madame Nhu in order to make arrangements for the safety of her children. "Congratulations, Roger. How does it feel to have blood on your hands?" Higgins said. "Oh, come on now, Maggie. Revolutions are tough. People get hurt," Hilsman replied.²⁷⁷

The resident reporters in Saigon did not aggressively question whether the American government had participated in the coup. Halberstam reported that the coup had created a "sense of joy" in Saigon. He did not write that American officials had been told by the Vietnamese generals that they did not want the U.S. to interfere.

In Washington, journalists reported the official Kennedy line and found unity in what administration officials were telling the press. This resulted from his decision to keep knowledge of the coup within the administration on a "need-to-know" basis. The White House did not want knowledge of the coup to leak from divisions within the administration.²⁷⁸ Nonetheless, Rusk noted in a cable on to the U.S. mission that the "gory details" were causing shock in the United States.²⁷⁹

As Sidey later wrote the President "braced" for the coup, but wanted the Nhus to have safe passage out of Vietnam.²⁸⁰ The White House became responsible for the coup, whether intended or not. "Perhaps the USG has here evolved a way of not being everywhere saddled with the responsibility for autocratic governments simply because they are anti-Communist," Lodge noted in a cable to the President on November 6th. He noted that with Kennedy's information strategy "the coup seed grew into a robust plant...the coup would not have happened (as) it did without our preparation."²⁸¹ "Indeed, Kennedy himself had set the stage for the coup," Sidey admitted.²⁸²

The President immediately acknowledged the possible effect on future policy in Vietnam: "we necessarily faced and accepted the possibility that our position might encourage a change

in government. We thus have a responsibility to help this government.”²⁸³ Yet, the President was simultaneously considering withdrawing at the Honolulu Conference. Amidst the apparent confusion, Reston’s column in the *Times* that day offered the White House guidance. “Why a Truce in Korea and Not in Vietnam?” he asked.²⁸⁴

Reston wrote another article calling for a negotiated settlement in Vietnam in the *New York Times* on November 10th. White House aides worried about Reston’s proposal. Hilsman’s assistant suggested having the President make a statement in his November 14th press conference that there was nothing to negotiate. He also advised having Kennedy contact the *New York Times* to “set them straight.”²⁸⁵

Forrestal met with Bob Kleiman of the *Times* editorial board. Kleiman suggested reconvening the Geneva Conference to negotiate a settlement. Forrestal argued that the White House wanted to withdraw after Saigon was able to stand up to Hanoi on its own. “Kleiman will no doubt continue to peddle his Geneva Conference idea,” Forrestal reported, “and we should be preparing ourselves to counter it.”²⁸⁶

The President Kennedy responded at his November 14th press conference. He said U.S. policy was “to bring Americans home...when the assault from the...north, is ended.”²⁸⁷ According to former advisers, the strategy was to withdraw after the 1964 election. Nevertheless, Schlesinger later recorded that Kennedy “was vaguely searching for a nonmilitary solution — vaguely because Vietnam was still a sideshow.”²⁸⁸

Naive pragmatism allowed Kennedy to remain ambivalent about military intervention to stop Communism without paying the full cost. He wanted to preserve options with managed conflict, but his statements compared Vietnam to World War II and Korea and promised victory. For President Kennedy’s image the cost of withdrawing after the 1964 election would be high. Indeed, it meant facing critics who would point to his powerlessness against

Communism in Vietnam and a willingness to risk the lives of American soldiers to recapture the White House.

The behind-the-scenes decision not to oppose the coup expanded American involvement rapidly by connecting the White House to the birth of a new regime. Boxed in by public statements and behind-the-scenes actions, the President remained ambivalent, but dismissed Reston's plea for a negotiated settlement and talked about withdrawing only when South Vietnam could fend for itself. "Oh well, just think of what we'll pass on to the poor fellow who comes after me," Kennedy once joked in better times.²⁸⁹ His tragic murder left President Johnson with the question of determining how the U.S. could leave Vietnam.

Notes

¹Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy 1963, (hereafter cited as PPJFK63), (Washington, DC: 1964), pp.650-653; Richard Reeves, Profile of Power, (New York, NY: 1993), p. 586.

²PPJFK63, pp.559-660.

³Walter W. Rostow, The Diffusion of Power: An essay in Recent History,(New York, 1972), pp.264-266.

⁴Arthur Schlesinger, A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House, (New York, 1965), p.163; Edward C. Keefer, Editor, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963 Vol. XXIV: Laos Crisis, (hereafter cited as FRUS 61-63 XXIV), p.19.

⁵ Schlesinger, Thousand Days, p.332.

⁶FRUS 61-63 XXIV, p.80. Thompson assured Khrushchev that Kennedy was sincere. He reported, "Khrushchev replied US Declaration on Neutral Laos appears new an differs agreeably from position US adhered to before in its attitude toward neutralist policies of individual states."

⁷ FRUS 61-63 XXIV, pp.80-83.

⁸ Thomas G. Patterson, J. Gary Clifford and Kenneth Hagan, American Foreign Relations: A History Since 1895, Fourth Edition, (Lexington, MA: 1995),pp.402-406.

⁹ Schlesinger, Thousand Days, pp.333-334.

¹⁰John M. Newman, JFK and Vietnam: Deception, Intrigue, and the Struggle for Power, (New York, 1992), p.12.

¹¹ Hugh Sidey, John F. Kennedy, President, (New York, 1964), p.84.

¹² Norman Hannah, The Key to Failure: Laos and the Vietnam War, (Maryland, 1989), pp.12-13.

¹³Schlesinger, Thousand Days, pp.336-337; Richard Nixon, "Cuba, Castro and John F. Kennedy," Reader's Digest, November 1964.

¹⁴ Hannah, Key to Failure, pp.12-13.

¹⁵William J. Rust, Kennedy in Vietnam, (New York, 1985), p.34.

¹⁶General Roswell Gilpatric Oral History (hereafter cited as OH) John Kennedy Library (hereafter cited as JFKL), pp.16-19.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp.43-44.

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- ¹⁸ Reeves, Profile of Power, p.119.
- ¹⁹ George Reedy, Lyndon B. Johnson: A Memoir, (New York, 1982), p.147.
- ²⁰ The Senator Gravel Edition, The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of United States Decisionmaking on Vietnam Vol II, (hereafter cited as PP), (Boston, MA: 1972), p.60.
- ²¹ William Conrad Gibbons, The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships Part II 1961-1964, (Washington, D.C.: 1985).pp.70-71.
- ²² Newman, JFK and Vietnam, pp.83-84.
- ²³ Walt Rostow OH, JFKL, p.81.
- ²⁴ Rostow, Diffusion of Power, p.278.
- ²⁵ Gilpatric OH, JFKL, pp.19-20; James Giglio, The Presidency of John F. Kennedy, (Lawrence, Kansas: 1991),p.243.
- ²⁶ Ibid., pp.19-20.
- ²⁷ PP, p.72.
- ²⁸ Schlesinger, Thousand Days, p.544; Newman, JFK and Vietnam, p.115.
- ²⁹ Roger Hilsman, To Move A Nation: The Politics of Foreign Policy in the Administration of John F. Kennedy, (Garden City, NY: 1967), p.424.
- ³⁰ David Halberstam, The Best and the Brightest, (New York, 1972), pp.46-49.
- ³¹ Rust, Kennedy in Vietnam, pp.31-34.
- ³² Reeves, Profile of Power, p.242.
- ³³ Ibid., pp.259-260.
- ³⁴ Rust, Kennedy in Vietnam, pp.31-34.
- ³⁵ PP, p.117.
- ³⁶ Schlesinger, Thousand Days, p.547.
- ³⁷ Ibid., p.547.
- ³⁸ Hilsman, To Move A Nation, p.424.
- ³⁹ Theodore Sorensen, Kennedy, (New York, 1965), p.654.

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- ⁴⁰ John Mecklin, Mission in Torment: An Intimate Account of the U.S. Role in Vietnam, (Garden City, NY: 1967), pp.105-106; Giglio, John F. Kennedy, p.245.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., p.245.
- ⁴² Chester Cooper OH, JFKL pp.48-49. Cooper noted that the problems on the battlefield were exacerbated by the fact that the U.S. was training the South Vietnamese in conventional tactics for a Korean type of war. The South Vietnamese were not trained in guerrilla tactics until early 1962 after a reassessment in the Kennedy administration led to the conclusion that it was a waste of resources to station troops in fixed positions along the 17th parallel.
- ⁴³ Newman, JFK and Vietnam, p.236.
- ⁴⁴ Leann Grabavoy Almquist, Joseph Alsop and American Foreign Policy: The Journalist as Advocate, (Lanham, MD: 1993), pp.101-103; see also Galbraith to John F. Kennedy, March 2, 1962, John K. Galbraith, Ambassador's Journal, (Boston, MA: 1969), pp. 279-281, 420.
- ⁴⁵ Newman, JFK and Vietnam, p.236.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid., p.236.
- ⁴⁷ Hannah, Key to Failure, p.14.
- ⁴⁸ Newman, JFK and Vietnam, pp.236-237.
- ⁴⁹ Gary R. Hess, "Kennedy's Vietnam Options and Decisions," in David Anderson et al. Shadow on the White House: Presidents and the Vietnam War 1945-1975, (Lawrence, Kansas: 1993), p.75; Public Papers of the President of the United States: John F. Kennedy 1962, (hereafter cited as PPJFK62), (Washington, D.C.: 1963), pp. 194-203.
- ⁵⁰ Robert Manning, Swamproot Chronicle, (New York, 1992), p.266.
- ⁵¹ Schlesinger, One Thousand Days, p.695.
- ⁵² Lloyd C. Gardner, Pay Any Price: Lyndon Johnson and the Wars for Vietnam, (Chicago, Illinois: 1995), pp.70-71.
- ⁵³ Hess, "Kennedy's Vietnam Options and Decisions," p.76.
- ⁵⁴ Kenneth O'Donnell and David Powers with David McCarthy, "Johnny We Hardly Knew Ye." Memories of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, (Boston, MA: 1972), pp14-15.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., pp.15-16.
- ⁵⁶ William Prochnau, Once Upon a Distant War, (New York, 1995), p.303.
- ⁵⁷ Louis Harris, Anguish of Change, (New York, 1973), p.54.

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- ⁵⁸ George Ball OH Box 1, Kern and Levring Papers JFKL, p.3.
- ⁵⁹ Rust, Kennedy in Vietnam, pp.106-107.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., pp.114-115.
- ⁶¹ Ibid., p.119.
- ⁶² Ibid., pp.123-124; FRUS 61-63 IV, p.17.
- ⁶³ FRUS 61-63 IV, p.p20-21.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid., pp.33-34.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid., pp.35-36.
- ⁶⁶ Harris, Anguish of Change, p.54.
- ⁶⁷ Robert McNamara, In Retrospect: The Tragedies and Lessons of Vietnam, (New York, 1995), p.62.
- ⁶⁸ Manning, Swamproot Chronicle, p.275.
- ⁶⁹ Chalmers Roberts, First Rough Draft: A Journalist's Journal of Our Times, (New York, 1973), p.221. Roberts noted, "The net of all this is evident: by October 1963, there was a desire to get out of Veitnam, but there was no plan to do so other than by winning the war."
- ⁷⁰ FRUS 61-63 IV, pp.336-346.
- ⁷¹ Ibid., pp.336-346.
- ⁷² Ibid., pp.350-354,
- ⁷³ Ibid., p.379.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid., p.472.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid., pp.500-501.
- ⁷⁶ McNamara, In Retrospect, pp.83-84; A detailed account of the coup is available in Geoffrey Warner, "The United States and the Fall of Diem, Australian Outlook, December 1974, Vol. 28, pp.245-258; also Ellen J. Hammer, A Death in November : America in Vietnam, 1963, (New York : E.P. Dutton, 1987).
- ⁷⁷ Ibid., pp.83-84.
- ⁷⁸ O'Donnell, "Hardly Knew Ye," 1972, p.18.

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- ⁷⁹ PP, p.223
- ⁸⁰ Roberts, First Rough Draft, p.222.
- ⁸¹ Harris, Anguish of Change, p.54.
- ⁸² Ibid., p.55.
- ⁸³ PP, p.165.
- ⁸⁴ Leslie Gelb, Richard Betts, The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked, (Washington D.C.: 1979),p.222.
- ⁸⁵ David Halberstam, The Powers That Be, (New York, NY: Alfred Knopf, 1979).p.449.
- ⁸⁶ Joseph Alsop OH, JFKL, p. 24.
- ⁸⁷ Giglio, John F. Kennedy, p.241,
- ⁸⁸ Gibbons, U.S. Government and the Vietnam War, pp.56-57.
- ⁸⁹ Ibid., pp.56-57.
- ⁹⁰ Ibid., pp.56-57.
- ⁹¹ Sorensen, Kennedy, p.656.
- ⁹² Pierre Salinger OH, JFKL, pp.157-158.
- ⁹³ PP, p.127.
- ⁹⁴ Roberts, First Rough Draft, p.195. One hundred fifty soldiers were killed in Vietnam while Kennedy was in office.
- ⁹⁵ Schlesinger, One Thousand Days, pp.506-509.
- ⁹⁶ Pierre Salinger, With Kennedy, (Garden City, NY: 1966), p.320.
- ⁹⁷ William M. Hammond, Public Affairs, The Military and the Media: 1962-1968, (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History United States Army, 1988), p.12.
- ⁹⁸ Salinger, With Kennedy, p.320.
- ⁹⁹ Ibid., p.320.
- ¹⁰⁰ Arthur Krock, The Consent of the Governed, (Boston, MA: 1971), p.68, p.127; Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Eighty Seventh Congress Second Session

Vol. XIV, (Washington D.C.: 1986), p.195, pp.811-817; Prochnau, Once Upon a Distant War, p.20.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p.20; pp.40-41; Hammond, Public Affairs the Military, pp.16-17; Mecklin, Mission in Torment, p. 115.

¹⁰² Executive Sessions Vol. XIV,p.200.

¹⁰³ Prochnau, Once Upon a Distant War, p.41.

¹⁰⁴ Executive Sessions Vol. XIV,pp.811-817.

¹⁰⁵ Prochnau, Once Upon a Distant War, p.321.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p.321.

¹⁰⁷ Hammond, Public Affairs, The Military, p.11.

¹⁰⁸ John P. Glennon, Editor, Foreign Relations of the United States 1961-1963 Volume II (hereafter cited as FRUS 61-63 II), (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), Document 62, p.129-132.

¹⁰⁹ FRUS 61-63 II, p.129-132.

¹¹⁰ Carl Rowan, Breaking Barriers: A Memoir, (Boston, MA: 1991),pp.211-213.

¹¹¹ FRUS 61-63 II, p.129-132.

¹¹² Rowan, Breaking Barriers, pp.211-213.

¹¹³ Ibid., pp.211-213.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., pp.211-214. On February 18th, Rowan presented the guidelines in Honolulu at a Secretary of Defense conference on Vietnam. Harkins, the commander of the Military Assistance Command in Vietnam, read Rowan's proposal for maximum feasible cooperation and did not raise any objections because its vague language codified already existing policy. Kennedy's tactic to let the disgruntled Rowan write the rules paid off because he felt satisfied with his accomplishment at the end of the conference. Two months later, Kennedy showed his appreciation by transferring Rowan away from Vietnam to work in the UN with Adlai Stevenson and finally to the post of Ambassador to Finland.

¹¹⁵ Hammond, Public Affairs, The Military, p.15.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., pp.16-17

¹¹⁷ Ibid.,p.21.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p.12.

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- ¹¹⁹U.S. News and World Report September 12, 1966, "Salinger Tells How Kennedy Tried to Hide Vietnam Build-Up," p.103.
- ¹²⁰Salinger, With Kennedy, pp.393-399.
- ¹²¹FRUS 61-63 II, pp.158-160.
- ¹²²Salinger, With Kennedy, pp.323-324.
- ¹²³Reeves, Profile of Power, pp.253-254.
- ¹²⁴Ibid., pp.253-254.
- ¹²⁵Ibid., p.426; McNamara, In Retrospect (New York, 1996); Halberstam, Best and the Brightest, pp.71-72.
- ¹²⁶Howard B. Schaeffer, Chester Bowles: New Dealer in the Cold War, (Cambridge, MA: 1993), Chapters 10 and 11.
- ¹²⁷Reeves, Profile of Power, p.72; Halberstam, Best and Brightest, p.27; Schlesinger, One Thousand Days, pp.461-464, pp.831-836.
- ¹²⁸Halberstam, The Best and the Brightest, p.25.
- ¹²⁹Ibid., pp.27-28.
- ¹³⁰Ibid., pp.32-37; James T. Patterson, Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974, (New York, 1996), p.459.
- ¹³¹Ibid., p.28, pp.30-32, pp.50-63.
- ¹³²Reeves, Profile of Power, p.17.
- ¹³³Halberstam, Best and Brightest, p.43.
- ¹³⁴Arthur Schlesinger, Robert Kennedy and His Times, (New York, 1978), p.705, p.707.
- ¹³⁵Prochnau, Once Upon A Distant War, Chapters 1 and 2.
- ¹³⁶Playboy Interview, "Walter Cronkite: A Candid Conversation with America's Most Trusted Television Newsmen," *Playboy*, June 1973 pp.67-96.
- ¹³⁷Prochnau, Once Upon A Distant War, pp.293-297.
- ¹³⁸Hammond, Public Affairs. The Military, pp.16-17
- ¹³⁹Ibid., pp.17-21.

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- ¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p.16.
- ¹⁴¹ Ibid., pp.664-667.
- ¹⁴² Mecklin, Mission in Torment, p.1.
- ¹⁴³ Ibid., pp.99-109.
- ¹⁴⁴ Ibid., pp.100-115. Mecklin noted, "The state of mind in both Washington and Saigon tended to close out reason. The policy of support for Diem became an article of faith, and dissent became reprehensible"
- ¹⁴⁵ Salinger, With Kennedy, p.325.
- ¹⁴⁶ Manning, Swamproot Chronicle, p.268.
- ¹⁴⁷ Robert Manning OH, JFKL, p.21.
- ¹⁴⁸ Manning, Swamproot Chronicle, p.268.
- ¹⁴⁹ Ibid., pp.269-270.
- ¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p.22.
- ¹⁵¹ Ibid., pp.19-25.
- ¹⁵² Ibid., p.20.
- ¹⁵³ Ibid., p.271.
- ¹⁵⁴ Manning OH, p.22.
- ¹⁵⁵ Manning, Swamproot Chronicle, p.273.
- ¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p.274.
- ¹⁵⁷ Sperber, Murrow, pp.668-669.
- ¹⁵⁸ Hammond, Public Affairs, The Military, p.29.
- ¹⁵⁹ Prochanau, Once Upon a Distant War, pp.180-184.
- ¹⁶⁰ Ibid., pp.180-184.
- ¹⁶¹ Sperber, Murrow, pp.668-671.
- ¹⁶² Benjamin Bradlee, Conversations with Kennedy, (New York, 1975),p.58.

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- ¹⁶³ Ibid., p.155-156.
- ¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p155-156.
- ¹⁶⁵ Reeves, Profile of Power, pp.484-485.
- ¹⁶⁶ Ibid., pp.484-485.
- ¹⁶⁷ Ibid., pp.236-237.
- ¹⁶⁸ Schlesinger, Thousand Days, p.544.
- ¹⁶⁹ Ibid., pp.369-371.
- ¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p.375; Arthur Krock, "Warning to Kremlin: Aides Suggest Kennedy Tell Soviet that the U.S. Will Not Back Down," *The New York Times*, May 7, 1961.
- ¹⁷¹ Arthur Krock, "I've Seen the best of It," Memoirs, (New York, 1968), pp.357-359.
- ¹⁷² Arthur Krock, "The Nation," *The New York Times*, October 19, 1961.
- ¹⁷³ Alsop OH, pp.100-102.
- ¹⁷⁴ Reeves, Profile of Power, pp.172-173.
- ¹⁷⁵ Joseph Alsop OH, Box 1 Kern and Levring Papers JFKL, p.9.
- ¹⁷⁶ Reeves, Profile of Power, pp.172-173.
- ¹⁷⁷ James Reston, Deadline: A Memoir, (New York, NY: 1991), see chapter on Kennedy years.
- ¹⁷⁸ Gibbons, U.S. Government and the Vietnam War, pp.109-110.
- ¹⁷⁹ Peter Arnett, "Reflections on Vietnam and the Press," *Nieman Reports*, March 1972 pp.6-8.
- ¹⁸⁰ Reeves, Profile of Power, p.282.
- ¹⁸¹ Prochanau, Once Upon A Distant War, p.355.
- ¹⁸² Reston, Deadline, p.316.
- ¹⁸³ James Baughman, Henry Luce and the Rise of the American News Media, (Boston, MA: 1987) p.187.
- ¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p.187.
- ¹⁸⁵ Reston, Deadline, p.315.

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- ¹⁸⁶ Salinger, With Kennedy, p.325.
- ¹⁸⁷ FRUS 61-63 IV, pp.277-278.
- ¹⁸⁸ FRUS 61-63 IV, pp.277-278.
- ¹⁸⁹ Reston, Deadline, p.315.
- ¹⁹⁰ James Aronson, The Press and the Cold War, (New York, NY: 1970), pp.202-203.
- ¹⁹¹ Donald Wilson OH, JFKL, pp.81-82.
- ¹⁹² Dean Rusk OH, JFKL, pp.63-65.
- ¹⁹³ Hammond, Public Affairs, The Military, p.33.
- ¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p.35.
- ¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p.35.
- ¹⁹⁶ Neil Sheehan, A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam, (New York, 1988), p.236, p.277, pp.280-281.
- ¹⁹⁷ Stanley Karnow, Vietnam: A History, 2nd Edition, (New York, 1991), p.278.
- ¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p.37; Gerald S. Strober and Deborah H. Strober, "Let Us begin Anew" An Oral History of the Kennedy Presidency, (New York, NY: 1993),p.402; see also Neil Sheehan, A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam, (New York, NY: 1988).
- ¹⁹⁹ FRUS 61-63 III, pp.2-3.
- ²⁰⁰ Ibid., pp.98-102.
- ²⁰¹ Ibid., pp.263-264.
- ²⁰² Ibid., pp.263-264.
- ²⁰³ Ibid., pp.473-530.
- ²⁰⁴ Ibid., pp.263-264.
- ²⁰⁵ Hammond, Public Affairs, The Military, p.38.
- ²⁰⁶ Ibid., pp.45-46.
- ²⁰⁷ Ibid., pp.39-41.
- ²⁰⁸ Ibid., pp.42-44.

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- ²⁰⁹ FRUS 61-63 III, pp.531-543.
- ²¹⁰ Reeves, Profile of Power, 1993, p.448.
- ²¹¹ Prochanau, Once Upon A Distant War, p.349.
- ²¹² Ibid., p.350.
- ²¹³ Russ Braley, Bad News: The Foreign Policy of The New York Times, (Chicago, Illinois: 1984),pp.226-227.
- ²¹⁴ Joseph Alsop, "I've Seen the Best of It." Memoirs, (New York, 1992),p.459.
- ²¹⁵ Aronson, The Press and the Cold War, pp.202-203.
- ²¹⁶ Prochanau, Once Upon A Distant War, p.413.
- ²¹⁷ Alsop, "I've Seen the Best of It." p.462. Alsop later thought this may have influenced the approach Kennedy and other officials used toward Diem, but was not sure that he deserved all the credit.
- ²¹⁸ Joseph Alsop OH Box 1, Kern and Levering Papers, JFKL, p.10.
- ²¹⁹ Arthur Krock, Memoirs: Sixty Years on the Frontline, (New York, NY: Funk and Wagnalls, 1968), pp.357-35;pp.370-371.
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- ²²¹ Prochanau, Once Upon A Distant War, p.418.
- ²²² Almquist, Joseph Alsop, pp.101-103
- ²²³ Ibid., pp.101-103
- ²²⁴ Prochanau, Once Upon A Distant War, p.450.
- ²²⁵ Ibid., p.418.
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- ²²⁷ Ibid., p.56.
- ²²⁸ Aronson, Press and the Cold War, pp.196-197.
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- ²³² Braley, Bad News, pp.224-225.
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- ²³⁴ FRUS 61-63 III, pp.621-625.
- ²³⁵ Montague Kern, Patricia and Ralph Levering, The Kennedy Crises: The Press, The Presidency and Foreign Policy, (Chapel Hill, NC: 1983) pp.143-144 refers to Neustadt Memorandum for Theodore Sorensen, "Subject: The President's Next TV Address," 27 October 1962, Box 36, Sorensen Papers, JFKL.
- ²³⁶ PPJFK61, pp.304-306.
- ²³⁷ PPJFK62, pp.5-15.
- ²³⁸ Ibid., pp.695-698.
- ²³⁹ PPJFK63, pp.11-19.
- ²⁴⁰ Ibid., pp.412-413.
- ²⁴¹ Ibid., pp.727-730.
- ²⁴² Ibid., pp.888-890.
- ²⁴³ see Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy 1961-1963
- ²⁴⁴ PPJFK61, pp.354-362.
- ²⁴⁵ Ibid., pp.656-664.
- ²⁴⁶ Ibid., pp.701-709.
- ²⁴⁷ Karnow, Vietnam: A History, 2nd Edition, pp.253-254.
- ²⁴⁸ Tom Wicker, On Press, (New York, NY: 1978),pp.92-93.
- ²⁴⁹ Ibid., pp.92-93.
- ²⁵⁰ Sorensen, Kennedy, p.656.
- ²⁵¹ Wicker, On Press, pp.92-93.
- ²⁵² PPJFK62, pp. 90-98.
- ²⁵³ Ibid., pp.120-127.

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- ²⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 134-141; pp.225-232.
- ²⁵⁵ Ibid., pp.315-322.
- ²⁵⁶ Ibid., pp.866-874.
- ²⁵⁷ PPJFK63, pp.372-379.
- ²⁵⁸ PPJFK63, pp.566-574.
- ²⁵⁹ Ibid., pp.672-679.
- ²⁶⁰ Ibid., p.770.
- ²⁶¹ Ibid., pp.845-853.
- ²⁶² FRUS 61-63 IV, pp.638-641.
- ²⁶³ Ibid., pp.25-26, p.184.
- ²⁶⁴ Halberstam, Best and the Brightest, pp.361-362; Levering, Crisis Years, p.166.
- ²⁶⁵ Reeves, Profile of Power, p. 586.
- ²⁶⁶ FRUS 61-63 IV, Telegram from the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to the President, at Hyannis Port, Massachusetts, September 1, 1963.
- ²⁶⁷ Salinger, With Kennedy, p.114.
- ²⁶⁸ Ibid., p.114.
- ²⁶⁹ PPJFK63, pp.658-659.
- ²⁷⁰ Ibid., pp.204-206.
- ²⁷¹ Ibid., pp.111-112.
- ²⁷² Ibid., pp.87-88.
- ²⁷³ Arthur Krock, "U.S. Policy in Asia: Kennedy's Different Approaches to Diem and Sukarno Examined," *The New York Times*, September 22, 1963, p.E11.
- ²⁷⁴ Braley, Bad News, p.p230-231.
- ²⁷⁵ "Candor Needed on Vietnam," *The New York Times*, October 4, 1963, p.34.
- ²⁷⁶ FRUS 61-63 IV, pp.384-385.

²⁷⁷ Marguerite Higgins, Our Vietnam Nightmare, (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1965), p.225.

²⁷⁸ Levering, Kennedy Crises, pp.186-187; FRUS 61-63 III, pp.638-641; This meeting discussed the August 24, 1963 cable to Lodge. The notes indicate that at the end of the meeting, "The President then stated that the matters discussed in the room should be kept in the minimum number."

²⁷⁹ FRUS 61-63, Vol. IV, pp.550-551.

²⁸⁰ Sidey, John F. Kennedy, p.419.

²⁸¹ Gibbons, U.S. Government and the Vietnam War, pp.204-205.

²⁸² Sidey, John F. Kennedy, p.419.

²⁸³ Ibid., pp.204-205.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ O'Donnell, "Hardly Knew Ye." p.472; McNamara, In Retrospect, pp.95-96; Sorensen, The Kennedy Legacy, (New York, 1969), pp.204-214; Schlesinger, Robert Kennedy and His Times, p.709, pp.722. According to Schlesinger, "He still supposed that he had plenty of time for maneuver..... Kennedy had proved his manhood in the Solomon Islands and did not have to prove it again."

²⁸⁹ Sorensen, Kennedy, p.294.

Chapter Five

The Flight of the Eagle and the Dove:

Kennedy's Nuclear Policy for Berlin and the Test Ban

John F. Kennedy had been elected in 1960 after promising to put an end to the missile gap with the Soviet Union. “Kennedy charged that President Eisenhower had neglected our nuclear defenses and that, as a result, the Soviet Union had achieved numerical superiority in the most modern of offensive weapons,” recalled Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara.¹

Upon taking office, however, McNamara conducted a personal investigation to resolve the controversy resulting from differences of interpretation in intelligence reports. By the first week of February, McNamara concluded: “There was a gap — but it was in our favor!” Scheduled to meet the press that day for the first time, McNamara told reporters that the missile gap actually favored the United States. Upon hearing the news, the reporters scrambled to file stories for the afternoon papers. Inexperienced in dealing with journalists, McNamara had been told in advance that the meeting was “on background,” but did not understand the ground rules meant reporters could publish everything without attributing the source.²

The following day, Kennedy awoke to see McNamara’s news on the front page of the *New York Times*. McNamara thereupon offered Kennedy his resignation. “We’re in a helluva mess, but we all put our foot in our mouth once in a while,” Kennedy said. “Just forget it. It’ll blow over.”³ He decided not to repudiate McNamara in public knowing it would cause further debate over national security policy. Privately, Kennedy impressed upon McNamara that he was not angry. His instinct was to continue military studies of the problem and ride out

whatever controversy the Secretary's comments caused, rather than offering political opponents the public spectacle of McNamara's firing.⁴

For Kennedy, the missile gap controversy was secondary to his strong commitment to changing national security doctrine from Eisenhower's heavy reliance upon nuclear weapons. The flexible response strategic doctrine proposed to reduce the risk of nuclear war, but required a large military buildup to provide a larger menu of conventional options. In Berlin, Eisenhower's strategic doctrine seemed to leave Kennedy with a choice between "holocaust or humiliation" if Khrushchev decided to advance.⁵ At a meeting on April 6, 1961, obviously reluctant to respond with nuclear weapons, Kennedy asked, "What made him hold off?" : "Was it the danger of Western response?" Charles Bohlen replied that Khrushchev probably did not think Berlin was worth the risk. "In addition, the China thing was forcing Khrushchev to be more militant. He was being outflanked by his left."⁶

Throughout the Kennedy years, the Soviet Union and China competed for influence over Communist nations in the Third World. Khrushchev faced domestic pressure to increase Soviet military spending and criticism from the Chinese for allegedly being soft against the West. China was also developing a nuclear weapons program despite Khrushchev's preference to keep Beijing under the Soviet nuclear umbrella. Sino-Soviet tension soon caused hostile rhetoric between the two nations and sporadic fighting along shared borders. China's nuclear program alarmed Kennedy, who believed a test ban treaty would help slow proliferation. By 1963, Kennedy recognized that Sino-Soviet tension meant there was a split in international communism, and so he sought to use the test ban treaty to prevent the Soviets from giving nuclear technology to Beijing.⁷

At the time of Kennedy's inauguration, negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union for a test ban treaty and further arms control measures had been ongoing since 1955. In August 1958, the United States and the Soviet Union had informally agreed to a moratorium on all nuclear testing. Although informal and unsigned, the agreement was

considered a crucial first step toward a formalized comprehensive test ban. The main obstacle to a formal treaty was ongoing disagreement regarding verification and inspection of small underground tests with seismic equipment.⁸

From the outset of Kennedy's presidency a comprehensive test ban treaty stood as a priority on his diplomatic agenda, but only if it did not compromise American security. Electoral success during a meteoric ascent through the ranks of American politics to become the first Catholic and youngest president of the United States fueled self-assured ambitions in foreign policy. The New Frontier represented the administration's youthful spirit and confident determination to re-ignite the engine of American foreign policy to get the country moving again. Shortly after taking office, a cocksure, yet inexperienced, president anxiously scheduled a summit with Khrushchev in June 1961, believing a strong personal touch would produce diplomatic breakthroughs for a test ban treaty that had eluded Eisenhower's seasoned effort.

The initial military buildup required by the New Frontier's change in U.S. strategic doctrine, however, actually increased Cold War tensions between the United States and Soviet Union, which at least for the first two years negatively affected arms control negotiations. The President viewed the 1960s as a decade when the threat of advancing Communism would present a series of challenges throughout the world. His approach to achieving an arms control agreement was shaped by the assumption that it was necessary to demonstrate toughness to Khrushchev by contesting Communism throughout the world. The New Frontier responded to apparent Communist flash points by offering military assistance and foreign aid to regimes in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia. Berlin overshadowed other Communist threats, however, by functioning in the President's mind as a Cold War hair-trigger where Soviet action against American interests could ignite nuclear war. Ultimately, Kennedy believed American toughness would make the Soviets back down in Berlin and thus become interested in arms control negotiations as a pragmatic first step toward a diplomatic resolution of differences.⁹

The approach the President adopted toward Khrushchev in his inaugural address stressed a firm stand against Communism while leaving the door open for diplomacy. Kennedy promised to 'bear any burden' and 'pay any price' to prevent the spread of Communism and maintain the status quo, but did not pledge to launch a rollback campaign. The young president, especially after the Bay of Pigs fiasco, wanted a man-to-man talk with Khrushchev to spell out that the U.S. was prepared to defend vital interests. The New Frontier's approach to the Soviet Premier reflected Kennedy's perception of the Cold War as a personal test of manhood. Following machismo logic, Kennedy concluded that arms control and a test ban treaty were not possible until he had the Soviet leader's respect. "I have to show him that we can be as tough as he is....I'll have to sit down with him, and let him see who he's dealing with," Kennedy told aides.¹⁰

Upon taking office, the President faced strong pressure to resume nuclear testing from his military and scientific experts. Soon after the inauguration, his National Security Adviser, McGeorge Bundy, reported that during Eisenhower's final year in office the Atomic Energy Commission had conducted clandestine experiments exploding chemicals to produce "very small -but rapid- nuclear reactions.....miniature versions of real atomic explosion"¹¹ Persuaded by the political and military arguments, Kennedy approved additional experiments.¹²

In May 1961, again under urging from advisers, the President announced U.S. plans for the resumption of nuclear weapons testing if progress was not forthcoming in the resumption of talks at Geneva.¹³ Kennedy wanted to build a psychological case to put public pressure on the Soviets for a test ban treaty and postpone testing until it could be justified by an international crisis.¹⁴ He told the National Security Council that world opinion opposed further testing and the U.S. would need a public relations plan in the event testing resumed.¹⁵

The President's confident attempt at personal diplomacy with Khrushchev in June 1961 failed to resolve the differences over the test ban treaty. "But what about Allen Dulles?" the Soviet Premier responded to questions about inspection. The Soviet leader proposed a troika

inspection system with U.S. and Soviet representatives on a committee with veto power over proposed inspections. He also demanded settlement of the Berlin question and threatened to sign a separate peace treaty with East Germany. But Kennedy firmly held his ground and made it clear that he was prepared for a showdown.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the President left Vienna psychologically threatened and determined to prove his manhood to the Soviet Premier: Kennedy could not be bullied into public compromises with Communists. He believed that the Bay of Pigs had taught Khrushchev the wrong lesson, mainly that Kennedy was the weaker man. Serious diplomacy remained impossible until Kennedy had proved himself and restored macho self-esteem. "He just thought that he (Khrushchev) was completely unreasonable -that he was tough. And he (JFK) had to be tough," recalled Robert Kennedy. "And I think it was a shock to him that somebody would be as harsh and definitive, definite, as this."¹⁷ Upon returning, the President bluntly told a bi-partisan congressional leadership group that Khrushchev had lost interest in a treaty.¹⁸

Faced with a negotiations stalemate during summer of 1961, the President requested the Ad Hoc Panel on Nuclear Testing to examine technical questions associated with the test ban. The panel reported that the U.S. would maintain a technological edge over the Soviet Union if both sides stopped testing, but the Soviets could take the lead after three to four years of testing while the U.S. refrained. "Therefore, any decisions in the near future concerning the resumption of nuclear testing can be governed by non-technical considerations," the panel concluded.¹⁹

The Joint Chiefs of Staff filed a rebuttal to the Ad Hoc Panel and pressed the President to resume testing.²⁰ Kennedy reported to British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan the Ad Hoc Panel's warning of possible clandestine Soviet tests: "Yet I remain most reluctant to take a firm decision to resume testing." The President preferred sending Arthur Dean back to Geneva to continue negotiating. "Meanwhile, I shall be forced to consider a decision to resume testing."²¹

In August, Khrushchev erected the Berlin Wall, and in the days that followed he ended the moratorium on nuclear testing. "Fucked again," said Kennedy.²² Nevertheless, the President resisted pressure for immediate resumption of nuclear testing or military action to tear down the wall.²³ Compelled to reassure the American public and Allies that the United States would take a stand, Kennedy dispatched Vice-President Lyndon Johnson and American troops to West Berlin. He wanted contingency plans to resume testing, but postponed public announcement for "propaganda value."²⁴

In early September, the President told Rusk that he wanted to work with Macmillan on a treaty that would ban atmospheric testing.²⁵ At the same time, Kennedy wanted an underground nuclear test performed by September 15, 1961.²⁶ He asked for a larger test to avoid criticism for allowing the Soviets to conduct even bigger tests. Glenn Seaborg, the director of the Atomic Energy Commission, explained to the President that a large-scale test would destroy the tunnel complex in Nevada. Very disappointed, Kennedy accepted Seaborg's explanation.²⁷ Following this decision, the President told the Prime Minister his duty was "inevitable." "We have to show our friends and our own people that we are ready to.....face these Soviet acts."²⁸

The President later requested permission to use Christmas Island to conduct atmospheric tests. Although Macmillan saw no need for atmospheric testing and thought that world opinion would condemn further testing, he approved contingency plans to use Christmas Island for atmospheric nuclear testing in the event that Kennedy decided to test.²⁹

By December 8, 1961 the results of Soviet tests appeared on the front page of the *New York Times*. During a White House staff meeting, Colonel Julian Ewell, a staff assistant to General Maxwell Taylor, commented sarcastically about "the non-atmospheric testing bleeding hearts club" in the Kennedy administration. Bundy explained that nuclear testing in Nevada had been limited to underground testing because the domestic political reaction concerned Kennedy, otherwise "everyone would squawk about fall-out in their milk." Ewell opined that

diplomatic “gymnastics” to find another site were not necessary because the Nevada desert was already available.³⁰

In late December, the President met with Macmillan in Bermuda to lobby for atmospheric testing. The Prime Minister suggested that the Soviets had resumed testing in response to what the U-2 spy plane might have photographed. Nevertheless, he consented to use of Christmas Island if Kennedy couched the test announcement as “less a threat than a hope.” The President agreed, but would not cut off all his options.³¹

The President's decision to go ahead with atmospheric tests divided the administration.³² Hawkish aides such as McCone, Seaborg, Rusk, and Foster urged the President to resume testing, while Stevenson became a lone voice calling for a “Peace Offensive.”³³ Kennedy wanted to resume atmospheric testing on April 15, 1962.³⁴ Macmillan asked him to delay public announcement for a day or two to allow time to make a case to the British public.³⁵

The President made his announcement at 7 p.m. March 2, 1962 in a national television and radio address. He emphasized U.S. willingness to test in the atmosphere and underground to maintain military security. At the same time, Kennedy pledged to stop the arms race and to reach an agreement at peace talks scheduled to begin in Geneva on March 14, 1962.³⁶

At the opening of the Eighteen-Nation Disarmament Conference, Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko presented a draft treaty on disarmament which called for the withdrawal of troops from military bases in foreign territories.³⁷ Faced with a new round of deadlocked negotiations, Macmillan asked the President to join him in a public appeal to the Soviet Premier for a test ban treaty. The President agreed to issue a joint statement, but preferred not making direct contact with the Soviet leader to avoid political risk. As Kennedy observed, “opinion in this country would not hold that a further appeal from me to Khrushchev was appropriate or constructive.”³⁸

Working together, Kennedy and Macmillan drafted a joint statement which the latter delivered to the Soviet government on April 9, 1962. It required international inspection as

prerequisite for a comprehensive test ban treaty. The Prime Minister issued an appeal to reconsider verification.³⁹ Khrushchev, however, called the proposal for international verification a ruse to “plant nests of spies” in the Soviet Union.⁴⁰ Macmillan cabled: “Therefore the tests must proceed.”⁴¹ Kennedy thus approved a long series of thirty-six nuclear tests for Christmas Island and Johnston Island from April 25th until November 3, 1962. He scheduled subsequent tests for Nevada and the Pacific Ocean on May 8th and June 20th.⁴²

The President told advisers he still wanted a test ban treaty because he was worried about nuclear proliferation. Assistant Secretary of Defense Paul Nitze advised that a “test ban would be necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for inhibiting proliferation, and that to prevent it would require collaboration by the U.S. and U.S.S.R.”⁴³ Kennedy wanted to bring a treaty before Congress in the fall after the Soviets finished their test series and the administration could verify whether the Soviet tests had produced a breakthrough. Negotiations remained an important precondition because the President wanted the UN General Assembly to blame the Soviets for any failure to reach an agreement.⁴⁴

At Geneva, Dean had instructions from Kennedy to discuss a comprehensive test ban, but on the condition that he not specify the number of inspections until the Soviets had agreed to the principle of on-site inspection. He wanted Dean to wait until the end of August before proposing a limited treaty banning tests in the atmosphere, outer space, and underwater.⁴⁵ The President informed Macmillan that the events of 1961 had left him unprepared to enter “serious negotiations” for a comprehensive test ban. He considered an atmospheric ban a “reasonable second best.”⁴⁶ “If for political reasons, you cannot drop this demand.....Next best would be to propose at this stage a ban on atmospheric tests only,” Macmillan wrote in reply.⁴⁷ The President issued a joint statement with the Prime Minister on August 27th which instructed British and American delegates at Geneva to offer the Soviets a draft comprehensive test ban agreement as well as an alternative that would end testing in the atmosphere, underwater, and in outer space.⁴⁸

In September, the Soviet Premier offered to sign “immediately” a limited test ban agreement under the condition that the U.S. offered to continue negotiating for a ban on underground testing.⁴⁹ The President cautiously hoped that an agreement could be completed by the end of 1962.⁵⁰ Khrushchev's response noted that a limited test ban treaty would “create a false impression with the world public opinion, a kind of illusion that an agreement on cessation of tests had seemingly been concluded.” He thus asked Kennedy to include underground testing in a test ban treaty.⁵¹ The President remained pessimistic about underground testing, but said the limited test ban treaty was within “striking distance.” He predicted “rapid progress” when negotiations resumed in November.⁵²

During the final weeks of October, however, the Cuban Missile Crisis threatened to derail the entire disarmament process. Recently released tapes of ExComm meetings show that President Kennedy turned to Llewellyn Thompson, the Ambassador to the Soviet Union, for his perspective on Khrushchev's psyche. Thompson realized that Kennedy believed that Moscow felt free to expand Soviet geopolitical influence because Khrushchev did not respect him as a man. Thompson reported that Yugoslavia's Ambassador said: “I don't agree with your analyst...that Khrushchev thinks you're afraid to act or are weak...I've had a lot of private conversations with him and he said that he doesn't think that.” Kennedy did not comment on Thompson's report.⁵³

The experience of being “eyeball to eyeball” and being able to say ‘Khrushchev blinked first,’ restored Kennedy's macho self-esteem. Narrowly avoiding a nuclear war made both leaders recognize their mutual interest in controlling nuclear weapons and avoiding future showdowns; thus the stage was set for achieving a test ban agreement. On the last day of the Missile Crisis the President wrote the Soviet Premier that he hoped that after they publicly announced the settled Cuban matter it would ease world tension and set the stage where they could resume disarmament talks.⁵⁴ “We should like to continue the exchange of views on the prohibition of atomic and thermonuclear weapons, general disarmament, and other problems

relating to the relaxation of international tension,” replied the Soviet leader.⁵⁵ “I think we should give priority to.....the great effort for a nuclear test ban,” Kennedy responded that same day.⁵⁶

Using back-channels, Kennedy and Khrushchev laid the groundwork for the limited test ban treaty throughout the spring and summer of 1963. Averell Harriman was chosen to negotiate with the Soviet Premier in Moscow in July 1963. Concerned also about proliferation, the President authorized Harriman to “go as far as he wished in exploring the possibility of a Soviet-American understanding with regard to China.”⁵⁷ “You know, it wouldn't be too hard if we could somehow get kind of an anonymous airplane to go over there, take out the Chinese facilities — they've only got a couple — and maybe we could do it, or maybe the Soviet Union could do it, rather than face the threat of a China with nuclear weapons,” Kennedy told William Foster.⁵⁸ The President even prepared to consider “Soviet, or possibly joint US-USSR, use of military force” to destroy China's nuclear program. Khrushchev, however, avoided Harriman's overture.⁵⁹

The Limited Test Ban Treaty signed by Harriman at the end of July marked the culmination of the President's efforts to achieve a pause in the Cold War and move détente forward while maintaining American national security.⁶⁰ After two months of debate, the Senate approved the treaty by a substantial vote of eighty to nineteen. The President signed the Limited Test Ban on October 7, 1963 in the Treaty Room of the White House.⁶¹ “No other single accomplishment in the White House ever gave him greater satisfaction,” Sorensen wrote later.⁶²

Kennedy's Dilemma and Information Strategy:

The question of whether Kennedy intended the test ban as a step toward future détente has aroused scholarly debate because of the arms build-up which occurred simultaneously. The debate derives from his decision to adopt a dual approach to national security which juxtaposed

armament and disarmament. The seemingly contradictory strategy was the result of the President's interest in balancing every step forward in the détente process with America's national security interests.

The missile gap controversy of the 1960 election had left the President in a difficult position to pursue arms control seriously. Kennedy had supported Allen Dulles's position that until the U.S. had complete satellite coverage of the Soviet Union, the missile gap could not be ruled out by U-2 photos or other intelligence. The election had raised public concern about Soviet nuclear superiority and limited the President's options because he faced political opponents who would voice criticism in the press if the administration did not fill the gap by purchasing new weapons systems. Fear of a missile gap led to the launch of the first U.S. spy satellite in August 1961. By September, Kennedy had indisputable photographs of the Soviet Bloc revealing that the missile gap actually favored the United States. Khrushchev's boasts of Soviet missile power had been a bluff. Nevertheless, the President could not reveal that the missile gap favored the United States without being called a hypocrite and an opportunist.⁶³

The decision to campaign on the missile gap issue made it difficult to pursue arms control without first building-up American defenses. Ultimately, the President accepted a limited test ban treaty rather than a comprehensive test ban treaty because it allowed the U.S. to build a new generation of weapons while pursuing arms control. Although the Limited Test Ban Treaty can be easily criticized for allowing nuclear testing to continue underground, one must consider the context of the domestic and international political landscape from 1961 to 1963. Constrained by domestic political pressures, Kennedy compromised in order to take a pragmatic step toward achieving long term arms control goals, as favored by the Administration since inauguration.

Arms control presented the President with a dilemma because of the danger that Khrushchev and U.S. allies might interpret pragmatism and willingness to negotiate with a penchant to compromise on American interests in Europe and other areas of the world. Before

Kennedy's inauguration, the Soviet Premier had challenged U.S. power in Europe and threatened to spread Communism throughout the world in wars of liberation. The Soviet leader had boasted of a nuclear and conventional advantage in Europe, and the missile gap debate during the 1960 election indicated that the President had agreed.

Kennedy planned his inaugural address as a response to Khrushchev's claim in January 1961 that "peaceful co-existence" did not preclude Soviet support for "national wars of liberation." Khrushchev also threatened to sign a separate peace treaty with East Germany if the West did not leave Berlin.⁶⁴ The speech worried the President-elect because he believed that American first strike nuclear capability had not deterred the Soviets from plans to expand. The Soviet Premier's declaration seemed to reaffirm that the United States needed to build-up conventional forces to contain Communism without a nuclear holocaust.⁶⁵

To prevent misinterpretation of American intentions while pursuing an arms control agreement, Kennedy wanted to project a strong Cold Warrior image while credibly demonstrating America's readiness to honor defense obligations. The dual nature of the President's approach to the Soviet Union required an "olive branch and arrows" information strategy.⁶⁶ Political needs to balance the right and the left required a test ban treaty that placated the left wing of the Democratic Party without offending right wing Republican opponents. To fulfill these political needs, Kennedy chose an information strategy that emphasized personal commitment to both test ban negotiations and strong defense policies vis-à-vis the Soviet Union.

Prior to going to Vienna, the White House worried about how Khrushchev perceived the crisis at the Bay of Pigs and Laos. Salinger suggested using the scheduled visit to DeGaulle to play up Jacqueline Kennedy's glamorous image and appeal to the French interest in royalty. Kennedy told him to travel to Paris in advance to cultivate the French press. The advance work by Salinger resulted in an hour long documentary on the Kennedys on the eve of the presidential visit. For the New Frontier, the arrangements befitted a royal coronation with a parade and

crowning dinner at Versailles. The Mayor of Paris offered the key to the city and politely observed that the Kennedys had imitated Queen Elizabeth II's recent visit. To encourage glamorous behind-the-scenes photos in the American press, the White House orchestrated media coverage around pool photographers. Thus, the stage was set for meeting Khrushchev.⁶⁷

At Vienna, Khrushchev's blatant attempt to settle the Berlin question and arms control on Soviet terms alarmed the President. His misinterpretation of the Soviet Premier's brusque diplomacy as a personal test added another layer to Kennedy's dilemma because nuclear war over Berlin was unpalatable. He resolved the dilemma by an information strategy that allowed the President to demonstrate firmness to the Soviet leader and refute the lessons of the Bay of Pigs and encourage arms control negotiations.

Following Vienna, Kennedy instructed Bundy to consult with Joseph Alsop and Walter Lippmann regarding Khrushchev's aide mémoire. Both columnists gained access to the decision-making process because Kennedy wanted journalistic support before going public with a Berlin policy. On June 10th, Bundy reported: "Alsop is for a strong and essentially unyielding position, carried all the way to war if necessary. Lippmann is for a negotiated solution, and has interesting ideas on what it should be." Lippmann favored neutralizing Berlin, while Alsop equated neutralization with surrender. Both columnists agreed that Kennedy needed to explain the Berlin problem to the American people and if he chose a "firm line" it would avoid "the Cuban error." In light of the Bay of Pigs, Alsop recommended a negotiated arrangement for Berlin if Kennedy did not wish to "press the issue right up to war." Bundy himself recommended "ways of having the best of both Alsop and Lippmann, by making serious military preparations now, while at the same time we strengthen the attractiveness and acceptability of our political posture, both before the world and also before the Russians."⁶⁸

Using the best of both Alsop and Lippmann required Kennedy to make 'the eagle fly with the dove.' The information strategy satisfied Kennedy's basic pragmatism because he could have it both ways in Berlin while knowing there was support from influential columnists.

Throughout the Berlin Crisis, Kennedy's information strategy combined a hawkish stance for preserving the status quo in Germany while continuing to press for arms control negotiations with the Soviet Union.

The summer of 1961 provided Kennedy with an opportunity to use the press to demonstrate his strength to Khrushchev. The President kept secret the fact that during June 1961 his brother Robert had been sending messages to Khrushchev through Georgi Bolshakov, the Washington bureau chief of Tass and a Colonel in Soviet military intelligence. The President's brother had proposed freezing the Berlin question in a written or verbal understanding that would leave U.S. troops in West Berlin at least until after the 1964 election. The Soviet leader rejected the proposal, but now understood that Kennedy wanted to freeze the Berlin question. Khrushchev therefore went forward with plans to build a wall.⁶⁹

Privately, Kennedy viewed the Berlin Wall as a pragmatic solution to avoid war and decided against tearing it down. "Why would Khrushchev put up a wall if he really intended to seize Berlin?" Kennedy asked O'Donnell. "There wouldn't be any need of a wall if he occupied the whole city.....It's not a very nice solution, but a wall is a hell of a lot better than a war." Relieved to avoid war, Kennedy did not tell the press he was prepared to live with the Berlin Wall. Wanting to be re-elected, Kennedy did not want it publicized that he had compromised with the Soviet Union over Berlin because it would diminish his strong Cold Warrior image.⁷⁰ His strategy was to remain silent and ride out criticism because any public defense of his inaction on the Berlin Wall would pose political problems. In preparation for the 1962 election, Sorensen scripted a response for Democratic debaters in anticipation of Republican complaints regarding Kennedy's response to the Berlin Wall: "They cannot complain about the Berlin Wall —for no member of either party and no one abroad suggested at the time it was built that we should tear it down."⁷¹

The Soviet decision to resume atmospheric testing increased the pressure upon the President to conduct atmospheric tests.⁷² Schlesinger understood the dilemma and noted that

“an unexplained failure to resume might even be construed as weakness.” The question that Kennedy should consider was whether a decision not to resume atmospheric testing could be presented to the public in a “positive and dramatic context.”⁷³ Claiming that avoiding tests in the atmosphere enhanced U.S. prestige in the world, Schlesinger used Gallup Poll data to argue for a Peace Offensive. The Gallup Poll reported the American public evenly divided forty-four percent in favor and forty-five percent against the resumption of atmospheric testing. Four months earlier fifty-five percent of the public had favored resumption and twenty-six percent had opposed. Refraining from testing in the atmosphere would be popular in the United States if the President used the bully pulpit.⁷⁴

Bundy urged consideration of Schlesinger’s proposal. In a memo that reported administration divisions over nuclear testing, he included President Kennedy in the opposition camp along with “politically vulnerable disbelievers” such as Wiesner, Sorensen, and Schlesinger. Bundy personally supported the resumption of atmospheric testing along with Johnson, McNamara, McCone, Seaborg, and Brown. The President would have to take a stand in the press on his own and could not afford to mention Schlesinger’s name in public debate. As an alternative, Bundy suggested privately renewing the September offer to Khrushchev and setting an April 1, 1962 deadline for a test ban treaty before any resumption of atmospheric testing.⁷⁵

Sorensen also urged support of Schlesinger’s Peace Offensive because Kennedy could “afford politically” to make a final attempt to breakthrough the diplomatic deadlock. The President could offset any bad press with a “reservoir of goodwill” from an approval rating of seventy-seven percent.⁷⁶ Citing a review of editorials by influential newspapers and syndicated columnists, Sorensen anticipated bad press from only the Hearst publications if Kennedy offered a treaty to Khrushchev. He could count on support for testing and for a final effort at diplomacy from fourteen influential newspapers and syndicated columnists including Walter Lippmann, Marquis Childs, and Doris Fleeson.⁷⁷

Citing Gallup Polls taken in July and November 1961, Sorensen noted that the public was divided over the resumption of atmospheric testing and opposition appeared to be growing. "Such a nearly even split, with almost everyone having a definite opinion, makes more difficult a 'national consensus' behind a Presidential decision to test or not to test, whichever way it goes." The wisest political choice for Kennedy, however, was to make a diplomatic offer to the Soviets before testing: "The 'testers' will be satisfied because we are testing; -The 'non-testers' will be satisfied because we made every reasonable effort to avoid it."⁷⁸

"Peace is still the country's most popular course," Sorensen argued, claiming that a majority of the forty-four percent who supported the resumption of testing in the Gallup Poll would also support a treaty that could be described as "effective." The remainder were "hardened Republicans or militarists" who would never support Kennedy: "Much has already been done to appeal to this group in the endorsement of a shelter program, the build-up of missiles, the appointment of Republicans such as McCone, et. al., and we are testing underground, which is all they once said was necessary."⁷⁹

Sorensen concluded that the "non-testers" constituted a "slim majority," but the President could count on the support of outspoken opinion leaders to turn "peace" into a winning issue. He benefit from the concerns of "non-testers" regarding the health risks from nuclear fallout. An emphasis on peace for the New Frontier's 1964 election strategy could reflect Sorensen's reading of Gallup Polls: "71% favor Peace Corps (Feb. 1, 1961); 65% opposed troops to Cuba; 83% think success of UN is very important; 57% favored a Kennedy-Khrushchev summit (Jan. 27, 1961)."⁸⁰

The proposals for a Peace Offensive were nonetheless rejected. Under the President's direction national security policy had to follow two seemingly divergent paths: armament and arms control.⁸¹ His early decision to approve experiments that produced "nuclear reactions" and "miniature versions of a real atomic explosion" risked derailing the disarmament negotiations and escalating the tension in the Cold War. The President's national security

policy reflected his belief in the importance of balancing arms control with a defense posture that protected American national interests.⁸² Once he decided upon flexible response as a new security doctrine, Kennedy continued to support a military build-up even after the first pictures from satellite intelligence revealed that the missile gap actually favored the United States. Although satellite pictures from Discoverer revealed that Khrushchev's aggressive posture was a bluff, the President did not reveal his hand to the press or the Soviets because he could not predict the Kremlin's next move.⁸³

Always the pragmatist, the President preferred to minimize any public debate in the press over national security policy. Throughout his presidency, Kennedy attempted to manage the agenda of nuclear policy and the arms control negotiations by controlling and carefully releasing relevant but unauthorized information from within the administration. He realized that leaks could trigger premature public debate over national security policy that might send the wrong message to friends and foes alike. The President wanted to reassure the American public and the world community that the U.S. was prepared to honor defense commitments while at the same time willing to advance negotiations for arms control.

The tactics Kennedy used to influence the press included access to selected journalists, television speeches, press conferences, leaks, and political appointments. Although the President ultimately achieved a limited test ban treaty, the tactics in his information strategy produced mixed results that threatened to derail arms control negotiations. The President's pragmatic media instincts were often wrong: what emerged was an arms control media strategy of muddling through and using the press to respond to events and hold on to long term policy objectives.

Tactical Use of Appointments:

After winning by a close margin in 1960, Kennedy realized that partisan criticism in the press could thwart arms control negotiations. The one preemptive tactic to insulate the

administration from criticism was to appoint Republicans to fill arms control positions. Kennedy appointed John J. McCloy as the Presidential Adviser for Arms Control. With Eisenhower's support, McCloy recommended the creation of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency to negotiate and monitor arms control agreements. A pillar of the so-called "establishment," McCloy served during World War II as the Assistant Secretary of War and had recommended a political solution to avoid dropping the atomic bomb on Japan.⁸⁴ Kennedy appointed William C. Foster to serve as the first director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. Foster was also a Republican, like McCloy, and had served as Deputy Secretary of Defense from 1951 to 1953.⁸⁵ Kennedy also named Arthur Dean, a prominent Republican lawyer who served as an adviser to Franklin D. Roosevelt and Eisenhower administration, to serve as the United States Representative at Geneva.⁸⁶

To demonstrate the New Frontier's commitment to defense, Kennedy appointed Paul Nitze as the Assistant Secretary of State for National Security Affairs. Nitze was a Democrat with a reputation for being a hawkish military expert and Eisenhower critic who had served as an adviser to every president since Roosevelt. Kennedy immediately followed Nitze's advice to increase defense spending to move away from massive retaliation.⁸⁷

The strategy to appoint Republican military experts to arms control positions while following Nitze's hawkish advice to increase defense spending was a strategy designed to deflect criticism in the press from political opponents. Kennedy realized that the only way to move forward on nuclear arms control was to make it a bipartisan issue while emphasizing the New Frontier's commitment to strengthening U.S. military power.⁸⁸

In preparation for the resumption of disarmament talks in March 1961, the President's advisers urged him not to settle for a comprehensive test ban agreement if it was to be monitored only by seismic instruments.⁸⁹ Throughout the negotiations, Kennedy preferred to follow the advice of a respected bi-partisan group of arms control and national security advisers rather than develop new ideas that could draw criticism and debate in the press.⁹⁰

Kennedy's appointees played a minor role, however, in his relations with the press. The President functioned as his own press secretary making tactical decisions regarding information strategy. Before negotiations sessions in Geneva, Kennedy briefed Dean with general guidelines on what to say to the press and how to say it. The general rule for all appointees was that the administration spoke with only one voice.

The Pentagon was one area of the government where Kennedy's appointment strategy faced difficulty because of officers who made speeches on national security policies that were at odds with the Administration's policies. An official censorship policy was instituted in response to the President's interest in having the military follow his line. The policy of clearing public speeches meant deleting inflammatory rhetoric from speeches and was unpopular with officers. The officers complained to the press, and the President was asked about the policy once during a press conference on February 14, 1962. He explained that internal censorship was an established policy to make sure the government spoke with one voice.⁹¹

Kennedy found that leaks from military sources presented the greatest challenge to his philosophy of the Administration speaking with one voice. Unauthorized leaks were often followed by presidential phone calls to Salinger to find the source. During one such incident that occurred during the Berlin Crisis, Kennedy had the FBI investigate how *Newsweek* gained access to contingency plans from the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Efforts to track down and plug the origins of leaks failed to prevent official Washington from talking anonymously to journalists.⁹²

Tactical Use of Access:

In Kennedy's information strategy prominent columnists, journalists, and publishers were regarded as significant leaders of electoral opinion to be courted and cultivated. The White House kept a watchful eye on what prominent journalists, columnists, and publishers were writing, and in this sense they shaped Kennedy's approach to foreign policy. As a result of the President's national security dilemma, the press grew in importance because of the images of

strength or weakness that news stories created. Kennedy deplored press criticism and news stories that threatened his strong Cold Warrior image. He pragmatically cultivated prominent journalists, columnists, and publishers in an attempt to influence what was being written about national security policy because of the potential effects of the message in electoral politics and international relations.

For Kennedy the conditions of the Cold War demanded that journalists follow patriotic duty to serve the government by writing what the White House wanted rather than offering criticism.⁹³ The President benefited because Cold War journalists and publishers of the early 1960s needed little persuasion to be convinced of the need to stand firm against the Soviet Union.⁹⁴ In fact, the problem he faced was that journalists such as Alsop and Luce were often a step ahead, urging a more hawkish stance than he wanted. For Kennedy, the dilemma was how to balance pressure to maintain a strong Cold Warrior image while pragmatically compromising with Khrushchev through policies aimed at avoiding war. The technique of offering access to journalists was an attempt by the President to resolve his dilemma by influencing what was written about national security policy. Nevertheless, throughout his presidency Kennedy used the access strategy primarily to emphasize his strong commitment to taking a tough stand against Khrushchev.⁹⁵

Following the Vienna summit, the President relied heavily upon his personal access strategy to influence news coverage and to counteract press euphoria surrounding the summit. Kennedy hoped to compromise with the Soviet leader and make an arrangement regarding Berlin, but wanted news stories that emphasized his strong stance regarding American interests. He feared sending the wrong message to the Soviet Premier and the American people.

The president thus planted an exclusive story with James Reston of the *New York Times* to let the American public know the gravity of the situation in Berlin. "He savaged me," Kennedy told Reston "I think I know why he treated me like this. He thinks because of the Bay of Pigs that I'm inexperienced. Probably thinks I'm stupid. Maybe most important, he thinks

that I had no guts.” : “So we’ve got a problem. We have to see what we can do that will restore a feeling in Moscow that we will defend our national interest. I’ll have to increase the defense budget.” In Kennedy’s mind, the Soviet Premier had thus forced him to make arms control a ‘back-burner’ issue. At the same time, the President’s message for Reston was that news stories that criticized his hesitant stand at the Bay of Pigs posed a national security problem. The clear message for Reston was that “we’ve got a problem.” Journalists were an important part of the national security team, so the President emphasized the word “we” when he told Reston that something had to be done about convincing Khrushchev. The President wanted to make this point because he believed the editorial pages of the *New York Times* set the agenda among journalists and opinion leaders.⁹⁶

In preparation for a major speech to demonstrate firmness, the President offered access to other favored journalists. Enroute to England, Kennedy met with Alsop and somberly discussed the burden of responsibility for any decision to use nuclear weapons.⁹⁷ The President’s somber mood surprised Alsop because Salinger had characterized talks with the Soviet Premier as “amiable” and he had already filed a dispatch using the official line that the cordial talks had not changed the status quo. He recognized a contradiction between the official line and what the President was now saying, but never questioned or reported why the White House had two stories.⁹⁸ While in England, the President cornered Alsop and blurted, “I just want you to know, Joe, I don’t care what happens, I won’t give way.”⁹⁹ Kennedy appeared very upset to Alsop, who found his remarks “chilling.” His next column reported that the President found the Soviet Premier “chilling” and was prepared to take a tough stand, but omitted any mention that Kennedy was visibly upset. Alsop was careful not to encourage Khrushchev. Kennedy’s access strategy, nevertheless, permitted Alsop to criticize the White House for not having a strong enough answer to Soviet “brinkmanship.”¹⁰⁰

Kennedy also told *ABC*’s David Lawrence that the daily briefings did not reflect his “somber mood,” but he did not want to be quoted. Lawrence complied and *ABC* interrupted

scheduled programming for the report. Lawrence later acknowledged his debt to high level sources at the White House for helping him get an edge on other reporters at Vienna, thus allowing him to begin his career at *ABC* on a high note.¹⁰¹

Upon returning to Washington on June 6th, the President walked with crutches and tremendous pain because of chronic back problems. Throughout the summit meetings, Kennedy was weakened physically by his back and mentally by drug therapy to ease pain. He confided to aides that he had not used crutches during meetings with Khrushchev or DeGaulle because it projected an image of crippled weakness. He carefully avoided direct confrontation with reporters in a press conference until June 28th, preferring not to publicize his weak medical condition and to maintain a public image of strength and vigor. While on crutches, the President avoided press conferences so as not to seem weak. In the absence of a press conference, the President relied upon personal access and planned a major television address that evening.¹⁰²

At the airport the President called his close friend Charles Bartlett of *The Chattanooga Times*. "He's tough. It's very scary," said Kennedy. Confident that Bartlett would not reveal that behind the "Profile in Courage" he was actually "scared." "If Khrushchev wants to rub my nose in the dirt, it's all over," he told another reporter. Kennedy did not want the press to send the wrong signal to the Premier because the only feasible U.S. response to Soviet aggression in Europe would be tactical nuclear war. Thus, the President's access tactics set the stage for his response to Khrushchev at seven p.m. on national television.¹⁰³

"I will tell you now it was a very somber two days," President Kennedy said. He was pleased with the settlement in Laos, but disappointed with Khrushchev's intransigence regarding inspection. Nevertheless, Kennedy pledged to continue pursuing the test ban negotiations. "But our most somber talks were on the subject of Germany and Berlin," the President declared. He pledged to defend the people of West Berlin and U.S. access rights: "But we are not seeking to change the present situation." The message for Khrushchev was

that Kennedy was a tough pragmatist prepared to defend Germany's status quo while continuing arms control negotiations.¹⁰⁴

Following the television address, the President spent the weekend of June 10th with Alsop to orchestrate an exclusive story in *The Saturday Review*: "The Most Important Decision in U.S. History -And How the President Is Facing It." The Eisenhower strategic doctrine left the United States with an estimated twenty percent chance of nuclear war being triggered over Berlin or Laos. The disparity in conventional forces meant that Kennedy, in a sense, would be compelled to use nuclear weapons in a first strike to keep the Soviet Union out of Western Europe: i.e. "national suicide in order to avoid national surrender." Alsop urged Kennedy to stand firm against Khrushchev in West Berlin, but did advocate using nuclear war over East Berlin.¹⁰⁵ Alsop later noted that his article went against the hawkish trends in journalism and Kennedy later thanked him for providing a softer-line as an antidote to going to war to guarantee "freedom of movement" for the people of East Germany.¹⁰⁶

After transcripts from Vienna were prepared, Kennedy invited Alsop and Phil Graham to Glen Ora, Virginia. He repeatedly read selected sections on Berlin.¹⁰⁷ Inspired by Kennedy's tactics, Phil Graham directed the *Washington Post* to help the White House. Graham assigned Murrey Marder and Chalmers Roberts to write a series of articles entitled, "The Beleaguered Bastion of West Berlin." The articles did not encourage diplomacy, however, and pressed Kennedy to continue his tough stand against Khrushchev.¹⁰⁸

The information tactics the President implemented throughout most of June 1961 relied heavily upon access and carefully avoided direct confrontation with reporters in a press conference. The tactics failed to convince the press, however, that Kennedy would take a tough stand in Berlin. Critical stories in *Time* and *Newsweek* questioned his strong Cold Warrior image and urged firmness. The President's ability to elevate an issue in the press became a source of both power and frustration because he could not prevent the rest of Washington from talking to reporters. "Look at this shit," Kennedy told Salinger after reading *Time*: Sidey could

not protect the President. Henry Luce wanted Kennedy to take a more hawkish stance in Berlin against Communism. As noted, the President ordered an FBI investigation in response to a *Newsweek* story about contingency plans by the Joint Chiefs of Staff for Berlin. Kennedy was not upset that Bradley's *Newsweek* story told the world (and Khrushchev) about contingency plans to send more troops to Berlin, but he fretted about unauthorized leaks endangering national security. He could not stop the leaks and hawkish stories in the press. "This shit has got to stop. We've got to stop this," the President told Salinger. Kennedy's personal access strategy had failed to prevent the press from urging a more hawkish stance in Berlin.¹⁰⁹

Time also reported on the contrasts between Kennedy and Khrushchev following the Vienna summit. The article depicted Kennedy using crutches when not in public view while Khrushchev had triumphantly returned to the Soviet Union "like a man who felt he had carried all the marbles." The President's speech on Vienna was described as "firm and uncompromising," but cited "fears that the President on occasion relied too strongly on advisers who would rather lose the cold war step by step than risk nuclear consequences of standing fast."¹¹⁰

The June 23rd issue of *Time* featured Barry Goldwater on the cover. The article criticized Kennedy's handling of information on his bad back by pointing out that he "needlessly caused speculation and concern." *Time* applauded the White House for quietly dismissing a proposal by Senator Michael Mansfield to make Berlin a free city: "But the danger in the form of U.S. indecision has been done." "It was now up to President Kennedy to go beyond expressions of U.S. determination to hold fast in Berlin and to make plans toward meeting the crisis that seems sure to come." The editors of *Time* reported that Dean Acheson believed that losing Berlin meant all of Europe would fall to Communism. The problem in Berlin was that Khrushchev did not believe the U.S. was prepared to use nuclear weapons. "Thus, the U.S. must go to the very edge of war and be willing to go beyond to convince the Soviet Premier that the U.S. will live up to its commitments."¹¹¹

After the President complained to Sidey about *Time's* coverage of his handling of Berlin, *Time's* July 7th issue responded. "The President believes that one of his major tasks is preparing the nation for this showdown." *Time's* editors criticized Kennedy for misreading the country. "First fact: A great majority of Americans are prepared to go to risk war over Berlin rather than back down to the Reds. Second Fact: There is a wide and spreading feeling that the Administration has not yet provided ample leadership in guiding the U.S. along the dangerous paths of the Cold War."¹¹² Such hawkish support was more than Kennedy wanted.

Disappointed with the news coverage of Berlin, the President scheduled a television address for July 25th in order to clarify his position regarding Berlin. That same day, Kennedy arranged to meet with Sidey for an afternoon swim. Sidey did not have a swim suit, but joined the President after being assured he could dispense with formality in the White House. Kennedy confided that he wanted to negotiate with Khrushchev for a test ban treaty, but now it was impossible and he had to take a tough stand for West Berlin. "That son of a bitch won't pay attention to words, he has to see you move," the President said.¹¹³

Following the speech, *Time's* August 4th issue applauded the President for "an effective performance." "Without question the additions to U.S. defense strength and the new ready-for-anything national attitude would help John Fitzgerald Kennedy's diplomats in any discussions with the Soviet Union." The country was now allegedly prepared to put out the "brush fires" of Communism wherever Khrushchev moved next. The *Time* article did not anticipate that the Soviet Premier's next move would be the Berlin Wall.¹¹⁴

The White House was also caught unprepared when Khrushchev began construction of the Berlin Wall. The President went sailing and cut off access to journalists, but upon return granted access to Marguerite Higgins of the *New York Herald Tribune*. Higgins had learned from a State Department source that the U.S. military would not tear down the Berlin Wall, and she was the only reporter aggressively to confront the President. "Why are you so excited Maggie?" he responded. Higgins urged Kennedy to send General Clay to Berlin, but did not

suggest tearing down the wall. Clay had presided over Berlin in 1948 during the Soviet blockade and Allied airlift. After the President avoided a definite commitment, Higgins appealed to his brother.¹¹⁵

The President's information strategy sought to downplay the crisis and avoid committing the U.S. to a war over East Berlin's refugees. After granting access to Higgins, Kennedy implemented his strategy with eight days of enforced silence to prevent a public debate in the press and calls for a strong military response that he did not want to take. Presidential aides gave backgrounders to let the press know he was "shocked and depressed." Suggestions were leaked to the effect that the intelligence community had let the President down by not informing him in advance about the wall so he could respond. For the remainder of his term he referred to the Berlin Wall in only three speeches and with subdued passing reference. The decision not to talk about the Berlin Wall was another conscious tactic to dilute the issue in the press and forestall criticism and congressional investigation. The press never pounded Kennedy for going sailing or sending the Secretary of State to a baseball game after learning of the Berlin Wall.¹¹⁶

Faced with exhortations in the press to take a tough stance, the President met with Higgins before his press conference on August 18th to inform her of his decision. "I have good news for you. Not only have we decided to send General Clay to Berlin; we are sending Vice President Johnson with him," Kennedy said. Clay was a Republican and Johnson was being sent for bipartisanship. The President also ordered a division of troops to travel to Berlin over the autobahn.¹¹⁷ Kennedy also met with the *Washington Post's* Robert Estabrook. "We shall probably come close to the edge," Kennedy said. The line that Kennedy planted with Estabrook, however, did not reveal the entire picture. During an off-the-record press conference four days earlier, Kennedy had emphasized Berlin as a crisis that required action, but it was not analogous to the Korean War.¹¹⁸

Nevertheless, the President's tactics failed to persuade Walter Lippmann who admonished the White House for being "caught unprepared." Kennedy's response was to

extend an invitation to Lippmann for a formal state dinner in order to offer a personal rebuttal. "He didn't convince me anyway that we had really anticipated what the Russians really did," Lippmann later recalled.¹¹⁹ But Lippmann was not pressing for a tougher stand against Khrushchev. He wanted Kennedy to take a bolder stand at home and use the bully pulpit to educate the American public about the need for great diplomacy in the nuclear age.¹²⁰ The attempt to woo columnists with access left the President frustrated. "You have lunch with Lippmann or Reston and they come back and knock the shit out of you to prove their integrity," Kennedy observed. "To hell with them."¹²¹

Although access did not produce the results the President wanted, he continued to use it as a tactic to respond to partisan criticism in the press that he needed to take stronger measures to defend West Berlin. He also worried that news stories suggesting compromise might not convince the Soviet Premier of U.S. determination to take a stand for West Berlin. In September 1961, the President recruited Reston to use his editorial in the *New York Times* to send the Soviets a message. The President bluntly told the columnist it would be "helpful" to write an editorial to ensure the Soviet Union did not misinterpret his silence on Berlin. With a sense of patriotism and duty, Reston agreed to become a part of the White House diplomatic effort and wrote a column which he submitted to Kennedy for approval. "Any action that closes U.S. access to Berlin will certainly lead to counteraction by the West, first in the UN, then in the field of economic countermeasures, then, if necessary, with an airlift or conventional military action on the ground to force the passage of supplies" Reston wrote. "For nuclear war in such circumstances is not unthinkable. It is, in cold fact, being thought about and planned, and Mr. Khrushchev, unless he wishes to preside over a Soviet wasteland next door to 800 million Chinese, would be well advised to take this into account."¹²²

Reston's patriotism allowed the President to co-opt his column and thus make him a publicist for the White House. The President could remain silent without coming out in public to warn Khrushchev personally. Kennedy's tactic to use Reston rather than coming out in

public to repeat his July 24th television address allowed him, at least in theory, to avoid public actions that would have jeopardized negotiations for the test ban treaty that he was simultaneously pursuing.

During the President's July 24th television address he had assured the American public that he wanted a civil defense program for protection in the event of nuclear war. Using the access strategy, the President arranged with Luce to publish an article in the September 18, 1961 issue of *Life* magazine: "A Letter to You from President Kennedy: How You Can Survive Fallout -97 Out of 100 People Can Be Saved." He wanted the article published despite military advice that nuclear war would still result in high American casualties. Jerome Wisener, Special Assistant to the President for Science and Technology, told Kennedy the article offered America "an entirely false and misleading estimate" regarding the effectiveness of nuclear shelters.¹²³

Nevertheless, the President wanted to promote the shelter program in the press to demonstrate that the U.S. was willing to go to the brink and sustain losses. The U.S. nuclear strategy required a shelter program in order to pose a credible deterrent. Kennedy also knew that civil defense appealed to Republicans. Schlesinger cautioned him for focusing only on middle class homeowners in the article. Nevertheless, the President's assistant considered civil defense the "means of making questions of foreign policy less abstract or remote and bringing these questions home to every household in the land....Civil defense has become the focus for all anxieties over foreign policy. When people read about American and Russian (confrontation) they feel they can do something about it themselves —they can decide whether or not to build a shelter."¹²⁴ Although the shelter program only provided psychological security, the President intended to avoid nuclear war by demonstrating American preparedness to Khrushchev. A firm American defense was a strategy to bring the Soviets to the bargaining table for arms control and détente.

The President's access tactics assisted in the détente process by allowing communication with Khrushchev through journalists. The Soviet Premier understood that he could send Kennedy a message discreetly through a reporter without necessarily having it published. In October while preparing for a speech at the United Nations, Cyrus Sulzberger of the *New York Times* brought the President a message that Khrushchev wanted to arrange informal contacts to make Berlin a free city.¹²⁵

The President told Sulzberger that the White House had a problem because the American public was prepared to go "to the brink of war" over Berlin. He wanted to make a deal and have peace, but the American public was willing to risk war. "The chances of settling this without war are not yet too good." Kennedy needed the American public to understand that he would not bargain over East Germany: "We can't give what we haven't got." He did not know how to explain his position to the American people without Khrushchev testing how far he might compromise on Germany before going to war.¹²⁶ Concerned about maintaining a strong Cold Warrior image, getting re-elected, and not sending the wrong message to Khrushchev or American allies, the President chose to remain silent on Berlin and rely on journalists to educate the public.

Later that month, faced with continuing criticism, the President scheduled a press conference open to all reporters. In preparation, Kennedy consulted with Arthur Krock of the *New York Times* who advised him to ignore "the battle of the mimeographs." Kennedy liked the columnist's line and saved it for the press conference. For a brief moment, the President had used the conservative columnist as a friendly media strategist. Before Krock left the Oval Office, the President thanked him for "publicizing" a speech by Senator Claiborne Pell that called for an easement of the Berlin situation. He urged Krock to continue using his column to publicize people with Pell's public stature who did not want to escalate in Berlin. Krock never reported that Kennedy had urged him to function as his publicist. Through personal cultivation techniques the President had co-opted Krock, at least momentarily, to become part of the White

House team. For Krock, access to Kennedy's inside information strengthened his column at the price of cooperation.¹²⁷

Nevertheless, access tactics sputtered because the President could not prevent leaks and journalists and publishers did not always cooperate after obtaining access. Luce did not always cooperate and kept a watchful eye on the Kennedy administration and criticized any weakness against Communism. In early February 1962, Luce learned that Kennedy questioned the need for more U.S. testing. He thereupon published a critical expose in *Life* magazine by Charles Murphy, the editor of *Fortune*. A week later, Kennedy told Bradlee that Murphy was "a bastard" for writing in *Life* about the "hard-boiled/soft-boiled" divisions within the administration over atmospheric testing. The President wanted to be portrayed as "hard-boiled" on testing, but confided to Bradlee that he had made no final decision on nuclear testing and "reluctantly" gave the impression that the only issue left to decide was when to schedule tests. Bradlee later noted that Kennedy "seemed relieved" to postpone atmospheric tests on resuming negotiations with the Soviets. Bradlee never wrote in *Newsweek* about Kennedy's reluctance to test because he valued access and being a part of the White House team. The President's comments regarding Murphy made it clear to Bradlee that friendly journalists were not supposed to write about the internal debate or question his strong Cold Warrior image in print.¹²⁸

The President again turned to Bradlee in March 1962 after he announced the resumption of atmospheric testing. He wanted to impart the administration's "spin" on the history of the decision. Although Bradlee already knew the history of the decision, Kennedy wanted to make sure he had the story pat: "Despite what Scotty Reston says, the wrong way to have done it would have been to announce it in November," Kennedy said. Bradlee should call Stevenson for a reaction: "I suppose if you grabbed Adlai by the nuts, he might object....I'd like to see what he says." Before abruptly hanging up, the President coyly commented on Nelson Rockefeller's 1964 political prospects: "He's not doing so well, Lou Harris tells me." Kennedy

recognized that political opponents like Rockefeller were waiting in the wings waiting to raise questions regarding his Cold Warrior image during the 1964 election. The New York Governor had promoted the missile gap during the late 1950's and the 'shelter-gap' after Kennedy took office.¹²⁹

At the end of the U.S. and Soviet test series in November 1962, the President arranged a key meeting with Norman Cousins after learning that the editor of *The Saturday Review* was scheduled to visit Khrushchev on behalf of Pope John XXIII to negotiate the release of priests from the Soviet Bloc. In addition to being a journalist, Cousins was an outspoken peace activist and one of the original organizers of The National Committee for the Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE) which began in 1957 with the purpose of mobilizing public opinion to support arms control. "I'm not sure Khrushchev knows this, but I don't think there's any man in American politics who's more eager than I am to put Cold War animosities behind us and get down to the hard business of building a friendly relationship," Kennedy said. Cousins agreed to function as an emissary and accepted the President's condition not to publicize the mission. He saw a window to resume negotiations and did not want press criticism to slam it shut.¹³⁰

Cousins delivered the message to the Soviet Premier on April 12th at his Black Sea retreat, namely, that the President sincerely wanted a test ban treaty and did not want on-site inspections to block arms control. He explained that Kennedy was now working in concert with organized interest groups in the United States to build public support for a test ban treaty.¹³¹ The message seemed a major breakthrough because the question of on-site inspection had prevented Kennedy and Khrushchev from reaching an agreement for nearly three years. "You can tell the President I accept his explanation of an honest misunderstanding and suggest that we get moving. But the next move is up to him," Khrushchev said.¹³²

Cousins reported to the President on April 22nd that the Soviet leader appeared to be under pressure to take a tougher stance against the U.S. on arms control, but wanted the United

States to send an official delegation. "This looks like a job made to order for Averell Harriman," Kennedy said after McCloy demurred as first choice.¹³³

The access strategy that Kennedy used with journalists to take a strong stand against Khrushchev following the Vienna summit now set the stage for the first arms control agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union. The flight of the eagle and the dove had succeeded, but in the process of appealing to journalists such as Luce and Alsop, the access strategy had threatened to derail arms control. The decision not to use access as a strategy to educate journalists regarding the need to rely upon diplomacy in the nuclear age made it more difficult to achieve the Test Ban Treaty, but Kennedy did not want to appear weak. The President arguably could have turned to Luce or Alsop with a patriotic appeal to deliver the breakthrough message to Khrushchev, but decided that a quiet end run with Cousins was easier. Lippmann wanted a greater emphasis on diplomacy and was also available, but he wanted the White House to educate the public and engage critics in a public debate that Kennedy did not want. In Cousins, the President found an emissary who did not need to be convinced about the need to have arms control and was trusted enough not to draw attention to his mission by writing stories or leaking his message to Khrushchev.

Tactical Use of Speeches:

Upon returning from Moscow, Cousins offered the White House advice warning that the Soviet leader planned to meet a high level Chinese delegation by the end of June and failure to reach an agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union would improve Sino-Soviet relations. He urged Kennedy to go to the press and call for an end to the Cold War and the beginning of a new relationship with the Soviet Union. The President did not dismiss the proposal out-of-hand and asked Cousins to submit a memorandum on the Peace Speech.¹³⁴

In order to have the best of both Alsop and Lippmann, the President had already rejected proposals for a Peace Offensive so long as the Soviets conducted atmospheric tests. The

knowledge that Khrushchev was interested in a test ban made him receptive to a Peace Speech, yet he approached the proposal with caution. Experience with speeches following the Vienna summit taught Kennedy that televised speeches produced mixed results and unintended consequences.

Using access, Kennedy focused press attention on the news he intended to make during a television address on his first night back from Vienna. The speech revealed details most reporters had not been told in Vienna: Khrushchev wanted to sign a peace treaty with East Berlin and close off access rights to West Berlin. "We have totally different views of right and wrong, of what is an internal affair and what is aggression," the President stated. He assured the nation and the world that the U.S. would defend West Berlin. Khrushchev had dealt the test ban talks a "serious blow." "Nevertheless, the stakes are too important for us to abandon the draft treaty we had offered at Geneva." The speech juxtaposed the eagle and the dove: the White House was prepared to go to war with Khrushchev, but as previously noted Kennedy preferred the status quo and wanted to continue negotiating for a test ban treaty.¹³⁵

The mixed imagery that President Kennedy emphasized in the speech led to press criticism, however, that strong military action was needed to defend Berlin. Kennedy's tactics mobilized the *New York Times*, for example, to call for more troops in Berlin to "draw a line." Lippmann told *CBS News* that Kennedy appeared hesitant to stop the Communists: "He's unsure of himself." Higgins wrote in the *New York Herald Tribune* that German officials doubted Kennedy's resolution. Luce published a story that criticized Kennedy for not "guiding the U.S. along the dangerous paths of the cold war."¹³⁶

Faced with press brick bats and concerned about maintaining his strong Cold Warrior image, Kennedy decided on another televised speech to emphasize that the United States was prepared to defend Berlin. The President worried that the news stories that questioned his leadership sent the wrong message to Khrushchev. The tactic anticipated news stories to unify the American public and "somewhat hesitant" Allies over the developing crisis regarding Berlin.

Before Sorensen wrote the speech he asked Kennedy, "Should not explicit attention be given to the problem of providing an escape hatch for Khrushchev?"¹³⁷ Murrow also advised, "De-emphasis of bellicosity -emphasis should be made that this is not a contest of wills between superpowers." : "Provide no cushion — no latitude for discussion on the issues of American rights."¹³⁸

The President agreed and instructed Sorensen to write a strong speech with a carefully crafted "escape hatch" to send a message to Khrushchev and avoid war. Concerned mainly for protecting West Berlin if a peaceful solution could not be reached, Kennedy rejected former-Secretary of State Dean Acheson's advice to declare a state of emergency and send a division of U.S. troops down the autobahn. The administration's desire "not to drive the crisis beyond the point of no return" tempered the President's strategy to express determination.¹³⁹

While preparing the speech Kennedy had Sorensen consult with James O'Donnell, a conservative journalist who had been appointed to assist Undersecretary of State George Ball. "Well just look at this — it ought to make even hard-liners like you and Higgins happy," Sorensen said. O'Donnell liked the speech, but suggested that references to West Berlin needed to be deleted because the U.S. needed to take a stand to protect access rights to all of Berlin, rather than sending Khrushchev a message that divided the city in half. Sorensen argued that it was already enough of a problem to convince ordinary Americans to protect West Berlin: "Look, I can't monkey around anymore with the text of this speech." The references to West Berlin were not removed because the President desired an "escape hatch" to avoid war.¹⁴⁰

On television that evening, Kennedy expressed grim determination and pledged the U.S. to defend West Berlin if a diplomatic solution became impossible: "We seek peace, but we shall not surrender."¹⁴¹ The President increased the draft, mobilized reserve forces, announced an expansion of the armed forces, and ordered additional defense appropriations. He also reintroduced the public to the Civil Defense program which he had first proposed in his May 1961 budget message to Congress: "In the event of an attack, the lives of those families which

are not hit in a nuclear blast and fire can still be saved.” : “Today, the endangered frontier of freedom runs through a divided Berlin. We want it to remain a frontier of peace....The steps I have indicated tonight are aimed at avoiding that war.” As Sorensen later wrote, “The President’s aim was to bestir a still slumbering public; and he succeeded beyond his own expectations and desire.”¹⁴²

The President’s speech indeed succeeded in stirring the public regarding Berlin, nuclear war, and the need to build personal bomb shelters. The next phase of the information strategy to mobilize the public included another television address on civil defense followed by a mass mailing to every homeowner in the United States with instructions on how to build a bomb shelter. Drafts of the pamphlets and the public’s ensuing “shelter panic” gave Kennedy somber second thoughts. He decided to reject plans for the mass mailing and second television address. Following advice from Schlesinger and Carl Kaysen, Kennedy opted for a community shelter program with less publicity.¹⁴³

The intended “escape hatch” to avoid a fight for all of Berlin implied by Kennedy’s strong rhetoric specifically referring to West Berlin went unnoticed by the press in the United States during the ensuing shelter panic. The references in the speech did raise questions for Major General Albert Watson, the commander of U.S. troops in Berlin, who privately wondered whether the President emphasized West Berlin to signal Khrushchev that the U.S. would not respond to Soviet action to close the border to refugees fleeing East Berlin. The following day in the *New York Times*, Reston noted behind-the-scenes, “there has been far more private discussions here of negotiation with the Russians than either the statements of our officials or the headlines of the press would suggest. The determination of the New Frontier not to be bullied into dishonorable concessions had to be established first.” The President chose not to draw further press attention to the issue by issuing a denial because he preferred a diplomatic solution to the costs of war.¹⁴⁴ His speech referred to West Berlin fifteen times, but less

skeptical reporters rallied behind the President with editorials praising his strong stance, ignoring that the speech had drawn a line between East and West Berlin.¹⁴⁵

Five days later, on *ABC's* "Issues and Answers," Senator J. William Fulbright commented, "I don't understand why the East Germans don't close their border." *The New York Times* simultaneously reported an anonymous government spokesperson saying the U.S. would not go to war if the Soviets closed the border and permitted Allied military access. "If Mr. Khrushchev is prepared to offer concrete guarantees that no effort will be made by the East Germans to interfere with the free flow of traffic into Berlin, officials said, this would remove immediate threat of a military clash," the *New York Times* reported on August 8, 1961.

Both the *New York Time's* story and Fulbright's remarks sent the Soviets a clear signal. The President did not denounce the stories because they fit into his strategy of using the best of both Alsop and Lippmann. His conspicuous silence on the validity of the stories made Kennedy indirectly responsible for the message sent to the Soviets even though he had not orchestrated the efforts of Reston and Fulbright. To deny the news stories would have contradicted the President's secret diplomatic efforts. Kennedy did not want the press to know that during June 1961 his brother Robert had been sending messages to Khrushchev through Georgi Bolshakov, the Washington bureau chief of *Tass* and a Colonel in Soviet military intelligence. The President's brother had proposed freezing the Berlin question in a written or verbal understanding that would leave U.S. troops in West Berlin at least until after the 1964 election. Khrushchev did not accept the proposal, but he now knew Kennedy wanted to freeze the Berlin question.¹⁴⁶

Once the Berlin Wall was erected, the President decided to downplay the issue in the press and did not give a television speech. He ruled out advice from Stevenson and Sorensen to conduct a Peace Offensive with the American people. He preferred quietly freezing the Berlin question and focusing on diplomatic efforts with the Soviets regarding nuclear weapons.

The best of both Alsop and Lippmann was also revealed in Kennedy's handling of the announcement to resume underground testing during the fall of 1961. He ruled out a television speech, thereby downplaying U.S. testing. The President wanted the test series in Nevada conducted in a low key with very little notice to the press with arrangements made to prevent photographs of mushroom clouds. He knew that the American public was concerned about the health risks of nuclear fallout, but not testing would stir hawkish press criticism and again send the wrong messages to the Soviets and American allies. He wanted to show strength to Khrushchev by testing, yet continue to leave the door open for negotiating a test ban.

Before the resumption of atmospheric testing, Kennedy publicized his decision with a television address in early March 1962. The tests released radiation into the atmosphere and Kennedy needed to reassure the world and the American public that testing was important to security. Before the announcement, the President left aides guessing about the decision to prevent leaks and personally released the news to the press and the public. The announcement emphasized U.S. preparedness to test in the atmosphere and underground to maintain military security. At the same time, Kennedy pledged to stop the arms race and declared his resolve to reach an agreement at peace talks scheduled to begin in Geneva in mid-March. Even while conducting atmospheric tests, Kennedy wanted to pursue arms control.¹⁴⁷

Ultimately, faced with the prospect of achieving a breakthrough for the test ban treaty, the President followed Cousin's advice to give Khrushchev public reassurances and delivered a major peace speech on June 10, 1963. Kennedy wanted to make it difficult for Khrushchev to accuse the U.S. of not being interested in *détente*. Domestically, the speech was intended to allay American fears of nuclear war. Yet, while the major emphasis of the speech was a call for *détente*, the President carefully downplayed the speech.¹⁴⁸

To prevent leaks and press debate Kennedy resorted to secrecy. He told Sorensen not to solicit official opinions from within the administration while writing the peace speech, and it thus remained secret from his inner circle of advisers.¹⁴⁹ The President considered the peace

speech of major importance, but decided against delivering the address on prime time television for maximum exposure. Instead of a keynote television address during a series of speeches on peace, the peace speech was scheduled as a commencement address at American University on a day where it would stand alone between two major speeches on civil rights.¹⁵⁰ Kennedy spoke before the U.S. Conference of Mayors on June 9, 1963 and delivered a major television address on civil rights on June 11, 1963.¹⁵¹ Sorensen noted that the press in the United States did not give the peace speech extensive coverage and it became overshadowed by civil rights. Nevertheless, Kennedy had decided against promoting the speech in advance with his access strategy or putting the speech on television to attract more press attention.¹⁵²

After the limited test ban treaty was completed in July 1963 Kennedy did go on television to promote Senate ratification. He described the treaty as “a step towards reduced world tension,” “freeing the world from the fears of dangers of nuclear fallout,” a “wedge” to stop proliferation, and a step toward limiting the arms race by ending unrestricted testing. The speech ended with an oblique reference to the Sino-Soviet split and quoted from a Chinese proverb that expressed cautious optimism about détente: “A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step.”¹⁵³

Nevertheless, President Kennedy had waited until 1963 to use the bully pulpit to actively promote public support for arms control. Afraid to stray far from the status quo, Kennedy's information strategy for speeches approached arms control with caution and the need to balance détente with U.S. strategic interests. The experience of meeting Khrushchev at Vienna left Kennedy shaken and determined to prove himself. Upon returning, the televised response to Khrushchev emphasized the President's determination to defend the status quo and continue arms control negotiations. The speech that followed in July was designed to emphasize West Berlin and signal Moscow, but the White House never anticipated the Berlin Wall as Khrushchev's next move.

The experience of speeches backfiring frustrated Kennedy and made it easier to rule out a Peace Offensive until after the 1964 election. Nevertheless, after the Test Ban Treaty was signed the President was surprised by the crowd reaction during an early campaign swing through Western states. "I support the Test Ban Treaty...because we have a chance to avoid being burned," Kennedy said. The crowd roared with approval after the President finished delivering the line. He quickly concluded that " 'peace' was an issue in his favor." Nevertheless, although Sorensen had finally found a way to campaign on peace, Kennedy was still not prepared to 'minimize' the remaining problems the U.S. faced throughout the world in the war against Communism.¹⁵⁴

Tactical Use of Press Conferences:

The next section examines Kennedy's use of the eagle and the dove strategy during press conferences. The President's statements in press conferences emphasized personal commitment to defending West Berlin and his commitment to peaceful negotiations for arms control. An important goal was building a psychological case in the press against the Soviet Union and have world opinion blame Khrushchev for any negotiations stalemates. Following Vienna, Kennedy approached press conferences cautiously and used them to make his intentions regarding West Berlin clear to Khrushchev. Following the construction of the Berlin Wall, the President commented on Berlin in passing and faced only occasional questions. After the limited test ban treaty was completed, Kennedy used press conferences to promote ratification of the treaty.

Faced with Khrushchev's *aide mémoire* and a crisis building over Berlin, the President avoided press conferences until the end of June 1961. His tactic during the interim between Vienna and the Berlin Wall avoided direct challenge with the Soviet Premier over East Berlin and emphasized the U.S. commitment to West Berlin.¹⁵⁵ After Fulbright's statement on television and Reston's article on Berlin, Kennedy held a press conference on August 10th, but refused to respond to the Arkansas Senator's comments about East Germany's legal right to

close the border to refugees and opposed a war over the issue.¹⁵⁶ "In answer to your question, however, the United States Government does not attempt to encourage or discourage the movement of refugees and I know of no plans to do so." Three days later, Khrushchev began construction of the Berlin Wall.¹⁵⁷

While vacationing in Hyannis, the President first learned of the news from Rusk and decided to downplay the issue in the press. He hesitated to confront Khrushchev over East Berlin: "Go to the ball game as you had planned; I am going sailing," Kennedy said. In the absence of satellite television and a more aggressive press corps equipped with helicopters, the President remained undisturbed as he spent the afternoon cruising Nantucket Sound.¹⁵⁸

During the critical moments following the Berlin Wall, Kennedy's first instinct was to worry about the press reaction rather than mobilizing tanks with bulldozers: "What steps will we take this week to exploit politically propagandawise the Soviet-East German cut-off of the border?"¹⁵⁹ On the day after the Berlin Wall was erected the President held an off-the-record State Department news conference with George F. Kennan. When Kennan told reporters the U.S. faced a situation in Berlin analogous to the Korean War, Kennedy downplayed this comment by the "tactician of containment." Because Kennan had told him earlier that a peaceful solution for the Berlin crisis was possible, Kennedy assured the press that the U.S. would not be driven from West Berlin, but a peaceful solution was preferable to war: "In a nuclear exchange there would be no winners."¹⁶⁰

The President's off-the-record press conference fit into his commitment to a tough stand without going over the brink. The ground rules not to publish the information allowed Kennedy to tell reporters the Berlin Crisis was not analogous to the Korean War without the being quoted wherein partisan opponents and Khrushchev might misinterpret his words. The President planned to take a stand in West Berlin and was prepared to defend U.S. interests from Soviet encroachment; however, the Berlin Wall was not worth a war. Before troops were deployed he

wanted to make the entire press corps understand that the White House was taking action, but not going to war unless it became absolutely necessary.¹⁶¹

The off-the-record effort did not prevent hawkish demands to send Johnson and Clay to West Berlin along with American troops, but no one suggested tearing down the wall.¹⁶² In Berlin, Kennedy had avoided a war, but his tactics to demonstrate firmness did not prevent partisan criticism in the press. On August 30th, he finally gave reporters an opportunity to confront him with Nixon's criticism of his response to the Berlin Wall. He assured reporters that the U.S. intended to defend Berlin and sending soldiers demonstrated commitment.¹⁶³ Later, the President explained that nuclear war would be bad for the future of mankind and noted that a peaceful solution was in everyone's interest.¹⁶⁴

That same day, Khrushchev announced resumption of Soviet nuclear testing. Deciding against calling the press back for a press conference or televised speech, the President opted for a less confrontational press release which condemned the Soviets for "atomic blackmail" and suspended test ban talks.¹⁶⁵ Although completed intelligence studies now demonstrated the U.S. had a twenty-to-one advantage in delivery systems, Kennedy decided for reasons of national security not to reveal these details to the press. Faced with partisan criticism regarding Berlin, Kennedy avoided press conferences for the month of September and finally scheduled one on October 11, 1961.¹⁶⁶ "Mr. President, did you make the decision for us not to use force to stop the building of the wall in Berlin? And if you had to do it over again, would you make the same decision?" another reporter asked. He refused to answer the question and emphasized that East Berlin had been under Soviet control since 1947. The White House press corps let the President's evasive answer slip by without comment. Kennedy preferred not to take responsibility in public for the decision not to tear down the Berlin Wall because of the criticism it would arouse in the press regarding his strong Cold Warrior image.¹⁶⁷

The President worried that press debate over whether or not to tear down the Berlin Wall would be misinterpreted by Khrushchev. Trapped by the missile gap rhetoric, Kennedy

refrained from briefing the press on the latest intelligence studies that confirmed the U.S. had superiority in nuclear delivery systems. Presidential boasts of nuclear superiority during a press conference or a speech would have exacerbated already tense relations with the Soviet Union. Kennedy opted for a low key tactic and selected Undersecretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric to respond to the press and Khrushchev in a speech made on October 21, 1961 outside of Washington: "In short, we have a second strike capability which is at least as extensive as what the Soviets can deliver by striking first. Therefore, we are confident that the Soviets will not provoke a major nuclear conflict...." He dismissed nuclear testing by the Soviet Union as an effort to impress China.¹⁶⁸

The Gilpatric speech was followed by a press conference on November 8th, but reporters did not ask Kennedy to respond. "Mr. President, can you give us the latest, sir, on the Berlin crisis, which seems to have quieted down a bit, and also on your views regarding the talk of possible trips to the summit again to discuss this problem?" : "No," replied Kennedy. The White House press corps obediently complied. The President referred to the Gilpatric speech in response to a question on Soviet testing: "Well, I've stated that I thought that the United States was in a position that was powerful -Mr. Gilpatric said 'second to none.' " Kennedy's quiet tactics had called Khrushchev's bluff.¹⁶⁹

The President hoped that standing firm with the Soviet leader would encourage serious negotiations in 1961. Nevertheless, his strategy to convince Khrushchev of American strength and preparedness to use nuclear weapons backfired by scaring the Soviets into bridging their own missile gap. Concerned that Gilpatric's October 1961 speech meant hard-liners in the Pentagon and CIA were pushing for revenge against Cuba, the Soviet Union moved to protect Cuba. Khrushchev was motivated less by strategic military concerns than by a sense of personal rivalry with Kennedy and concern that Cuba needed to be defended to promote Soviet hegemony and the expansion of Communism. The Soviets were concerned about maintaining the image of a powerful Communist movement on the march throughout the world with the

Kremlin at the forefront. According to recent Soviet scholarship, maintaining the image of Soviet power was more important to Khrushchev than correcting the missile gap. The Soviets needed to launch a long term arms build-up to come close to nuclear parity with the United States. Thus, the unintended consequences of Kennedy's information strategy encouraged the moves that led to the Cuban Missile Crisis.¹⁷⁰

At a January 31st press conference, the President described the failure to produce an arms control treaty as the "biggest disappointment of my first year in office."¹⁷¹ By March 21st, Kennedy faced questions from reports noting that test ban negotiations were deadlocked. "I think the talks should go on," he said. "I think that it would be wiser to let the talks continue." Although Kennedy approached arms control cautiously he preferred negotiations over military confrontation.¹⁷²

By the summer of 1962, the President was disturbed by the lack of progress in the test ban talks and vented frustration during his press conference on July 23rd. "We are very reluctant to test," Kennedy noted. He blamed the Soviets for testing and forcing the U.S. into testing. Faced with a hypothetical question on the U.S. response if Khrushchev signed a peace treaty with East Berlin, the President refused to provoke the Soviet leader or reveal American contingency plans. "Well, I would rather not look into that clouded crystal ball....I'd rather talk about what we can do to work out an equitable solution than to talk about what might happen under these condition," Kennedy replied.¹⁷³

Following the Cuban Missile Crisis, the President was cautious about the prospects of Khrushchev's offer of inspection inside Cuba leading to a breakthrough for the test ban. Kennedy noted at his December 17th press conference that he was pessimistic about the Soviets opening up a totalitarian society to accommodate inspections. "No, I think the camera is going to be our best inspector," the President said. He had no plans for a summit meeting with Khrushchev until agreement on nuclear testing was reached. "That is what we really want to do," Kennedy emphasized.¹⁷⁴

After Harriman signed the test ban treaty at the end of July 1963, Kennedy actively campaigned for Senate passage of the treaty. Press conferences became an important part of the campaign because the President chose to answer criticism regarding the treaty and take a strong public stand rather than hide from the press as he had done after the Berlin Wall. Kennedy realized that the Limited Test Ban Treaty would not pass unless he gave it full public support and used press conferences to clarify where questions remained.

In order to pressure the Senate to pass the test ban treaty, Kennedy believed he needed to lead public opinion. "A great mass of the people frequently are not heard or may not be informed.....Therefore, the field is left to a few participants on both sides. I think that the wider we can spread this debate the better off we will be," Kennedy explained to Robert Stein, a reporter and an associate of Cousins working in the McCall syndicate representing seven magazines aimed at 3.4 million women readers.¹⁷⁵

At the President's August 1st press conference a reporter asked about ratification in light of Senator Everett Dirksen's comment that he was evaluating the treaty on a "wait and see" basis. "I think there is nothing wrong with waiting and seeing," Kennedy replied. Another reporter wanted to know whether the test ban treaty meant a relaxation in Cold War tension that would effect relations between the United States and Cuba. "We can't predict it....so I don't think we should make any presumptions," Kennedy said.¹⁷⁶

"Mr. President, the Joint Chiefs of Staff have approved a series of safeguards that they say will maintain our security under the limited test ban treaty, but there seems to be some feeling in Congress that perhaps these safeguards won't be carried out.....What do you have to say to that, sir?" a reporter asked at Kennedy's August 20th news conference. Kennedy pointed out that he had sent a letter to Congress assuring a "vigorous" underground test series, labs and testing procedures maintained on a stand-by basis, and methods of detection improved. "I can assure them that we are going to do the job," Kennedy said. "Mr. President, Dr. Teller, in urging the Senate to reject the nuclear test ban today, said that it weakens American defenses

and thus invites attack....What do you have to say to this?" Kennedy pointed out that McNamara and scientist with similar credentials equaling Teller's endorsed the treaty. "I recognize that he is going to continue to be opposed to it," Kennedy said. "I said in my speech what we now have on hand, without any further testing, will kill 300 million people in one hour. I suppose they could even improve on that if it's necessary," Kennedy wryly added.¹⁷⁷

"I want to stress again how important it is that the United States Senate approve the pending nuclear test ban treaty," the President said during his opening statement at his September 12th press conference. "Under that limited agreement it is possible to carry on underground testing," Kennedy assured reporters. Another reporter asked whether it would be possible to place further limits on testing through Executive action. "The treaty cannot be changed in any way," he said. Asked about Goldwater's charge that there was a secret deal with Khrushchev regarding Cuba and the test ban treaty, Kennedy refused to answer the charge about Cuba. "The fact of the matter is....we offered the correspondence on the test ban treaty to the leadership of the Senate. It stands on its own," the President said. Later in the press conference a reporter asked for a response to the Air Force Association's refusal to support the treaty. "But the fact of the matter is that the Joint Chiefs of Staff favored this treaty," Kennedy said. Another reporter asked Kennedy to respond to Senator Richard Russell's opposition to the test ban treaty. Kennedy pointed out that the Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee was influential, but the treaty had other supporters. "I think the Senate is going to approve this," Kennedy said. He argued that a failure to approve the treaty would be a "greenlight for intensive atmospheric testing by a number of countries."¹⁷⁸

Although unwilling to support a Peace Offensive, President Kennedy used press conferences to emphasize his commitment to the Test Ban Treaty throughout his presidency. Nevertheless, the President's press conference remarks balanced the commitment to arms control with U.S. strategic interests. The White House supported arms control, yet Kennedy still planned to continue nuclear testing underground. A cautious approach toward détente

forced him to campaign for passage of the Test Ban by emphasizing at press conferences that the military supported the President's approach toward arms control. Kennedy's perception of the Cold War conflict always presumed that the dove could not fly without the eagle.

Tactical Use of Interest Groups and Arm Twisting:

During the month of August, Kennedy personally organized the publicity campaign to promote passage of the test ban treaty by working closely with Cousins to create the Citizen's Committee for a Nuclear Test Ban. Cousins and The Citizen's Committee for a Nuclear Test Ban became an extension of the public relations efforts of the White House.¹⁷⁹ Using an interest group information strategy, Kennedy urged Cousins to coordinate lobbying efforts with Hollywood entertainers, leaders of business, academic, religious, farm and labor organizations. He also called for a grass roots mailing campaign which targeted Senator Jackson and Senator Dirksen along with Senators that Kennedy thought might swing either way. Testimony by Administration officials before the Senate was coordinated by Kennedy.¹⁸⁰

Kennedy wanted to mobilize the public and make it clear that the Limited Test Ban had full support of the Executive Branch. To prevent debate in the press, Kennedy sought witnesses for the administration who supported the test ban to go on the public record first before they testified in closed door sessions. Kennedy anticipated opposition from General Thomas Powers, Chief of the Strategic Air Command, and Dr. Edward Teller, a nuclear scientist who opposed the treaty because it would delay development of a hydrogen bomb. During the ratification debate, Teller argued that radioactive fallout did not pose a danger to public health. Although Kennedy knew that the public was concerned about the health dangers of radioactive fallout, he chose not to emphasize whether or not radioactive fallout was dangerous and thus avoided a debate in the press with Teller. During Senate hearings, the testimony by Cousins reflected Kennedy's information strategy to emphasize national security and avoid the question of public health. Rather than focusing on the technical debate regarding the health dangers of

radiation, Kennedy chose to emphasize that the treaty was necessary to lessen the dangers of nuclear proliferation and argued that the administration planned to continue underground testing for a strong defense.¹⁸¹

Kennedy may have over-estimated the amount of potential opposition the treaty actually faced in the Senate. On August 5, 1963, *Newsweek* published a story in which a Republican Senator noted that the test ban treaty was not an issue where there was “political mileage” to be gained from blocking ratification. “It is very likely that the Senate would approve such a treaty.”¹⁸² A Harris Poll published in *Newsweek* on August 26, 1963 indicated that the test ban treaty had not hurt Kennedy’s political standing and eighty-one percent had a favorable opinion about his handling of Khrushchev. The controversy over civil rights, however, created major political problems for Kennedy’s public support.¹⁸³

On that same day, however, Eisenhower told reporters he endorsed the treaty.¹⁸⁴ The endorsement resulted from political arm twisting. Earlier, Kennedy had called Dirksen to the White House as a tactic to secure the General's press endorsement of the test ban in exchange for payment of a political favor: “Ev, I want you to reverse yourself and come out for the treaty. I also want Ike’s public endorsement of the treaty before the Senate votes. We’ll call it square on that other matter.” In the other matter, Kennedy called off his brother Robert’s investigation into political wrongdoing by Eisenhower’s chief-of-staff, Sherman Adams, at the General’s request. “Mr. President, you’re a hell of a horse trader. But I’ll honor my commitment, and I’m sure that General Eisenhower will,” Dirksen said.¹⁸⁵ During the following week, Dirksen told reporters after careful reflection he had reversed his position on the test ban treaty. Kennedy appreciated this support because Senator Russell, chairman of the Armed Services Committee and Senator Stennis, chairman of the Preparedness Committee, remained opposed to the treaty.¹⁸⁶

By September, the White House began to receive more mail from supporters of the treaty.¹⁸⁷ A Harris poll completed on September 1, 1963 found eighty-one percent of the public

approved the test ban treaty, while eleven percent gave qualified approval and eight percent opposed.¹⁸⁸ Not satisfied that public opinion polls alone would guarantee ratification, Kennedy consulted with Senator Dirksen on September 9, 1963 to discuss reservations raised by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.¹⁸⁹ Kennedy wanted Dirksen's support to prevent Republican Senator Barry Goldwater and John Tower from attaching amendments to the treaty calling for on-site inspections in the Soviet Union and the removal of the Soviet troops from Cuba.¹⁹⁰

Kennedy assured Dirksen that ratification of the test ban treaty would not constitute a departure from the Administration's strong Cold War stance. Kennedy gave Dirksen with a pledge to protect America's national security with continued underground testing in a "vigorous program of weapons development" and to resume testing in all environments if the Soviets broke the treaty. On September 11, 1963 Kennedy released the letter to the press and sent copies to Senator Mansfield and Senator Dirksen.¹⁹¹ Kennedy's public tact attempted to balance the pursuit of peace with a strong stance on protecting national security from Communism.

Dirksen read Kennedy's letter in a speech calling for the passage of the test ban treaty during debate on the Senate floor. "I should not like to have written on my tombstone: 'He knew what happened at Hiroshima, but he did not take a first step,'" Dirksen said.¹⁹² Kennedy's pragmatic juggling had set the stage for his proudest achievement —the passage of the test ban— which marked the culmination of an information strategy that required arm twisting and striking a difficult balance between war and peace.¹⁹³

The Flight of the Eagle and the Dove:

The tactics used to influence press coverage of the Berlin Wall and the Test Ban Treaty showed that Kennedy pragmatically preferred to avoid nuclear war and was prepared to go beyond the limits of conventional opinion regarding the Soviet Union in order to stop the Chinese from acquiring nuclear weapons. President Kennedy's dual approach of war and peace

pragmatically finessed the Berlin question in the pursuit of peace, but created a dilemma by raising questions regarding his image as a strong Cold Warrior and preparedness to defend Europe.

Ironically, the President's information strategy for peace had potentially deadly unintended consequences by encouraging the events that propelled the world to the brink during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Determined to demonstrate strength to achieve arms control, Kennedy did not anticipate that Khrushchev's response would be a demonstration of Soviet strength in Cuba.

The information strategy for Berlin and the Test Ban Treaty did not operate with a sophisticated scientific design. Gut instincts to take a strong stand against Khrushchev while avoiding war and achieving a test ban treaty and getting re-elected guided Kennedy's relations with the press. The President found that his access strategy produced mixed results which left him frustrated. Access worked best when he appealed to patriotism or enlisted journalists to participate in diplomacy, but he could not escape criticism or pressure to take a hawkish against Khrushchev. Press conferences were events that Kennedy approached cautiously, sometimes relying on his access strategy in preparation, or avoiding them altogether, especially during crises and on sensitive issues. Kennedy used television effectively to influence the press and strike a high note, but his frustration following the July 24th speech derived from his desire to awaken the public without anticipating the consequences. Kennedy's response to hawkish criticism was only a temporary fix because he had not solved the real problem of educating the public. But Kennedy did not know how to educate the public without misleading Khrushchev that he was soft. As a result, the dilemma remained and Kennedy continued to face pressure in the press to take a hawkish stand while he preferred to negotiate pragmatically on with Khrushchev on Berlin and nuclear testing.

He later lamented to Sulzberger that his real problem was not being able to educate the public regarding Berlin. Rather than deliver a television address and damage his image as a

strong Cold Warrior, Kennedy preferred to cultivate Sulzberger and other columnists as surrogates. Kennedy preferred not creating a debate in the press by going on a peace offensive. He pragmatically preferred secret diplomatic efforts with Khrushchev and emissaries that would draw little press attention.

Kennedy decided against televising the Peace Speech at American University and camouflaged between speeches on civil rights because he was following a strategy to have the best of Alsop and Lippmann and pursued détente with Khrushchev cautiously in the press rather than boldly adapting Schlesinger's Peace Offensive. The Limited Test Ban Treaty was guided by this same cautious approach. Once Kennedy had an agreement with Khrushchev that he could bring to the Senate, he put the full weight of his office behind it, notwithstanding his continued caution when faced with press speculation regarding the future of détente after the 1964 election.

Yet, juxtaposed against Kennedy's cautious approach to promoting arms control with Congress there was another dimension in his personality that was prepared to take risks. Kennedy did not want administration officials talking to the press about proposals to Khrushchev which included the possibility of Pearl Harbor style air strikes and a joint preemptive nuclear strike against China.¹⁹⁴ Kennedy closely monitored the negotiations in Moscow and personally approved all communication. Fearing leaks, Kennedy restricted access to cables to six aides: Rusk, Thompson, Foster, McNamara, Undersecretary of State George Ball, and John McCone, the director of the CIA.¹⁹⁵

The President's pragmatic approach was driven by a competitive desire to win the nuclear game against China. Driven by a desire to score another Kennedy win, he failed to make a sober assessment of the consequences of a sneak attack on China by the United States and the Soviet Union. Moreover, Kennedy failed to anticipate that his information strategy against Khrushchev would make it very difficult to explain joint actions with the Soviets to the

American public. Dilemmas and crisis were ongoing costs associated with an information strategy that was driven more by instinct than a calculating vision.

Notes

¹Robert McNamara, In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam, (New York, 1995), pp.20-21.

²Ibid., pp. 20-21.

³Ibid., pp. 20-21.

⁴Ibid., pp. 20-21.

⁵Theodore Sorensen, Kennedy, (New York, 1965), p.587.

⁶Foreign Relations of the United States, Berlin Crisis, 1961-1963, Vol. XIV, (Washington D.C. 1993), p.41.

⁷Michael R. Beschloss, The Crisis Years: Kennedy and Khrushchev 1960-1963, (New York, 1991), p.p44-45; Roger Hilsman, To Move A Nation: The Politics of Foreign Policy in the Administration of John F. Kennedy, (New York, 1967), pp. 343-345.

⁸Ivo H. Daalder, "The Limited Test Ban Treaty," in Albert Carnesale and Richard Haass et. al., Superpower Arms Control: Setting the Record Straight, (Cambridge , MA: 1987), pp. 10-11.

⁹Bernard J. Firestone, "Defense Policy as a Form of Arms Control: Nuclear Force Posture and Strategy under John F. Kennedy," in Paul Harper and Joann P. Krieg et al., John F. Kennedy: The Promise Revisited, (Westport, CT: 1988), pp. 57-78; Lewis J. Paper, The Promise and Performance: The Leadership of John F. Kennedy, (New York, 1975), p.85, p.125, pp. 351-353 ; Herbert S. Parmet, JFK: The Presidency of John F. Kennedy, (New York, 1983), pp. 181-202.

¹⁰Parmet, JFK, pp. 181-202; Thomas G. Paterson, "John F. Kennedy and the World," in J. Richard Snyder et. al., John F. Kennedy: Person, Policy, Presidency, (Wilmington, DE: 1988), pp. 123-138.

¹¹Foreign Relations, 1961-1963, Volume VII Arms Control and Disarmament, (hereafter cited as FRUS 61-63 Vol. VII), (Washington D.C., 1995) pp. 8-10.

¹²Ibid., pp. 8-10.

¹³Ibid., pp. 56-57

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 58-59.

¹⁵Ibid., p.69.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 86-91.

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- ¹⁷ Edited by Edwin O. Guthman and Jeffrey Shulman, Robert Kennedy: In His Own Words, The Unpublished Recollections of the Kennedy Years, (New York, 1988), p.29.
- ¹⁸ FRUS 61-63 Vol. VII, pp. 92-93.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 106-109.
- ²⁰ Ibid., pp. 124-127.
- ²¹ Ibid., pp. 130-131.
- ²² Robert A. Divine, "The Education of John F. Kennedy," in Frank J. Merli and Theodore J. Wilson, eds. Makers of Foreign Policy: from Benjamin Franklin to Henry Kissinger, (New York, 1974), p.635; Richard Reeves, Profile of Power, (New York, 1993), p.223.
- ²³ FRUS 61-63 Vol. VII, p.149.
- ²⁴ Ibid., pp. 152-157
- ²⁵ Ibid., p.159.
- ²⁶ Ibid., p.159.
- ²⁷ Ibid., p.161.
- ²⁸ Ibid., p.164.
- ²⁹ Ibid., pp. 227-230.
- ³⁰ Ibid., p.259.
- ³¹ Ibid., pp. 272-281.
- ³² Ibid., pp. 328-330.
- ³³ Ibid., pp. 3318-337.
- ³⁴ Ibid., pp. 337-339.
- ³⁵ Ibid., pp. 337-339.
- ³⁶ Ibid., pp. 355-357.
- ³⁷ United States Arms Control and Disarmament Agency: Documents on Disarmament Volume I January-June 1962, (hereafter cited as ACDA), (Washington D.C., 1963), pp. 103-141.
- ³⁸ FRUS 61-63 Vol. VII, pp. 414-415.

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- ³⁹ Ibid., pp. 425-426.
- ⁴⁰ ACDA, pp. 318-328.
- ⁴¹ FRUS 61-63 Vol. VII, pp. 438-439.
- ⁴² Ibid., pp. 439-442.
- ⁴³ Gordon H. Chang, "JFK, China, and the Bomb," *Journal of American History*, March 1988, pp. 1287-1310.
- ⁴⁴ FRUS 61-63 Vol. VII, pp. 520-524.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 534-535.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 535-537.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 537-539.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 560-561; ACDA, pp. 791-792.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 561-562.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 568-569.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 575-57.
- ⁵² Ibid., pp. 585-586.
- ⁵³ POF, Cuban Missile Crisis Tape 38.2, JFKL.
- ⁵⁴ ACDA, pp. 990-991.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 995-999.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 1000-1001.
- ⁵⁷ Schlesinger, One Thousand Days, p.825.
- ⁵⁸ William C. Foster Oral History (hereafter cited as OH), John F. Kennedy Library (hereafter cited as JFKL), p.37.
- ⁵⁹ Chang, "JFK, China, and the Bomb," pp. 1301-1303.
- ⁶⁰ Daalder, "The Limited Test Ban Treaty," pp. 13-14.
- ⁶¹ Seaborg et al., Test Ban, pp. 280-281.
- ⁶² Sorensen, Kennedy, p.740.

- ⁶³ Beschloss, The Crisis Years, pp. 25-29; Reeves, Profile of Power, p. 228.
- ⁶⁴ Kaplan, Wizards, (New York, 1983), p.292.
- ⁶⁵ Reeves, Profile of Power, pp. 34-44.
- ⁶⁶ Sorensen OH March 26, 1964 JFKL, pp. 13-14.
- ⁶⁷ Edward Klein, All Too Human: The Love Story of Jack and Jackie Kennedy, (New York, 1996), pp.282-284; Salinger, With Kennedy, pp.166-168.
- ⁶⁸ Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Berlin Crisis 1961- 1962, Volume XIV, (hereafter cited as FRUS61-63 XIV)(Washington, D.C., 1993), pp. 107-109.
- ⁶⁹ Anatoly Dobrynin, In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to America's Six Cold War Presidents 1962-1986, (New York, 1995), pp. 54-55,64-65.
- ⁷⁰ Kenneth P. O'Donnell and David Powers with Joe McCarthy, "Johnny, We Hardly Knew Ye," (Boston, 1972), p.303; Cate, Ides of August, (New York, 1978), pp. 402-406.
- ⁷¹ Politics Prior to the 1964 Campaign 9-12/61-6/30/62 Sorensen, "Notes for Democratic Debaters," May 25, 1962, Box 36, White House Central Subject Files, (hereafter cited as WHFSF), JFKL.
- ⁷² FRUS 61-63 Vol. VII,pp. 272-281.
- ⁷³ Ibid., pp. 282-285.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid., pp.282-285.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid., pp.286-287.
- ⁷⁶ Sorensen, "Memorandum for the President, January 25, 1962," Box 36, WHCSF, JFKL.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid.: The memo included a list of newspapers: *The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Baltimore Sun, The Milwaukee Journal, The Louisville Courier Journal, The Saint Louis Post Dispatch, McClatchey Papers, The Christian Science Monitor, The Philadelphia Inquirer, The New York Herald Tribune, The New York Post, The San Francisco Chronicle, The Des Moines Register and The Hartford Times.*
- ⁷⁸ Ibid.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid.
- ⁸⁰ Ibid.
- ⁸¹ Sorensen OH March 26, 1964 JFKL, pp. 13-14.

⁸² FRUS 61-63 Vol. VII, pp. 8-10.

⁸³ Kaplan, Wizards, pp. 289-304.

⁸⁴ Harold Karan Jacobson and Eric Stein, Diplomats, Scientists, and Politicians: The United States and the Nuclear Test Ban Negotiations, (Ann Arbor, MI: 1966), pp. 269-270; "Keep ACDA Off the Chopping Block," *Defense News* July 17, 1995; Conor O'Cleary, "Destroyer of Worlds," *The Irish Times*, July 22, 1995, McCloy had told President Harry Truman in the summer of 1945 to consider having "our heads examined if we don't consider a political solution;" James Chace, "Going Nuclear," *Foreign Affairs*, January 1996, p.129. McCloy helped Secretary of War Henry Stimson write a memorandum to Truman that recommended against using the atomic bomb.

⁸⁵"Disarmer" Foster Old Hand...New Agency," *U.S. News and World Report*, October 9, 1961; "Disarmament: The U.S. Tries Again," *Time*, October 6, 1961; "Our Man in Geneva - Durable," *Newsweek*, August 13, 1962.

⁸⁶"Bargainer Arthur Dean Home...but No Nuclear Ban," *U.S. News and World Report*, July 3, 1961; "Our Man in Geneva -Durable," *Newsweek*, August 13, 1962.

⁸⁷Steven L. Rearden, "Paul H. Nitze: Last of the Cold Warriors," *Diplomatic History*, Winter 1993, p. 143; James T. Patterson, The Oxford History of the United States, Vol. 10, Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974, (New York, 1996) p. 489; "Brains Behind the Muscle," *Time*, April 7, 1961.

⁸⁸"Disarmament: The U.S. Tries Again," *Time*, October 6, 1961.

⁸⁹ FRUS 61-63 Vol. VII, pp. 10-14.

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 10-14.

⁹¹ Public Papers of the President of the United States: John F. Kennedy 1962, (hereafter cited as PPJFK62) (Washington, D.C., 1963), pp. 134-141.

⁹² *Newsweek* July 10, 1961; Honore Marc Catudal, Kennedy and the Berlin Wall Crisis: A Case Study in U.S. Decision-making, (Berlin, GA: 1980), pp. 154-159.

⁹³ Public Papers of the President of the United States, John F. Kennedy 1961, (hereafter cited as PPJFK61) (Washington, D.C., 1962), pp. 334-338.

⁹⁴ Joyce Hoffman, Theodore White and Journalism as Illusion, (Columbia, Missouri: 1995), pp. 166-168.

⁹⁵ Sorensen memorandum to Lippmann October 5, 1961, Box 105, Walter Lippmann Papers, Yale University, Steele Memorial Library.

- ⁹⁶ Reeves, Profile of Power, pp. 172-173; James Reston, Deadline: A Memoir, (New York, 1993), p.291; O'Donnell, "Johnny, We Hardly Knew Ye," pp. 298-299; Salinger, With Kennedy, pp.182-183.
- ⁹⁷ Reeves, Profile of Power, pp. 172-173; Reston, Deadline, p.291; O'Donnell., "Johnny, We Hardly Knew Ye," pp. 298-299.
- ⁹⁸ Robert W. Merry, Taking On the World: Joseph and Stewart Alsop Guardians of the American Century, (New York, NY: 1996), pp. 370-371.
- ⁹⁹ Reeves, Profile of Power, pp. 172-173
- ¹⁰⁰ Merry, Taking On the World, pp. 370-371.
- ¹⁰¹ Bill Lawrence, Six Presidents Too Many Wars, (New York, 1972), pp. 258-262. Lawrence also noted that he owed Salinger a debt for once helping him get a job with ABC's Jim Hagerty, Eisenhower's former press secretary. Lawrence had quit his job reporting for the *New York Times* after learning he would not go to Vienna. In preparation, Kennedy also issued a memo instructing aides to help Lawrence in any way possible.
- ¹⁰² PPJFK61, p.888; Beschloss, The Crisis Years, pp. 188-191; Parmet, JFK, pp. 182-183.
- ¹⁰³ FRUS 61-63 Vol. VII, pp. 92-93; Reeves, Profile of Power, pp. 175-184; Thomas Reeves, A Question of Character: A Life of John F. Kennedy, (New York, 1991), p.303.
- ¹⁰⁴ PPJFK61, pp.442-444.
- ¹⁰⁵ Reeves, Profile of Power, pp. 175-184.
- ¹⁰⁶ Joseph Alsop with Adam Platt, "I've Seen the Best of It:" Memoirs, (New York, 1992), p.446.
- ¹⁰⁷ Charles E. Bohlen, Witness to History, 1929-1969, (New York, 1973), p.483.
- ¹⁰⁸ Chalmers Roberts, First Rough Draft: A Journalist's Journal of Our Times, (New York, 1973), p.200.
- ¹⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 188-189; *Newsweek* July 10, 1961.
- ¹¹⁰ *Time Magazine* June 16, 1961.
- ¹¹¹ *Time Magazine* June 23, 1961.
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- ¹¹³ Hugh Sidey, John F. Kennedy, President, (New York, 1964), p.213; Kevin W. Dean, "We Seek Peace -But We Shall Not Surrender: JFK's Use of Juxtaposition for Rhetorical Success in

the Berlin Crisis," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* Summer 1991, pp. 531-544; Walt Rostow, The Diffusion of Power, (New York, 1972), p.135.

¹¹⁴ *Time Magazine* August 4, 1961.

¹¹⁵ Eleanor Lansing Dulles, The Wall: A Tragedy in Three Acts, (South Carolina, 1972), pp. 48-49.

¹¹⁶ Beschloss, The Crisis Years, pp. 277-278; p.282.

¹¹⁷ Cate, The Ides of August, pp. 402-403.

¹¹⁸ Roberts, First Rough Draft, p.201

¹¹⁹ Walter Lippmann OH JFKL, p.11.

¹²⁰ Lippmann memorandum to Sorensen October 6, 1961, Box 105, Lippmann Papers, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library.

¹²¹ Reeves, Profile of Power, p.p279-280.

¹²² Reston, Deadline, p.469-470.

¹²³ Reeves, Profile of Power, pp. 233-234; Sorensen, "Memorandum for the President, January 25, 1962," Box 36, WHCSF, JFKL.

¹²⁴ Ibid., pp. 233-234; Ibid., Sorenson "Memorandum."

¹²⁵ FRUS 61-63 Vol. VII, pp. 205-206.

¹²⁶ Ibid., pp. 205-206.

¹²⁷ Arthur Krock, Memoirs: Sixty Years On the Firing Line, (New York, 1968), p.372.

¹²⁸ FRUS 61-63 Vol. VII, p.310; Benjamin Bradlee, Conversations with Kennedy, (New York, 1975), pp. 52-53.

¹²⁹ Bradlee, Conversations, pp. 60-63.

¹³⁰ FRUS 61-63 Vol. VII, pp. 599-601; Norman Cousins, The Improbable Triumvirate, (New York, 1972), pp. 24-25; Charles DeBenedetti, Peace Heroes in Twentieth Century America, (Indiana, 1986), p.181.

¹³¹ DeBenedetti, Peace Heroes, pp. 184-185; FRUS 61-63 Vol. VII, footnote 1, p.687.

¹³² FRUS 61-63 Vol. VII, pp. 676-678.

¹³³ Cousins, Improbable Triumvirate, pp. 114-117.

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- ¹³⁴ Ibid., pp. 114-117.
- ¹³⁵ PPJFK61, pp. 441-448; Pierre Salinger, P.S.: A Memoir, (New York, 1995), pp. 110-111.
- ¹³⁶ Reeves, Profile of Power, pp. 175-184.
- ¹³⁷ Ibid., p.202; PPJFK61, pp. 533-540.
- ¹³⁸ Edward R. Murrow Memorandum to Secretary of State Rusk, July 21 1961, Box 60, Sorensen Papers, JFKL.
- ¹³⁹ Kai Bird, The Chairman, John J. McCloy, The Making of the American Establishment, (New York, 1992), pp. 505-507; Kevin W. Dean, "We Seek Peace -But We Shall Not Surrender," p.531-544.; Arthur Schlesinger, One Thousand Days, p.391.
- ¹⁴⁰ Cate, The Ides of August, pp. 110-111.
- ¹⁴¹ Robert M. Slusser, The Berlin Crisis of 1961, (Baltimore, MD: 1973), p.82; Kevin W. Dean, , "We Seek Peace," pp. 531-544.
- ¹⁴² PPJFK61, pp. 533-540; Sorensen, Kennedy, pp. 613-615.
- ¹⁴³ Schlesinger, One Thousand Days, pp. 745-749; Kaplan, Wizards, pp. 310-311.
- ¹⁴⁴ Reeves, Profile of Power, p.204; New York Times July 26, 1961.
- ¹⁴⁵ PPJFK61, pp. 533-540; Richard Reeves, p.202;
- ¹⁴⁶ Dobrynin, In Confidence, pp. 54-55,64-65.
- ¹⁴⁷ FRUS 61-63 Vol. VII, pp. 355-357.
- ¹⁴⁸ Norman Cousins, "Memorandum to Theodore Sorensen, June 1, 1963," Box 36, WHCSF, JFKL.
- ¹⁴⁹ Sorensen, Kennedy, p.730.
- ¹⁵⁰ Sorensen OH, April 15, 1964, JFKL, pp. 71-72. "The President sent the letter to me, asked me to think about it, and it was probably a month later that he and I reviewed his speaking schedule for the summer, deciding a division for each forum. And I brought to his attention again the idea of the peace speech and suggested that the only likely forum on the speaking schedule for such a speech was the commencement address at American University on June 10. He felt that would be a good subject for that time and that place."
- ¹⁵¹ PPJFK63, pp. 454-459; pp. 236-238.
- ¹⁵² Sorensen, Kennedy, pp. 732-733.

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- ¹⁵³ PPJFK63, pp. 601-606.
- ¹⁵⁴ Sorensen, Kennedy, pp.744-745.
- ¹⁵⁵ PPJFK61, p.888.
- ¹⁵⁶ Salinger, With Kennedy, p.190; Beschloss, The Crisis Years, pp. 267-269.
- ¹⁵⁷ Ibid., pp.270-274; PPJFK61, pp. 553-561.
- ¹⁵⁸ Lansing Dulles, The Wall, p.46; Thomas Reeves, A Question of Character, p.102.
- ¹⁵⁹ FRUS61-63 XIV, p.332.
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- ¹⁶¹ Ibid., p.201
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- ¹⁶³ PPJFK61, pp. 575-576.
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- ¹⁸⁹ PPJFK63, pp. 669-671; MacNeil, Dirksen, p.222.
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- ¹⁹³ Seaborg., Test Ban, pp. 280-281.
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Chapter Six

Captured by an Image:

Kennedy's Information Strategy and China

President John F. Kennedy inherited a China policy rooted in domestic Cold War politics and America's geopolitical struggle to assert hegemony. During the Truman years, China had been divided by Mao Zedong's Communist revolution which conquered the mainland and created the People's Republic of China. Chiang Kai-shek, the President of the Republic of China, fled to Taiwan and the offshore islands of Quemoy and Matsu. The United States recognized Chiang as the exiled leader of China's legitimate government while considering the People's Republic of China Moscow's illegitimate offspring. Throughout the Truman and Eisenhower years, the U.S. refused to recognize the People's Republic or enter into any form of trade. The U.S. bolstered Chiang with military assistance, an alliance in 1954, and formed the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization to contain Communist China from expanding.¹ For most Americans, Chiang remained a colorful war hero who had helped defeat Japan. The press played down authoritarian politics because the Generalissimo was considered an ally in the Cold War against Communism.²

Determined to regain the mainland, Chiang turned to the United States for support and became a political force in Washington politics. To promote a one-China policy, the Generalissimo built an issue network using lobbyists to create alliances with American anti-Communists in business, labor, academia, politics, and the media.³ To mobilize public support, the China Lobby bought full-page newspaper advertisements and gathered signatures from

supporters to create the Committee of One Million to block admission of Communist China into the United Nations, diplomatic recognition, and trade relations. The Committee of One Million served as a force for continuity by pressuring America's elected leaders to take a strong stand against the People's Republic.⁴

The New Frontier seemed to pose a threat to the China Lobby because it suggested new ideas for China policy. Kennedy nonetheless opted for continuity. Shortly after taking office in January 1961, he received an intelligence report warning that Communist China might detonate a nuclear bomb by the end of 1962 and have delivery capabilities by 1965. Kennedy considered this threat from Mainland China "a potentially more dangerous situation than any we have faced since the Second World War."⁵ The perception of China's imminent danger became the engine driving the New Frontier's policies toward the Asia Pacific region. From the outset, China's emerging nuclear threat only reconfirmed Kennedy's perception of Mainland China as an aggressive country on the march to advance the Stalinist phase of Communist revolution. He believed the threat was magnified by China's disregard for human life.⁶ Diplomatic recognition and membership in the United Nations were not possible until Mao denounced plans to expand China's sphere of influence by fomenting worldwide Communist revolution.⁷

Throughout the early 1960's, this perception of China on the march was fueled by Peking's militant public stance toward the United States and contemptuous attacks against the Soviet Union for proposing peaceful coexistence with the West. In public tirades, Mao frequently mocked the U.S. military for being a cowardly "Paper Tiger" that roared with statistics while backing down from a real fight with the People's Republic.⁸ He labeled Khrushchev a cowardly appeaser for pursuing 'peaceful coexistence' with the West. Mao boasted that China was prepared to sacrifice millions to rebuild a 'higher civilization,' notwithstanding Khrushchev's warning that Washington's "paper tiger" had 'nuclear teeth.'⁹

As the White House saw it, the motive behind Communist China's belligerent rhetoric was to justify expansion and gain strategic control of the countries in Southeast Asia's breadbasket.

The U.S. viewed Mainland China through a rigid Cold War lens, and U.S. policy sought to isolate and contain Peking without triggering a Sino-American war.¹⁰ "The central problem we face in Asia is the existence of Communist China," Undersecretary of State Chester Bowles wrote Kennedy in July 1961.¹¹ Compared to Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Walt Rostow, the Undersecretary was considered the voice of moderation on China policy within the Kennedy administration. During the 1960 election campaign, Bowles had written an article for *Foreign Affairs* urging the admission of Communist China into the United Nations. Kennedy agreed that American relations with China were "unrealistic." He privately congratulated Bowles for writing an article that "might open at least a few minds to the possibilities."¹²

Nevertheless, from Kennedy's perspective, Peking held responsibility for the breakdown in Sino-American relations. His long-held position advocated a hard-line with some room for flexibility depending upon Peking's behavior. In a 1957 *Foreign Affairs* article Kennedy had written: "There have been —and still are— compelling reasons for the non-recognition of China; but we must be very careful not to strait-jacket our policy as a result of ignorance and fail to detect a change in the objective situation when it comes."¹³ In 1959, Kennedy had again endorsed negotiations with Communist China: "We should indicate our willingness to talk to them when they desire to do so and set forth conditions of recognition which seem responsible to the watching world."¹⁴

After taking office, Australia's Prime Minister Robert Menzies had urged Kennedy to acknowledge that the 'objective situation' required U.S. recognition of the largest country in the world. During a February 1961 visit, Menzies told Kennedy that the Western allies hoped the New Frontier would change U.S. policy toward China. Kennedy acknowledged there was an

unexplored realm of possibility buried beneath the image of China on the march, but Menzies failed to persuade him that any moderation of the U.S. hard-line would be rewarded.¹⁵

Following the Menzies visit, Kennedy made an honest effort to demonstrate flexibility. To test Communist China's receptivity to change, the White House made overtures in March 1961 to Peking's ambassador to the Warsaw talks. The Warsaw talks had been ongoing since the Eisenhower years to maintain informal diplomatic contact with Communist China. Kennedy proposed an exchange of American and Chinese newspaper reporters. Peking rigidly replied that change was not possible until the United States ended Chiang's occupation of Taiwan; the White House was unwilling, of course, to abandon Taipei.¹⁶ Mao thereupon responded with propaganda that claimed to unmask the New Frontier's "peace fraud."¹⁷

During these critical years, Mao viewed the world as an unsafe place and adopted a self-help approach toward China's security. China felt threatened by the nuclear threat from the United States and the Soviet Union. The experiences of the Korean War, the Sino-Soviet split, and border disputes with India and Japan only accentuated Peking's view of the world as a hostile arena. Kennedy's covert assistance to Chiang for raids against mainland China contributed to Mao's perception that the U.S. was itself on the move to stop Communist revolution. Mao wanted to acquire nuclear weapons both to give Peking the prestige of a great power and to have military capabilities that would deter other nations from acting against China's interests. "As for the atomic bomb, the big thing, without it people say you don't count for much," Mao said. "Fine, then we should build one."¹⁸

Throughout the Kennedy years, Peking lacked the nuclear capabilities to match the U.S. and the Soviet Union, but compensated by using excessively hostile rhetoric and by demonstrating an apparent reckless willingness to take risks and accept heavy losses if the U.S.

or the U.S.S.R. miscalculated.¹⁹ Mao's tactic reflected the influence of the Chinese Sun Zi warrior philosophy: "to defeat the enemy without fighting."²⁰

To avoid direct confrontation, the Chinese privately discouraged North Vietnam from acting against South Vietnam, even though Hanoi chose not to follow Peking's advice and moved against South Vietnam during the Kennedy years. Ho Chi Minh's decision forced Mao's hand by threatening the credibility of Peking's revolutionary dogma. By May 1963, Peking promised to protect North Vietnam's rear flank, but Kennedy never realized that Mao had waited to board the train until long after it left the station.²¹ For Mao, the final decision to support Vietnam's revolution came in response to the apparent Soviet-American détente in the aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Chinese strategists even feared that the U.S. and U.S.S.R. might plan a joint attack against the People's Republic. Supporting national insurgencies and revolution in countries such as Vietnam was intended to avert the outbreak of direct conflict by focusing Soviet and American attention toward regional Cold War battlegrounds.²²

Mao's vituperative rhetoric and hostile policies made it impossible for Kennedy to believe that the "objective situation" had changed: Peking was racing to develop nuclear weapons and had rejected U.S. overtures for diplomacy in favor of a militant stance that criticized Khrushchev for appeasing Washington by not fomenting worldwide revolution. The New Frontier continued with a hard-line policy that combined firmness and flexibility: firmness was designed to use the stick to isolate Mainland China militarily and diplomatically; flexibility made it clear that the U.S. would use the carrot to conduct diplomatic relations and business with Communist countries, but only if Peking moderated in favor of peaceful coexistence. Lacking Far Eastern expertise at the top because of McCarthy era purges, State Department planners resisted pleas from Bowles to show greater flexibility in U.S. policy by offering "food

for peace."²³ Despite capable China experts among the lower ranks of State Department advisers, the problem was getting top policy-makers to listen.²⁴ The dominant view among top U.S. strategists was that too much flexibility would only encourage and reward China's aggression.²⁵

In the State Department, the top experts had survived the Red Scare debate over who lost China because they had earned reputations for advocating a hard-line. Senator Joseph McCarthy had purged the advocates of flexibility towards China and left an institution that resisted new ideas. During the Red Scare, Senator Kennedy had himself advocated a hard-line and joined the criticism against President Truman for losing China. By 1961, Kennedy and Rusk had not changed their opinion regarding the need for a hard-line in Asia. As a result, when the CIA reported on the Sino-Soviet split to U.S. strategists in April 1961, both the State Department and White House resisted its recommendations to reevaluate China policy.²⁶

The China policy which emerged within the Kennedy administration in the spring of 1961 sought to encourage the splits in the Communist bloc and isolate China by seeking better relations with the Soviet Union on arms control. The White House hoped the Soviets would use arms control as a vehicle to curtail China's nuclear program and keep a superpower monopoly on nuclear weapons. The U.S. also developed a plan for the region called the New Pacific Community. The New Pacific Community aimed to bolster the U.S. Pacific flank and isolate mainland China with an alliance system that complemented the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization.²⁷

The New Pacific Community planned to continue military assistance and development aid to bolster the region against the People's Republic. To discredit Peking's Ugly American propaganda, Kennedy planners envisioned modifying Eisenhower's policies to downplay Washington's role by focusing attention on the Ugly Chinese. Australia was slated to serve as

the headquarters for the New Pacific Community and chief lobbyist against governments that questioned American objectives.²⁸

The New Pacific Community's lofty ambitions went unfulfilled: Kennedy lacked the time and political resources to overcome allied resistance and make changing U.S. policy toward China a high priority; and White House strategists were more concerned about managing the Cold War in Europe, Laos, and Cuba. In May 1961, Vice President Johnson was dispatched to the Far East to promote the New Pacific Community along with the message that Kennedy opposed U.N. recognition for Peking and deplored militant Taiwanese rhetoric. The President considered making the tour himself, but hesitated upon Rusk's advice that personal diplomacy in the Far East would diminish the President and it would be interpreted as weakness and begging.²⁹

Johnson's effort to promote the New Pacific Community failed to convert key Asian-Pacific leaders: Japan's Prime Minister Ikeda Hayato worried more about increasing trade with the United States; President Carlos Garcia of the Philippines warned that isolating China would increase the probabilities for violent regional conflict; and Australia rejected the proposal as a New Frontier strategy to manipulate Canberra as an American puppet.³⁰ Johnson also failed to convince Chiang that Kennedy unequivocally supported a one-China policy, and thus the Generalissimo reserved the right to take "appropriate action."³¹

Throughout this period, the White House sent Chiang and other U.S. allies mixed signals. Kennedy was trying to promote the New Pacific Community to further isolate Mainland China while simultaneously handling quiet diplomatic contact with Peking's representatives at the Geneva negotiations for the neutralization of Laos. From May 1961 until July 1962, Ambassador Averell Harriman performed the delicate task of making direct contacts with Communist officials including China's Foreign Minister Chen Yi.³² Ultimately, when the

People's Republic and the United States signed the final treaty to neutralize Laos, the New Frontier's diplomacy seemingly gave Mao tacit unofficial recognition.³³ Determined not to offer official diplomatic recognition, Kennedy preferred to contain Communism with pragmatic political deals to avoid direct military confrontation with the People's Republic.³⁴

A pragmatic approach toward Laos and diplomatic contacts at Warsaw did not make Kennedy re-consider Communist China's entry into the United Nations. Since the Truman years, the U.S. had blocked Peking's admission into the United Nations by keeping the question off the agenda. By May 1961, the White House realized that the admission of newly independent African nations meant the U.S. might not retain enough votes in the United Nations to continue the moratorium. The State Department thus recommended the "successor states" solution as a compromise. Under the formula, both the People's Republic and the Republic of China would represent China in the United Nations. The "successor states" approach, however, was attacked by Chiang and the China Lobby as a move away from one-China policy.³⁵

The President warned Chiang in July 1961 that continuing the moratorium was impossible.³⁶ At the same time, the White House planned Operation Reassurance to demonstrate the New Frontier's commitment to "one China." Under Operation Reassurance, Kennedy arranged for Taiwan's Vice-President Chen to visit the White House in August 1961.³⁷ In preparation for Chen's visit, the White House received a memo from the State Department that "one China" policy played into the hands of Mao because Peking viewed Taiwan as a caretaker regime until the revolution was completed. Taiwan clung to the myth of one China to retain benefits from great power status and Security Council membership. Without the myth Chiang would be unable to justify dictatorial power over Taiwan's native inhabitants. Further, Kennedy's isolation of Communist China threatened progress in arms control because any treaty would become meaningless once Peking actually exploded a nuclear device.

Nevertheless, the New Frontier remained boxed in by the China Lobby. "The problem," wrote Bundy and Rostow, "is how to shake off the old man without upsetting the boat in the process."³⁸

Privately, Kennedy remained dissatisfied with U.S. China policy, but postponed initiatives that would rock the boat or seemingly reward aggression.³⁹ The "successor states" and the New Pacific Community were both dead by the time of Chen's White House visit. During a meeting with White House advisers, Chen was briefed on the lack of support in the United Nations for "one-China" policy. As Kennedy observed, "the coming twelve months may present us a different problem and a different solution." "Let's win this one," he declared. For Kennedy, winning meant recognizing Outer Mongolia so that Taiwan would retain China's seat in the United Nations. Taiwan should not conclude that the White House planned to open the door for Peking.⁴⁰

Outer Mongolia was a Soviet Communist satellite. Bowles wanted Kennedy to recognize a moderate Communist country on the Asian mainland as a signal to Peking of the New Frontier's flexibility. Even though the China Lobby attacked it as the first step toward recognizing the People's Republic, Kennedy planned to continue Eisenhower's policy by providing covert support for Chiang's raids against the Mainland.⁴¹ The White House supported the raids under the condition that Taipei kept them small and consulted the U.S. in advance. Kennedy insisted upon control to prevent Chiang from dragging the U.S. into war.⁴²

The United Nations presented the strongest challenge to the New Frontier's commitment to keeping the one-China myth alive. In late August 1961, John Kenneth Galbraith, the U.S. Ambassador to India, warned Kennedy that the U.S. needed more votes in the U.N. to block entry of the People's Republic: "The New Frontier will get credit only for continuing the Old Frontier policy with the difference that with us it failed." Galbraith advised the President to

accept fate with “a passive attitude” toward Communist China: “the proper reaction to inevitable rape.” Kennedy could not afford to afford a two-China policy dictated by the United Nations. “To the extent that your position has any merit,” Rusk replied, “it has been fully considered and rejected.”⁴³

Using diplomatic channels, Kennedy told Chiang that the U.S. would use its veto to bar the People’s Republic from the United Nations.⁴⁴ Finally satisfied, Chiang agreed not to veto Outer Mongolia.⁴⁵ In October, Mongolia gained membership into the United Nations. Kennedy used military and economic aid to muster enough votes in the General Assembly to continue blocking Communist China’s admission. The White House strategy made the admission of Communist China an important question requiring two-thirds vote. For the remainder of 1961, the parliamentary gambit succeed in blocking the Soviet move to admit the People Republic.⁴⁶ Ultimately, the strategy did succeed in keeping the People’s Republic out of the United Nations for the rest of Kennedy’s term.⁴⁷

In October 1961, the State Department’s Policy Planning Council recommended an end to joint covert operations against Mainland China and discouraging Chiang from acting alone. The White House sought a long range approach to the region that recognized the growing split between the Communist China and Soviet Union had exacerbated Chinese suspicions of negotiations between Kennedy and Khrushchev.⁴⁸ For Kennedy, the Sino-Soviet dispute meant Peking’s expansionist doctrine presented a greater threat to the Asian-Pacific region.⁴⁹

The President’s perceptions of Communist China’s capabilities overlooked U.S. intelligence on internal conditions. In 1961, a Special National Intelligence Estimate reported that Mao’s Great Leap Forward had failed. Moscow had withdrawn assistance to China leaving Peking with food shortages and internal political problems. The report concluded that Peking was more cautious than Mao’s militant rhetoric suggested and wanted to avoid direct

confrontation with U.S. power.⁵⁰ Kennedy's CIA advisers concluded that a hostile U.S. policy played into the hands of Communist Chinese officials who welcomed a demonic image of Washington that threatened the Chinese people.⁵¹

The proposed policy called for unilateral actions that did not require a response from Peking. The first change called for was a partial lifting of the trade embargo with China to allow shipments of food and medicine. The Planning Council also urged Kennedy to determine conditions for diplomatic recognition: "The basic argument for diplomatic relations with Communist China is that they would place us in more direct and immediate contact with reality, in observation of the injunction: Know your antagonist."⁵²

The Policy Planning Council acknowledged that any change in U.S. policy toward Communist China would be difficult because Kennedy faced a potential domestic backlash. Nevertheless, the President needed to debate the China Lobby and educate the American public. He should no longer plead "nolo contendere."⁵³

By December 1961, Eisenhower's policies remained firmly in place on the New Frontier. Unwilling to test new ideas, the President continued to support Taiwan and strengthen India and Japan as friendly neutrals with enough strength to deter mainland China. Military and economic aid was also used to strengthen alliances with Thailand, South Vietnam, Laos, and Taiwan to keep their rice, oil, and rubber out of the hands of the Chinese Communists. The White House sought to "destroy the image of Communist China" by using a "temperate" posture with political and psychological warfare to discredit Peking's claim to success. As alternatives, U.S. policy built up the image and accomplishments of India and Taiwan as moderate nations. In Taiwan, Kennedy focused on developing air superiority and made aid contingent upon rejecting "recovery of the mainland" through overt means, while still supporting covert resistance on the mainland by Free Chinese.⁵⁴

The goal of containing Communist China became more urgent as reports on the Sino-Soviet split finally gained acceptance among Kennedy planners in January 1962. As James Thomson, a State Department adviser on Asian Affairs later wrote, "one could almost hear the snap and crackle of frozen minds undergoing rapid thaw." Nonetheless, the White House blocked any radical reexamination of China policy.⁵⁵ For U.S. strategists, the Sino-Soviet split meant that Mao's xenophobic ambitions were no longer reigned in by Khrushchev's calmer hand, so it made little sense to approach Peking diplomatically. Kennedy's goal was to further isolate China by exploiting the split for progress in arms control with the Soviets in a wedge strategy that pushed Peking and Moscow further apart.

Throughout 1962 and 1963, Kennedy pondered how to respond to well-publicized food shortages in the People's Republic. Since November 1961, Bowles had urged Kennedy to use American grain surpluses to offer Peking "food-for-peace." The plan called for calming China's expansionist posture by signaling U.S. willingness to sell grain.⁵⁶ Walt Rostow wanted to use food as a lever to pressure Peking for settlement on Laos and Vietnam.⁵⁷ The President told Rusk that aid was not possible until the Chinese Communists stopped threatening Asia. At a press conference, Kennedy said the U.S. would give the People's Republic humanitarian assistance if Mao made a public appeal.⁵⁸ Mao refused to act as Kennedy's "beggar."⁵⁹

Chiang complicated matters with a New Year's battlecry to recapture the Mainland. The U.S. Embassy in Taipei reported that Chiang had also stated that "political measures must precede military action."⁶⁰ Nevertheless, the White House feared another Bay of Pigs or charges that Democrats "lost China twice."⁶¹ The Generalissimo needed to be convinced of Kennedy's determination not to involve the U.S. in a war against mainland China without appearing weak.

In March 1962, Averell Harriman delivered the President's ultimatum to Chiang that the U.S. would not commit U.S. personnel to support Taiwanese efforts to regain the mainland.⁶² The President refused to offer "unlimited American backing."⁶³ "The smaller the action," the President told Harriman, "and the more completely it is handled by the GRC, the more likely our agreement."⁶⁴

By September 1962, Kennedy faced again the question of Quemoy and Matsu.⁶⁵ During the summer, the People's Republic had built up military forces along the mainland across from the islands.⁶⁶ John McCone, the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, reported that the build-up was the prelude to an invasion of Taiwan.⁶⁷ Congress responded to the apparent provocation with a declaration urging Kennedy to defend Taiwan.⁶⁸ Chiang pleaded for more military aid, but McNamara advised that the People's Republic had moved military forces into position more as a defensive measure to discourage an invasion.⁶⁹ Peking, as Kennedy saw it, was overreacting to the covert raids the White House had approved for Chiang.⁷⁰ Through the Warsaw talks, the President assured the People's Republic that the U.S. did not support Chiang's invasion plans.⁷¹ These reassurances came with mixed signals because Chiang increased "intelligence raids" along with U-2 overflights.⁷² On September 6th the People's Republic shot down a U-2 from Taiwan, at a time when Kennedy was becoming more concerned by reports of Soviet missiles in Cuba.⁷³

On November 15th at the very end of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the People's Republic of China invaded India.⁷⁴ The move triggered alarm in the White House whether this was a coincidence.⁷⁵ But the move also demonstrated the depth of the Sino-Soviet split because Russia and India were friends.⁷⁶ Facing the possibility of an all out war between India and China, Kennedy ruminated over which crisis posed a greater long term threat. Diplomatic bargaining helped defuse the Cuban Missile Crisis, but a similar deal for the Sino-Indian War

seemed impossible because U.S. policy opposed formal diplomatic relations with the Peiping. Not prepared to involve the U.S. in a direct war with China, the White House offered military aid in response to requests by India's Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Kennedy never learned which crisis was more dangerous because Peking declared a cease-fire after Chinese forces secured territorial claims in the Himalayans.⁷⁷

Nonetheless, the Sino-Indian War reconfirmed the President's belief that Communist China was a serious threat that needed to be contained. "These Chinese are tough," he said.⁷⁸ The Sino-Indian War strengthened his resolve to take action to prevent the Chinese Communists from becoming a nuclear power. The White House was not rushing to start diplomatic relations or challenge the China Lobby until after the 1964 elections. Limited diplomacy through the Warsaw talks and Geneva were pragmatic moves to keep an "open door" until there was a friendlier Congress and greater public understanding. Kennedy would not use the bully pulpit until U.S. policy to isolate and contain Communist China taught Peking's leaders that aggression would not solve internal problems.⁷⁹

The Cuban Missile Crisis also renewed Kennedy's concerns regarding nuclear proliferation and achieving a test ban treaty with the Soviet Union.⁸⁰ During a January 1963 meeting of the National Security Council, Kennedy stressed that the test ban was important for "one reason": stopping Communist China: "If the Soviets want this and it can help in keeping the Chinese Communist from getting a full nuclear capacity, then it is worth it."⁸¹

The desire to use the Test Ban Treaty to prevent China from becoming a nuclear power ran counter to Washington's "one-China" policy; nevertheless, Kennedy resolved not to recognize Communist China. The success of U.S. policy to isolate Communist China limited his options. The Sino-Soviet split meant that Khrushchev would be unable to make any arrangement to deliver Peking. The White House had also ruled out a private U.S. diplomatic

initiative towards Peking. Military options seemed to offer Kennedy a possible solution. During preparation for the final series of Test Ban negotiations in July 1963 Kennedy obliquely explored the possibility of proposing a joint U.S.-Soviet Pearl Harbor style military action against Communist China's nuclear facilities.⁸² After signing the Test Ban Treaty, Harriman had orders from the White House to make overtures to Khrushchev regarding Kennedy's military proposal.⁸³ Harriman asked Khrushchev how he felt about the prospects of Peking pointing nuclear missiles at Moscow, but the Soviet Premier refused to discuss the topic. Earlier, Khrushchev had emphasized a preference for diplomacy by encouraging other countries to sign the Test Ban treaty, thereby coercing Peking into signing or becoming an outcast.⁸⁴

After the People's Republic refused to sign the Test Ban Treaty, Kennedy told Rusk that it was still a victory because China had now become more isolated.⁸⁵ But the strategy to isolate China failed to produce any substantive change in Peking's aggressive posture. In August 1963, the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research reported that the Sino-Soviet split and the Test Ban Treaty left the People's Republic more isolated and therefore more likely to be militant and aggressive. Nevertheless, Peking remained cautious and unwilling to take military action with any high degree of risk.⁸⁶

The Bay of Pigs taught Kennedy to trust instincts more than intelligence reports. He saw no need to review U.S. options for China policy because instinct gave the answer: "firmness and flexibility." The only course left was to continue American efforts to contain Communist China from advancing and pragmatically hold the door open for the day when Mao decided to renounce expansionism.⁸⁷ "None of us thought that any of these moves would bring about a great thaw in the coldly aggressive policies of Communist China," Hilsman later recalled.⁸⁸

Kennedy believed that the People's Republic was a permanent force in the Asian-Pacific region that future Presidents would have to confront.⁸⁹ At the time of his death in November

1963, Kennedy still viewed China as a rogue elephant whose bullying would only be encouraged if the U.S. displayed weakness. Thus, the torch of leadership for U.S. policy towards China remained unchallenged by New Frontier ideas and a legacy of continuity bequeathed to the Johnson administration.⁹⁰

Kennedy's Dilemma and Information Strategy:

In addition to the geopolitical reasons for isolating China, Kennedy had compelling domestic motives. During the 1960 election campaign, Chester Bowles, the Democratic platform chairman, noted that the Democratic candidate differed in his private views on China and his public statements. Bowles prepared an article for the April 1960 issue of *Foreign Affairs* which advocated a "two-China policy" and called for admitting Communist China into the United Nations. Before publication, Bowles anticipated "a political hornet's nest" and reviewed a draft with Kennedy. The candidate "enthusiastically endorsed" the article which explained that U.S. foreign policy was "irrational" because international gains of admitting Peking into the United Nations in 1961 outweighed the domestic political problems it would generate.⁹¹

The second 1960 presidential debate on October 7th highlighted differences on China policy between Kennedy and Vice-President Richard Nixon. Reluctant to commit the U.S. to war with Red China, Kennedy angered the Committee of One Million by questioning Chiang's militant stance and U.S. policy to defend Quemoy and Matsu in an interview with *NBC's* David Brinkley on October 1st.⁹² During the debate, Nixon attacked his opponent's "woolly thinking" for appeasing the Communists with a "soft line."⁹³

Underlying the debate over Quemoy and Matsu was the issue of whether U.S. policy should recognize that China's Civil War had ended with two-Chinas.⁹⁴ The Senator's flexible

stand challenged the political dogma of the China Lobby.⁹⁵ Following the debates, campaign advisers moved into action and Kennedy abandoned the “soft line” for a firm commitment to defend the offshore islands.⁹⁶

The confident New Frontier spirit of the Kennedy campaign and ambivalent promise to re-examine U.S. China policy were thus tempered by the narrow 1960 election victory.⁹⁷ From the outset, Kennedy chose to play down the China issue and not challenge the status quo. The China Lobby’s public relations firemen were prepared to douse Kennedy with buckets of gasoline if the New Frontier sparked a crisis. Nevertheless, the Senator’s election raised expectations that the New Frontier elevated a younger generation’s innovative leadership. “The general tendency is to anticipate a ‘more flexible’ United States posture during the Kennedy Administration,” reported the State Department’s Monthly Survey of the press and the public in January 1961.⁹⁸

On the eve of the inauguration, President Eisenhower remained unsure about his successor’s plans for a ‘more flexible’ China policy. During a foreign policy briefing on January 19, 1961, Kennedy asked for advice on how to keep the People’s Republic out of Laos. “It is like playing poker with tough stakes,” Eisenhower explained. “There is no easy solution.”⁹⁹ Kennedy interpreted Eisenhower’s remarks to mean that the U.S. should be prepared to intervene unilaterally to save Laos: “It was the cork in the bottle.”¹⁰⁰

The outgoing Commander-in-Chief promised not to interfere with the New Frontier’s foreign policy, but made it clear to his successor that China was the exception. Eisenhower assured Kennedy that while preferring quiet retirement in Gettysburg he was prepared to re-enter public life to prevent admission of Communist China into the United Nations.¹⁰¹ The warning shot reinforced the lesson Kennedy had taken away from the 1960 presidential debates with Nixon over Quemoy and Matsu: political opponents and the China Lobby would attack

any "fresh thinking" regarding China.¹⁰² Earlier in Key Biscayne, Nixon had warned Kennedy that liberal proposals to admit Communist China into the United Nations would be attacked.¹⁰³ The admonitions were unnecessary, for Kennedy already planned to continue Eisenhower's policies toward China and postpone any re-examination of U.S. policy until his second term.¹⁰⁴

Despite hints of a two-China policy during the 1960 campaign, Kennedy shared Eisenhower's belief in the domino theory that called for containing China to prevent Communism's Asian thrust.¹⁰⁵ As noted, he had criticized Truman and the State Department in 1949 for appeasing the Red Chinese by not giving the Republic of China enough aid to prevent another domino from falling in the Asia-Pacific region.¹⁰⁶ Throughout the 1960 campaign, he had castigated Eisenhower for not stopping the spread of Communism.¹⁰⁷ Kennedy's inaugural address envisioned that America faced "maximum danger" and needed "to bear any burden" in the global struggle against Communism.¹⁰⁸ "I think it's time America started moving again," the President confidently declared.¹⁰⁹

The initial efforts of the New Frontier failed to convince Taipei that the White House advocated a continuation of Eisenhower's "firm" one-China policy. In an April 1961 letter congratulating Kennedy's election, Chiang railed against proposals for "two-Chinas." He pleaded for the United States to continue a "firm" China policy working with Taiwan to block Peking from United Nations membership: "there is no room for patriots and traitors to live together."¹¹⁰ The President replied with assurances that the U.S. would support Taiwan and oppose Communist China's admission into the United Nations.¹¹¹ Yet Kennedy blocked all efforts to regain Communist China, thereby "leashing" Chiang and seemingly offering tacit recognition that the Chinese Civil War was over.¹¹²

Advisers who wanted the bully pulpit used to educate the public regarding the advantages of offering humanitarian aid, diplomatic recognition, and helping the People's Republic enter

the U.N. did not understand that Kennedy viewed Peking as a great threat. Throughout 1962 and 1963, Kennedy worried about having to respond to China detonating a nuclear bomb. The Policy Planning Council had reported in October 1961 that Communist China could explode a nuclear bomb as early as 1962 and advised that the only option to stop the Chinese nuclear program was to take out the installations by military action.¹¹³ To avoid making the U.S. appear to be motivated by “apprehension,” Averell Harriman urged the President to “gracefully” pursue diplomacy with Communist China before they successfully tested a nuclear device.¹¹⁴ Rather than pursue diplomacy, Kennedy stepped up intelligence to assist Chiang and to gather information on China’s nuclear program.

In the event that Communist China exploded a nuclear bomb, Kennedy’s planners wanted advance knowledge in order to prepare the American public and the international community and not set off a panic. “The U.S. should propagate an image of the Chicom leadership as essentially cool and calculating, and should disguise Peiping’s militancy as a basic bluff to conceal its own weakness.....U.S. statements should credit Peiping leadership with intelligence and rationality, and charge it with ambitious goals of domination, on the other.” Following the detonation, Kennedy’s advisers recommended that he assure the public that the government had advance knowledge and Peking still had trouble developing delivery capability. Ultimately, responding to a nuclear China was a task bequeathed to Lyndon Johnson.¹¹⁵

For reasons of national security and to prevent partisan attacks that ‘Kennedy let Mao get the bomb,’ the White House opted not to reveal American intelligence secrets on China’s nuclear program to the American public. President Kennedy portrayed Peking as an aggressive power in Stalin’s mold and warned reporters that China’s nuclear program was an emerging threat. He decided against explaining to the public that there were advantages for the U.S. to combine a tough military stance with diplomacy that recognized China was divided. The

debates taught Kennedy that attempts to moderate on the China question would provide ammunition for political opponents in 1964. He preferred to deal with his dilemma by “pleading no lo contendre” and not elevate the issue as a target for domestic political opponents and the China Lobby.

Thus, President Kennedy developed an information strategy that downplayed proposals by Bowles for recognizing “two-Chinas” and offering humanitarian aid. Statements in press conferences and speeches always employed the language of the China Lobby in reference to China. He used Chiang’s designation of Peiping to refer to the capital of the People’s Republic. He also spoke of Red China or Communist China to refer to Mainland China, rather than using Mao’s official designation. The White House strategy to contain Communist China did not permit a change in information strategy until Communist China renounced expansionism.

Kennedy ruled out unilateral gestures in the bully pulpit, fearing that they would seem a sign of weakness. The dilemma posed by Peking’s aggression became an ongoing problem for U.S. policy because Kennedy failed to make specific public demands for Peking to adopt. The dilemma was exacerbated by the decision to rule out quite diplomatic contacts to propose specific demands for Mao to act upon. After Mao rejected an exchange of journalists, Kennedy did not pursue other issues such as compensating property owners who were victims of China’s Revolution. The New Frontier failed to make it clear to China either in public or private forums that Kennedy was willing to offer the olive branch, but would not reward a rogue nation that used the world stage to behave like a berserk elephant.

Similarly, the President failed to develop an information strategy that offered new ideas or challenged the consensus view in America on how to handle China. Kennedy lacked the confidence in his own public relations abilities to educate the public to accept his pragmatic view of the advantages of admitting the People’s Republic into the United Nations while

continuing containment. He feared that even a small retreat from the Old Frontier to establish official diplomatic relations would be lost in a backlash over “Who lost China?” Moreover, Kennedy’s growing perception of China as a bully reinforced his caution and made it impossible to develop an information strategy that justified pragmatic diplomatic moves without rewarding aggression.

Always the pragmatist, Kennedy’s answer to the dilemma wanted to have it both ways with regard to China: Operation Reassurance sought a public pledge of the U.S. commitment to “one-China,” “firmness and flexibility” was designed to demonstrate Kennedy’s commitment to continuity and willingness to consider détente with the People’s Republic after Mao backed down. Ultimately, the New Frontier’s information strategy to have it both ways in China failed to ask America to reexamine the Old Frontier with new ideas. Kennedy preferred to keep controversial debate off the political agenda while holding-the-line against the threat of Communist China with an uncompromising stance.

Tactical Use of Appointments:

To demonstrate strong commitment to containing Chinese Communism, Kennedy nominated Dean Rusk to serve as Secretary of State. Rusk was well-known in Washington for his strong commitment to containing the expanding Sino-Soviet monolith. He had served as President Harry Truman’s Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, but remained unscathed by the McCarthy Era.¹¹⁶ Yet Rusk privately favored the admission of the People’s Republic into the United Nations, under the condition that the Republic of China retained its seat. Nevertheless, the Secretary faithfully defended Kennedy’s preference for a “firm” China policy and refused to discuss ‘two-Chinas.’¹¹⁷

Kennedy also nominated to key advisory posts “Action Intellectuals” such as McGeorge Bundy, Walt Rostow, and Robert McNamara.¹¹⁸ In contrast, however, Kennedy nominated Bowles to serve as Undersecretary of State. During confirmation hearings, Bowles was told to downplay proposals for “two-Chinas” and speak out against admitting the People’s Republic into the United Nations.¹¹⁹ In November 1961, the moderate Roger Hilsman was appointed to the Undersecretary’s post and Bowles became a roving ambassador after the so-called Thanksgiving Massacre. Averell Harriman, a seasoned negotiator, replaced Bowles.¹²⁰ For the post of Ambassador to the United Nations, the President turned to the liberal voice of Adlai Stevenson, but with assurances that he opposed admitting Communist China into the General Assembly. “It really doesn’t make sense -the idea that Taiwan represents China. But if we lose this fight, if Red China comes into the UN during our first year in town....they’ll run us both out,” Kennedy told Stevenson.¹²¹ “So far as this year is concerned, you must do everything you can to keep them out.”¹²² It became clear to Stevenson that expert advice on China went ignored for domestic political reasons. “Kennedy’s orientation is to neither Europe nor Asia, just to Washington,” he declared.¹²³

Tactical Use of Access:

The access strategy gave Kennedy an opportunity to quietly lay the groundwork for changing China policy. Nevertheless, the conspicuous absence of references to China in memoirs by journalists and publishers suggests that the President downplayed the issue and rarely discussed U.S. policy. Thus, the access strategy was used to maintain continuity for the New Frontier’s China policy.

President Kennedy’s access strategy focused upon Joseph Alsop, the syndicated columnist, and Henry Luce, the publisher of *Time-Life*. Alsop and Luce considered themselves

experts on China and wanted the New Frontier to maintain the China Lobby's one-China policy. The President infrequently discussed China with other journalists and publishers who also considered themselves to be China experts. Although Kennedy mentioned China once in passing to Arthur Krock of the *New York Times*, he assured the columnist that the New Frontier supported 'one-China.' The President offered the same assurances to Luce and Alsop, but told Benjamin Bradlee that although he wanted to change U.S. policy the New Frontier was boxed in by the China Lobby. Kennedy chose Bradlee to unburden himself to because he was a trusted friend and the only one who did not consider himself to be an expert in foreign policy or China policy.

Throughout the Kennedy years, American journalists and publishers were barred by Peking from traveling to the People's Republic of China, but remained in regular contact with the Generalissimo. The only exception Peking made was in the case of the long-time China watcher, journalist Edgar Snow. Peking regarded Snow, who had written the classic account Red Star Over China, as a friendly leftist and offered him special access to write a book.¹²⁴ Upon completion of the book, Snow sent Averell Harriman galleys of the book that referred to him as 'Mr. Monopoly Capitalist.' In a subsequent letter, Snow explained to Harriman that his job was to "stir up a bit of controversy."¹²⁵

Snow was not about to be a White House lapdog, but Kennedy chose not emulate President Franklin Roosevelt who had often met with Snow for an expert journalist's first-hand perspective on China. In America's Cold War political landscape, Snow was only a left wing journalist with a small elite readership that would have trouble in a pillow fight with the China Lobby, much less win an election for Kennedy in 1964.

The political cost of consulting with Snow was not worth the effort for Kennedy because he was worried about holding off the China Lobby's fire brigade. Access became a tactic to

maintain an image of continuity in China policy and President Kennedy did not use journalists and publishers to test new ideas changing the Old Frontier. Influential columnists were important for making it clear to the American public and Peking that the White House did not plan to unilaterally change the Old Frontier's strategy to contain Communist China. During private meetings with journalists Kennedy did not attempt to portray Communist China as anything less than a threat to U.S. interests. He did not want articles written that suggested the White House was even discussing the merits of diplomatic recognition or not blocking admission of the People's Republic into the United Nations.

Nevertheless, Kennedy never trusted journalists who considered themselves China experts with political secrets or offered them the same access as *Newsweek's* Ben Bradlee. Bradlee was Kennedy's pal and had the better access to Oval Office than any journalist in Washington. He became Kennedy's mouthpiece and they frequently collaborated on ideas for *Newsweek* stories. In June 1962, Bradlee visited the White House to pitch a cover story on "crippling myths of America." The President complained about being tethered by the China Lobby and pointed out that one of Washington's myths was Chiang's "one-China." He did not believe that the U.S. had made Peking suffer by not offering diplomatic recognition.¹²⁶ Showing some flexibility by admitting Communist China into the United Nations was really not a problem, he confided.¹²⁷

But President Kennedy told his friend not to print anything about his pragmatic views. Nixon had already given the New Frontier enough problems over Quemoy and Matsu. Bradlee was able to see that although Kennedy talked the China Lobby's line his true preferences were not far away from Bowles and other liberals on China, but he was cornered by domestic politics. Kennedy's China secret safely remained in the closet. In Camelot, secrecy was a currency and just part of the cost of doing business that Bradlee paid to have access to the President's turf. He understood that his patron already faced enough political problems and

decided not to add to 1964's campaign burden by publicizing the New Frontier's ambivalence over continuing Eisenhower's China policy.¹²⁸ Kennedy could safely make a private confession because Bradlee did not consider himself to be a China expert. He was also a tame journalist who functioned as an extension of the President's team in the public relations war against Washington.¹²⁹

Kennedy could not hope for such an easy time with journalists who supported the China Lobby. During September 1961, before the UN vote on China's status President Kennedy attempted to reassure Chiang through Roy Howard, the conservative publisher of Scripps-Howard News Service. Howard was semi-retired, but the White House was aware of his frequent travel to the Republic of China as Chiang's personal guest. After Kennedy raised the idea of using Howard with Bundy, the publisher wrote the Generalissimo's wife: "I am convinced that President Kennedy is making every effort to safeguard free China's position in the Security Council." Top officials had contacted the publisher to convey the President's commitment to the Republic of China.¹³⁰ Kennedy probably avoided direct contact because weeks earlier he did not follow Howard's suggestion to add another phase to Operation Reassurance by inviting Chiang to the U.S. before the UN opened.¹³¹ After Howard served his purpose, the President kept the publisher at arms length for the remainder of his term.

In Kennedy's access strategy Krock, unlike Howard, was considered important enough to have an audience, but not on a regular basis. The President did not actively promote China as an issue and only needed to let the columnist know the issue was on the backburner. In May 1961, during a two hour interview the President mentioned China in passing, noting that the U.S. had to push the Test Ban negotiations in Geneva in order to stop Communist China from developing a nuclear bomb. Kennedy wanted Krock to realize that China was considered to be a serious threat by the White House, but not necessarily an issue on the front burner. Kennedy

turned to Krock again in October 1961 and invited him for Bloody Marys and lunch. In passing, the President complained about the attempts of foreign leaders to influence the White House. He included Chiang among the many leaders who operated as if they made U.S. foreign policy and did not behave as good allies.¹³² Kennedy confided that the domino theory would no longer apply when China developed nuclear weapons because all of Southeast Asia would fall in one strong blow.¹³³

Nevertheless, Kennedy realized that Alsop would not let him forget about the domino theory because the columnist saw his role in the New Frontier as “the giver of unsolicited advice.”¹³⁴ The President was a frequent guest at the columnist’s home for salons to discuss major issues and gossip about Washington. Alsop’s experience in China as a lend lease agent during World War II encouraged his conceit that he understood better than anyone else the puzzle Kennedy faced in the Far East.¹³⁵

Following the success of Mao’s revolution, Alsop had attacked Truman in an article entitled “How We Lost China.” The columnist’s widely circulated article introduced a phrase that became the China Lobby’s attack slogan against American liberals.¹³⁶ Alsop viewed his column as a tool in the battle to keep the U.S. fighting Communism and for promoting the China Lobby.¹³⁷

During the summer of 1962, Alsop lobbied the Kennedy administration to take notice of the deteriorating conditions within the People’s Republic. In an article prepared for the *Saturday Evening Post* and distributed to Kennedy’s advisers, the columnist argued that Communist China was in a defensive mode because of weakness and internal vulnerability to a takeover. “It used to be Chiang who feared the Communists,” Alsop wrote, “not the Communists, Chiang.” He speculated that Peking decided to reinforce troops along the Formosa Straights, less from fear of the Generalissimo than to counter a rebellion in the event

of an invasion. “The people there would rally to Chiang,” Alsop proclaimed. The moment seemed clearly at hand for Kennedy to give Chiang the greenlight to retake China.¹³⁸

Alsop also realized that Chiang was “isolated,” presided over a “faction-ridden” country, and was an immoral ruler, nevertheless, the Generalissimo was Washington’s man in the fight against Communism. The Generalissimo’s “pimples” were cosmetically overlooked because Alsop fervently believed Kennedy needed to take a tough stand against Mainland China to cut off the tentacles of Mao’s expansionism.¹³⁹ The article made President Kennedy suspicious that someone leaked intelligence information and he summoned John McCone, the director of the CIA, to conduct an investigation. The CIA director, an old school chum of Alsop’s and frequent source, confidently assured the President that an investigation would not track down the leak.¹⁴⁰

Although privately holding reservations regarding Alsop’s tactics, Kennedy publicly courted and charmed the China Lobby’s fireman by carefully using private meetings and social occasions to reinforce their friendship and demonstrate that the New Frontier measured up to the columnist’s expectations for China policy. The President made no attempt to alert the conservative columnist to pragmatic reasons for using diplomacy to challenge the “one-China” policy. Alsop later recalled not ever having a disagreement with Kennedy on foreign policy. Completely smitten with the President, he described the Camelot years as the best period of his life.¹⁴¹

Kennedy also attempted to charm Henry Luce, but the publisher of *Time-Life* was not so easily swayed. The publisher had an aggressive edge and was deeply committed to using *Time-Life* publications to deliver the China Lobby’s message to the American heartland. The attachment came from being born and raised in China.¹⁴² Luce fervently believed in the

obligation of the United States to pursue a hegemonic mission using American ideas and military power to transform Asia and the rest of the world in the twentieth century.¹⁴³

Operation Reassurance specifically targeted Luce to demonstrate Kennedy's commitment to defending Taiwan.¹⁴⁴ The Generalissimo was glorified by *Time-Life* because Luce wanted the U.S. to save his childhood home from Communism.¹⁴⁵ His ability to reach millions of subscribers made Luce a powerful influence in Washington politics. The administration wanted Luce to have the same type of access to the People's Republic that Snow enjoyed, but was told that American leaders were not welcome.¹⁴⁶

Faced with key decisions on China policy in May 1961, Kennedy so feared Luce's reaction to the New Frontier's China policy that he scheduled a meeting with the publisher. During the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs, the White House realized that the U.S. might not have enough votes in the U.N. to block the admission of the People's Republic. Advisers prepared for Luce by scripting President Kennedy's discussion with talking points. Kennedy assured Luce that he wanted to preserve the Republic of China's seat in the United Nations, but other governments were "quite relaxed" regarding the admission of the People's Republic: "That means we can not stress, to American opinion, that our hope and intention is to keep the Communists out of the U.N., since that would reduce to less than a majority the size of the coalition that can be built around the "successor nations" idea." Kennedy wanted Luce to exercise restraint lest the next session of the U.N. be turned into a debate over the credentials of the Republic of China versus the People's Republic.¹⁴⁷

Luce was moved by the President's concerns over the U.N. vote. In a July 1961 letter to Kennedy, Luce noted that *Time-Life* did not have an "unconditional position" on China: "I recommended a strong effort to gain a moratorium but qualified by an offer to change our policy if Red China changes hers, notably as regards Formosa." He agreed with Kennedy that

the fight to continue the moratorium in the U.N. would force the White House to lobby other nations: "But you have won many a fight before.....long faces win no battles."¹⁴⁸

Later in July 1961, Kennedy invited Luce to attend a White House luncheon honoring Vice President Chen's visit to the United States. Luce was the only publisher on the guest list.¹⁴⁹ Kennedy had not convinced Luce of his strong commitment to defend Taiwan. Rostow subsequently tattled to Kennedy that Luce "belly ached" about the New Frontier's liberals throughout the luncheon. Before Chen left, Luce wanted Kennedy to make a statement pledging economic aid and lauding the "extraordinary progress" made in Taiwan since 1949.¹⁵⁰ On August 2nd, Kennedy released a statement reaffirming the U.S. commitment to the Republic of China. He also gave *Time-Life's* publisher what he wanted by pledging economic aid and applauding Chiang's "remarkable achievements" and "unprecedented improvements."¹⁵¹

Robert Komer, another White House advisor, accurately described Luce as a restraint on Kennedy's willingness to change China policy. In a September 5th memo, Komer recommended to Bundy that Kennedy make a "pitch" to Luce "if only to carry further educating Luce, et. al. on the facts of life. The more such people are clued as to the real nature of our difficulties the less they might howl when even tougher problems, e.g. two Chinas, come up." But Kennedy had already learned the facts of life according to Luce and pledged to block the People's Republic from the United Nations.¹⁵²

The President chose not to go around Luce or Alsop with an alternative to the China Lobby's one-China policy. Reporters who were granted access and not considered Kennedy's pals heard no confessions regarding the need for more pragmatism. He pragmatically preferred having Peking in the United Nations, but did not plan to reward Mao's aggression or ignite debate with the China Lobby. The New Frontier was unable to overcome Kennedy's political

fears and an opportunity was lost to quietly use journalists and publishers to lay the groundwork for changing China policy.

Tactical Use of Press Conferences:

Kennedy used press conferences to reaffirm his commitment to maintaining the Old Frontier. Reporters raised only fifty-six questions on China over three years: nineteen in 1961; twenty-two in 1962; and fifteen in 1963. For most reporters, Peking and Taipei were distant lands glossed on pages of *Time-Life* publications. Travel restrictions made it difficult to travel to Peking. Those that ventured to Taiwan, such as Alsop and Luce, were interested in writing stories that bolstered the Generalissimo. As a result, the China Lobby exercised a strong influence over the flow of information into the United States.

Kennedy did not use press conferences to publicize proposals for changing U.S. policy. Reporters posed questions that offered opportunities to enunciate a New Frontier strategy for China, but Kennedy preferred the Old Frontier. Answers were crafted to demonstrate Kennedy's support for the status quo favored by the China Lobby. Again he chose not to build an image that suggested that 'flexibility' was possible toward the People's Republic until Peking refrained from an aggressive public posture towards Asia and the United States.

At Kennedy's first press conference on January 25th a reporter asked whether the White House supported a proposal by Senator Hubert Humphrey to send food to Communist China. Kennedy told reporters that Peking had not asked for food, noting that the People's Republic was exporting food to Cuba and Africa. Before finishing Kennedy added, "there has been a rather belligerent attitude expressed towards us in recent days by the Chinese Communists and there is no indication, direct or indirect, private or public, that they would respond favorably to any acts by the United States."¹⁵³ The Central Intelligence Agency later reported 'signs of

friendliness' by the People's Republic at the ongoing discussions at Warsaw, but this report did not change Kennedy's view of Peking or his decision not to offer assistance.¹⁵⁴

At the President's February 1st press conference a reporter asked about American prisoners being held in China and Cuba. Kennedy phrased the answer to make the point that Eisenhower had negotiated on a pragmatic basis with Communist China. The White House wanted to be associated with the Republicans when discussing negotiations with Peking. In closing, Kennedy emphasized that China would have to release the prisoners before normalizing relations with the United States.¹⁵⁵

A week later, Kennedy was asked to explain why the U.S. was in "its hour of maximum danger." He replied that over the next four years the Communists, "particularly the Chinese Communists," planned to test the U.S. throughout the globe. Kennedy claimed to be alarmed by the "belligerency" being displayed by Peking.¹⁵⁶

On April 12th Kennedy was queried whether he supported admitting Communist China into the United Nations. He pledged the U.S. to the supporting Taiwan's defense and United Nations membership. In the following question, Kennedy added that "under present conditions" the U.S. opposed Communist China's admission into the United Nations.¹⁵⁷

On Kennedy's trip to France on June 2nd, a reporter asked, "Mr. President, how can Communist China normalize her relations with the West and be admitted to United Nations membership?" Kennedy observed that Communist China had a stated policy of belligerence towards the United States: "We hope that policy changes. We want good will. But it takes two to make peace, and I am hopeful that the Chinese will be persuaded that a peaceful existence with its neighbors represents the best hope for us all."¹⁵⁸ Kennedy hoped to persuade Peking through containment, but decided against a public appeal for diplomacy.

At a press conference on October 11th Kennedy rejected an opportunity to propose diplomacy when a reporter asked him to respond to Peking's proposal for high-level talks under the condition that the U.S. made the initiative. Kennedy pointed out that the U.S. already had diplomatic contacts with Peking at the Geneva talks and in Warsaw. "But we have not seen any evidence as yet that the Chinese Communists wish to live in comity with us, and our desire to live in friendship with all people." Despite the reporter's reference to Peking's initiative, Kennedy still regarded Communist China's belligerent public posture as an obstacle to diplomacy.

At the President's November 8th press conference a reporter asked about the Sino-Soviet split. "It is a matter of surmise," Kennedy replied, "and on this experts may differ. Therefore, I don't feel that it's probably useful now for us to attempt to assess it." He chose not to take sides in a public debate over the Sino-Soviet split.¹⁵⁹

On Valentine's Day in 1962 a reporter asked whether future arms control agreements with the Soviet Union needed to include Communist China to be of any value. "Yes, I would think there would have to be an agreement that would cover the world, if it is going to be valuable," Kennedy replied.¹⁶⁰ When a reporter followed up with a question on how he proposed to bring Red China into an arms agreement, Kennedy offered a Delphic answer: "it is a question which waits for us before the end of the road is reached."¹⁶¹

On May 9th a reporter asked Kennedy whether the U.S. planned to recognize East Germany at the Geneva negotiations. The U.S. did not plan to recognize East Germany. Kennedy noted that the People's Republic had participated with the United States during negotiations over Laos: "We don't recognize them either way."¹⁶²

On June 27th Kennedy's opening statement addressed the growing tension in the Taiwan Straights. He pledged to defend Quemoy and Matsu and quoted a statement he made following

1960 debates. "What is your view now?" a reporter asked. "I also said in the fall of 1960 that there should be no withdrawal from these islands under the point of a gun," Kennedy replied. "We stand in the traditional policy which has been true since 1954." The pledge did not reveal that the White House had taken diplomatic action to defuse the crisis.¹⁶³

During the Sino-Indian War, Kennedy held a press conference on November 20th. His opening statement pledged assistance to India to thwart Communist China's attack. A reporter asked the President to speculate about the relationship between the Missile Crisis and Peking's move. "No, I don't think that any comment that I might make would necessarily be accurate," Kennedy replied. He decided against feeding the crisis with White House speculation.¹⁶⁴

"What chances do you think or do you believe there are of eliminating Communism in Cuba within your term?" a reporters asked at Kennedy's February 7th press conference. Kennedy refused to make a prediction regarding Cuba while referring to China: "There are a lot of unpleasant situations in the world today. China is one."¹⁶⁵

The President clearly regarded Red China as a growing threat. On August 2nd a reporter noted that experts predicted China would be a "full-fledged nuclear power" in ten years and asked Kennedy to assess the threat. Instead of portraying Peking as cool and calculating, Kennedy noted that Red China was Stalinist and aggressive and wanted international war to advance Communism: "We regard that as a menacing factor. And then you introduce into that mix, nuclear weapons." Kennedy explained that by the 1970s the U.S. would face a "potentially more dangerous situation than any we faced since the end of the Second War, because the Russians pursued in most cases their ambitions with some caution."¹⁶⁶ He did not interpret China's cease-fire in the Sino-Indian War as a sign of caution.

On November 14th a week before his death, Kennedy's final statement on China came in response to a reporter who asked about the requirements for resuming trade. "We are not

planning to trade with Red China in view of the policy that Red China pursues.” He was not prepared to reassess U.S. policy until Peking changed its aggressive public posture. He did not interpret Peking’s actions or words as propaganda designed for internal consumption: “When the Red Chinese indicate a desire to live at peace with the United States, with other countries surrounding it, then quite obviously the United States would reappraise its policies.” For Kennedy, ‘flexibility’ remained impossible until Peking either denounced or amended Mao’s revolutionary doctrine.¹⁶⁷

Tactical Use of Speeches:

Kennedy implemented Operation Reassurance and his policy of “firmness and flexibility” by downplaying China as an issue. He adopted a conservative approach toward speeches that did elevate the U.S. commitment to Chiang or emphasize the “firmness and flexibility” of the White House with regard to the People’s Republic. Kennedy had privately admitted that U.S. China policy was “irrational,” but ruled out an information strategy of speeches to educate Americans preferring not to challenge the China Lobby or cross Nixon and Eisenhower in public debate. At the gut level, Kennedy instinctively agreed with Eisenhower and Nixon on the need to contain the Chinese Communism. He was capable of understanding the irrationality of maintaining the myth of one-China policy, but was not prepared for overtures that seemed to appease Mao.

Kennedy did not make a major speech devoted to China policy throughout his presidency. He referred to China only in passing when he decided to raise the subject. He referred to China primarily within the context of continuing Eisenhower’s policies. None of his public speeches offered Peking suggestions for starting the process of improving relations.

The longest statement Kennedy made in a speech on China came before a group of Japanese businessmen. “Our problem, now, of course, is that with the rise of the Communist power in China combined with an expansionist, Stalinist philosophy, our major problem...is how to contain this expansion of Communism in Asia so that we don’t find the Chinese moving out into the dominant position in all of Asia.”¹⁶⁸ The remark demonstrated Kennedy’s concern regarding China’s looming threat to the region and the U.S. commitment to containment strategy.

The second longest statement on China that Kennedy came in a televised speech to promote the passage of the Test Ban Treaty in July 1963. He used the appearance to restate Khrushchev’s warning to Peking regarding nuclear war. “Chairman Khrushchev warned the Communist Chinese, ‘the survivors would envy the dead.’ ” The remark reflected Kennedy’s concern about China’s nuclear program, but he did not encourage Peking to join the Test Ban. Extending a hand would have placed Kennedy in the position of questioning the myth of one-China policy.¹⁶⁹

Maintaining the myth tied Kennedy’s hands when it came to considering policies, such as “food for peace,” that went against Operation Reassurance or “firmness and flexibility.” Throughout Kennedy’s presidency Bowles lobbied White House advisers to change China policy and make a speech endorsing “food for peace.” Kennedy rejected any mention of “food for peace” in any of his speeches. In November 1961, one of Bowles last acts as Undersecretary of State was to lobby the State Department to press Kennedy to deliver a speech that pledged the U.S. would defend Taiwan, but still opened the door for détente with Peking. But the White House had already committed to Operation Reassurance and keeping the People’s Republic out of the United Nations.¹⁷⁰

In June 1962, while the People's Republic built up forces adjacent to Quemoy and Matsu, Bowles urged Kennedy to give a speech that limited the U.S. commitment to in the Far East to defending Taiwan and leaving the commitment to the offshore islands "fuzzy."¹⁷¹ But Kennedy had already decided against a speech to defuse the crisis and opted for quiet behind-the-scenes diplomacy to warn Chiang not to talk about "mainland recovery." He also used the Warsaw talks to signal Peking that the U.S. did not support an attack.¹⁷²

Throughout his presidency, Kennedy's decisions on speeches reflected his preference not to draw press attention to China. Nevertheless, during the spring of 1963, State Department planners began discussing the possibility of a presidential tour of the Far East.¹⁷³ On July 8th the State Department's Roger Hilsman wrote the White House to add his endorsement: "What is needed now is a dramatic affirmation of America's presence and commitment." Noting the success of Kennedy's recent European trip, Hilsman observed, "A similar gesture would have a far greater impact on our Pacific flank, where one-third of the world's population lives and where the Communist threat looms larger."¹⁷⁴

By the fall of 1963, the proposal for a presidential trip to the Far East remained alive. Harriman endorsed the plan for a presidential tour of the Far East as a good idea, but warned Hilsman that New Pacific Community plans were primarily a "gimmick."¹⁷⁵ In early November 1963, in response to a Bundy phone call, Hilsman endorsed the proposal in a memorandum to the White House: "But if the trip is to have maximum impact it should in my judgment go beyond wither patching up strained relations or justifying our established policy and keyed to an initiative in foreign policy."¹⁷⁶

On November 19th Hilsman wrote to Bundy again to encourage Kennedy's trip to the Far East. Hilsman calculated that the trip would benefit U.S. policy in the Asian-Pacific region if it were made in 1964 or 1965. He favored 1964 only if Kennedy believed it would help domestic

support. He did not propose any changes to U.S. policy and recommended developing initiatives to demonstrate support for the U.S. system of alliances to contain Communist China¹⁷⁷

In the days that followed, the President considered the Far East trip during the 1964 election mainly to reinvigorate his New Frontier image as an idealist who needed a second term to implement a strategy to win the Cold War in the Far East.¹⁷⁸ The question of how to use the China trip was on Kennedy's mind during the final hours before departing for a campaign trip to Texas. The President and his brother Robert discussed the possibility of repeating the "Ich bin ein Berliner" speech in Hong Kong to bolster the Old Frontier. Not satisfied with the impact of the Berlin speech, the Attorney General observed that a Hong Kong speech would only show "more profile than courage" against China. But the President was rushing to leave for Texas and did not have time to discuss China policy.¹⁷⁹

Nevertheless, a "Great Leap Forward" would never have emerged from future campaign strategy sessions. He wanted a fiery blast against Peiping, not an olive branch. The Attorney General was not pleased with plans to show more "profile than courage." On November 22, 1963, when Kennedy was assassinated the Old Frontier's China policy remained intact with unfinished plans for a "speech offensive" to reaffirm America's commitment.¹⁸⁰ Thus, the New Frontier passed the torch leaving a legacy of continuity for U.S. policy in the Asian-Pacific region.

Pleading No Lo Contendre:

In the end, Kennedy's decision to continue the Old Frontier's China Policy required an information strategy that did not challenge the status quo. He chose to plead "no lo contendre" rather than spark a political battle with the China Lobby. Kennedy also believed in the domino

theory and the need to prevent the spread of Communism in the Far East through containment. The challenge of reexamining China policy with new ideas was always postponed by the White House while the door was left open for Peking's initiative.

Instead, Kennedy used an appointments as a tactic to communicate continuity to the press. He chose Rusk over Bowles and Stevenson because of his reputation in Washington for advocating "one-China." Before the inauguration in 1961, the appointment strategy signaled to the China Lobby and the press that the New Frontier had laid the foundation for continuing the Old Frontier. The appointments also reflected Kennedy's preference for "firmness" toward Peking before "flexibility."

Access was an important part of Kennedy's information strategy for China policy, but offered only mixed results. Luce and Alsop functioned as firemen for the China Lobby by fending off challenges to the Old Frontier. The President was concerned about alienating *Time-Life* and consulted with Luce in 1961 in advance to warn about possible changes in China policy. *Time-Life's* publisher was not moved by Kennedy's charm. He told Kennedy to fight harder to keep China out of the United Nations. Special treatment in Operation Reassurance only made Luce "belly-ache" that not enough was being done for Chiang. Kennedy had more success courting Alsop, but the columnist already agreed with the decision to handle China policy through "firmness and flexibility."

Kennedy used press conferences to emphasize that the White House would not change China policy. Press conferences never presented a major challenge because reporters infrequently raised questions regarding China policy. The President used questions as an opportunity to reaffirm his commitment to the Old Frontier. He made it clear that changing U.S. policy was not possible until Peking changed from an aggressive stance. When a reporter pointed out that Peking suggested high level talks, Kennedy rejected the proposal with the

argument that there already was diplomatic contact and China did not seem friendly. He did not use press conferences to explain specifically what China needed to do to normalize relations. Kennedy had decided to continue containing Communist China's threat, but decided not to use press conferences to elevate the issue by challenging the myth of one-China. Outlining specific concessions for Peking would have challenged the China Lobby by offering Kennedy's suggestions for beginning a two-China policy. Operation Reassurance made it impossible for Kennedy to be specific regarding 'flexibility.'

Speeches were used by Kennedy to downplay the China issue, rather than explain to the American public why U.S. policy was "irrational." Kennedy rejected proposals from Bowles to deliver a major speech on the need to change China policy. The "speech offensive" proposed for 1964 promised to reaffirm the U.S. commitment to the Asian-Pacific region in a *déjàvus* strategy to replay the Berlin Wall speech in Hong Kong. Kennedy's unfinished business was a plan to bolster the U.S. flank in the Pacific and not to back down against Communist China's aggression. An initiative for flexibility was not possible until Peking decided to change.

Kennedy's information strategy for China maintained the status quo, rather than challenging an "irrational" policy by attempting to educate the public. He anticipated that by the 1970's Peking's nuclear program would make Communist China a more difficult and menacing problem for the United States. The President envisioned the dilemma posed by Communist China as an ongoing problem and preferred an information strategy that maintained the Old Frontier rather than presenting challenges.

Notes

¹ Rosemary Foot, The Practice of Power: U.S. Relations with China Since 1949, (New York, 1995); John T. Rourke, Making Foreign Policy: The United States, Soviet Union, and China, (Belmont, CA: 1990); Foster Rhea Dulles, American Policy Toward Communist China, 1949-1969, (New York, 1972), pp. 1-187; Kenneth T. Young, Negotiating with the Chinese Communists: The United States Experience, 1953-1967, (New York, NY, 1968), pp. 3-246.

² Joyce Hoffman, Theodore H. White: Journalism as Illusion, (Columbia, MO: 1995), p.64.

³ Stanley Bachrack, The Committee of One Million "China Lobby" Politics, 1953-1971, (New York, 1976), p.7.

⁴ Dulles, American Policy, pp. 85-89.

⁵ Roger Hilsman, To Move A Nation: The Politics of Foreign Policy in the Administration of John F. Kennedy, (New York, 1967), p. 291; Dulles, American Policy, p.188.

⁶ William Tyler Oral History (hereafter cited as OH), John F. Kennedy Library (hereafter cited as JFKL), pp. 37-39.

⁷ Theodore Sorensen, Kennedy, (New York, 1965), pp. 661-666.

⁸ Howard Kleinberg, "A Threat Against Taiwan: U.S. Still A Paper Tiger as China Keeps Up Aggression," *The Post and Courier* (Charleston, SC) February 13, 1996; Andrew Higgins, "China Defies World on Nuclear Tests; War of Nerves Between Beijing and Taipei Grows," *The Guardian*, January 31, 1996; Chalmers Roberts, "Our Least Diplomatic Visitor," *The Washington Post*, February 4, 1979. In 1959, Mao told Khrushchev the U.S. was a "Paper Tiger." Khrushchev replied: "a Paper Tiger with nuclear teeth."

⁹ Arthur Schlesinger, One Thousand Days, (Boston, 1965), p. 905; Mao's willingness to absorb heavy losses to defend Peking's interests dated back to the earliest days of China's revolution. In the 1960 book, China Crosses the Yalu River, Allen Whitting wrote that during the Korean War Peking in a defensive mode. The thesis was confirmed with the opening of Soviet archives in the 1990's. Mao saw American forces on the Korean Peninsula as a threat. He cabled Stalin on October 2, 1950 to urge a tough stand: "If we allow the United States to occupy all of Korea, Korean revolutionary power will suffer a fundamental defeat and the Americans will run more rampant and have negative effects for the entire Far East." see "Mao's Cable Explains Drive Into Korea," *The New York Times*, February 26, 1992. During the Korean War, Mao considered American nuclear power to be a Paper Tiger compared to the ability of the Chinese military to absorb losses. Mao did not view the loss of human life in a confrontation with the U.S. as a high cost. The cables to Stalin show that Washington misread China by concluding that Mao would not enter the war if U.S. forces stayed in South Korea; Lucian Pye and Robert Siegel, "Mao Cables Show Ready to Fight in Korea, All Things Considered (NPR) February 28, 1992.

¹⁰ James C. Thomson, Jr., "How Could Vietnam Happen? An Autopsy," *The Atlantic*, April 1968, pp. 47-52.

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- ¹¹ Robert J. McMahon, "Changing Sides in South Asia," in Thomas G. Paterson et al., Kennedy's Quest for Victory: American Foreign Policy, 1961-1963, (New York, 1989), p. 205.
- ¹² Chester Bowles, Promises to Keep: My Years in Public Life, 1941-1969, (New York, 1971), pp. 391-392.
- ¹³ John F. Kennedy, "A Democrat Looks at Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, October 1957, pp. 44-49.
- ¹⁴ Dulles, American Policy, p.190.
- ¹⁵ Timothy Maga, John F. Kennedy and New Frontier Diplomacy, 1961-1963, (Malabar, FL: 1994), pp. 112-119.
- ¹⁶ Hilsman, To Move A Nation, p. 304.
- ¹⁷ The Signs of Chinese Communist Friendliness, July 17, 1961" Box 22, National Security Files, (hereafter cited as NSF), JFKL.
- ¹⁸ Alastair Iain Johnston, "China's New "Old Thinking:" The Concept of Limited Deterrence," *International Security*, (Winter 1995/96), pp. 5-42.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 5-42. The world stage was Mao's platform to wear the lion's robes and bite Kennedy's heels while growling like the mighty ruler of Asia's jungles, but beneath the costume China was a weak power.
- ²⁰ Ibid., pp. 5-42.
- ²¹ Chen Jian, "China's Involvement in the Vietnam War, 1964-1969," *China Quarterly* Winter 1995, pp. 356-387.
- ²² He Di, "The Most Respected Enemy: Mao Zedong's Perception of the United States," *The China Quarterly*, Fall 1994, p. 154.
- ²³ James C. Thomson, Jr., "On the Making of U.S. China Policy, 1961-1969: A Study in Bureaucratic Politics," *China Quarterly* April / June 1972, pp. 220-243.
- ²⁴ Roger Hilsman, "McNamara's War -Against the Truth: A Review Essay," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 111, (Spring 1996), pp. 151-163.
- ²⁵ Thomson, "Making of U.S. China Policy," pp. 220-243.
- ²⁶ CIA Sino-Soviet Task Force Report, "The Sino-Soviet Dispute and its Significance," April 1, 1961, Box 22, NSF, JFKL.
- ²⁷ Timothy P. Maga, "'Pay Any Price, Bear Any Burden': John F. Kennedy and Sino-American Relations, 1961-1963," in Priscilla Roberts et al., Sino-American Relations Since 1900, (Hong Kong, 1991), pp. 468-481.

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- ²⁸ Ibid., pp. 468-481.
- ²⁹ Ibid., pp. 468-481.
- ³⁰ Ibid. pp. 468-481.
- ³¹ Ibid., pp. 468-481.
- ³² Dulles, American Policy, pp. 198-199; Dean Rusk OH, JFKL, p.14.
- ³³ U.S. Department of State, American Foreign Policy Current Documents 1962, (Washington, D.C., 1966), pp. 1075-1085.
- ³⁴ Dulles, American Policy, pp. 198-199; Dean Rusk OH, JFKL, p. 14.
- ³⁵ James Fetzer, "Clinging to Containment: China Policy," in Thomas G. Paterson et al., Kennedy's Quest for Victory: American Foreign Policy, 1961-1963, (New York, 1989), pp. 186-187.
- ³⁶ Letter from John F. Kennedy to the President of Taiwan, July 14, 1961, Box 113a, President's Office Files, (hereafter cited as POF), JFKL.
- ³⁷ State Department Memorandum to McGeorge Bundy and Walt Rostow, "Using the Chen Visit," July 20, 1961, Box 22, NSF, JFKL; Luncheon at the White House Monday, July 31, 1961, Box 113a, POF, JFKL.
- ³⁸ Memorandum for Walt W. Rostow and McGeorge Bundy from BJK, RWK, July 25, 1961, Box 22, NSF, JFKL.
- ³⁹ Sorensen, Kennedy, p.665.
- ⁴⁰ Department of State Memorandum of Conversation, "United States China Relations," August 1, 1961, Box 22, NSF, JFKL.
- ⁴¹ Hilsman, To Move A Nation, pp. 305-306; Sorensen, Kennedy, p.665.
- ⁴² Department of State Memorandum of Conversation, "United States China Relations," August 1, 1961, Box 22, NSF, JFKL.
- ⁴³ John Kenneth Galbraith, Ambassador's Journal: A Personal Account of the Kennedy Years, (Boston, 1969), pp. 195-197.
- ⁴⁴ Memo to Ray Cline from McGeorge Bundy at the President's Direction, October 11, 1961, Box 22, NSF, JFKL. "This assurance, however, must be kept wholly private for the powerful reason that public disclosure of such U.S. pledge at this time would be deeply damaging to the common cause at the U.N. There we are debating on the important question issue and we will lose many votes -and also indicate fear of defeat- if there is any public discussion of a veto."

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- ⁴⁵ Bachrack, Committee of One Million, pp. 197-199.
- ⁴⁶ Hilsman, To Move A Nation, pp. 309-310.
- ⁴⁷ Richard J. Walton, Cold War and Counterrevolution: The Foreign Policy of John F. Kennedy, (New York, 1972), pp. 226-229.
- ⁴⁸ Department of State Policy Planning Council, "U.S. Policy Toward China," October 26, 1961, James Thomson Papers, JFKL.
- ⁴⁹ Hilsman, To Move A Nation, p. 344.
- ⁵⁰ CIA Sino-Soviet Task Force Report, "The Sino-Soviet Dispute and its Significance," April 1, 1961, Box 22, NSF, JFKL.
- ⁵¹ Department of State Policy Planning Council, "U.S. Policy Toward China," October 26, 1961, James Thomson Papers, JFKL.
- ⁵² Department of State Policy Planning Council, "U.S. Policy Toward China," October 26, 1961, James Thomson Papers, JFKL.
- ⁵³ Department of State Policy Planning Council, "U.S. Policy Toward China," October 26, 1961, James Thomson Papers, JFKL.
- ⁵⁴ Blind Memo re: Premises and Programs Basic to a China Policy for the United States, NSF:CO:China, General 12/16/61-12/31/61, Box 22, NSF, JFKL.
- ⁵⁵ Thomson, "Making of U.S. China Policy," pp. 220-243.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 220-243; Hilsman, To Move A Nation, pp. 315-317.
- ⁵⁷ Walt Rostow to President John F. Kennedy, "A Memo for Thanksgiving Weekend," November 22, 1961, Box 22, NSF, JFKL; Memorandum to the President from Walt Rostow, November 8, 1961, Box 22, NSF, JFKL. "I am convinced that the internal situation in Communist China is one of the most important factors in our calculations about Southeast Asia."
- ⁵⁸ Secretary's European Trip June 18-28, 1962: Memorandum of Conversation June 25, 1962, Box 15, James Thomson Papers JFKL, declassified January 31, 1996; Thomson, "Making of U.S. China Policy," pp. 220-243; Hilsman, To Move A Nation, pp. 315-317.
- ⁵⁹ Fetzer, "Clinging to Containment," pp. 192-193.
- ⁶⁰ Telegram from Drumright to Rusk, January 12, 1962, Box 23, NSF, JFKL.
- ⁶¹ Roger Hilsman, To Move A Nation, pp. 310-311; Theodore Sorensen, Kennedy, p.661.

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- ⁶² Memorandum from John F. Kennedy to Averell Harriman, March 9, 1962, Box 22, NSF, JFKL.
- ⁶³ Theodore Sorensen, Kennedy, pp. 661-662.
- ⁶⁴ Memorandum from John F. Kennedy to Averell Harriman, March 9, 1962, Box 22, NSF, JFKL.
- ⁶⁵ Stanley Bachrack, The Committee of One Million, p.201.
- ⁶⁶ Roger Hilsman, To Move A Nation, p .318.
- ⁶⁷ Roger Hilsman, To Move A Nation, p. 318.
- ⁶⁸ Stanley Bachrack, The Committee of One Million, p.201.
- ⁶⁹ Gordon H. Chang, "JFK, China and the Bomb," *Journal of American History*, March 1988, 1287-1310.
- ⁷⁰ Memorandum from John F. Kennedy to Averell Harriman, March 9, 1962, Box 22, NSF, JFKL.
- ⁷¹ James C. Thomson, Jr., "On the Making of U.S. China Policy," pp. 220-243.
- ⁷² Roger Hilsman, To Move A Nation, p. 319.
- ⁷³ Richard Reeves, President Kennedy: Profile of Power, (New York, 1993), p.352.
- ⁷⁴ Roger Hilsman, To Move A Nation, p. 321; John King Fairbank, China: A New History, (Cambridge, MA: 1992), p.381; Allen S. Whiting, "Forecasting Chinese Foreign Policy," in Thomas Robinson and David Shambaugh et al., Chinese Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice, (New York, 1994), p.511, China was responding to India's decision to place troops in territory that had been disputed in the Himalayans since the British drew the border between the two countries. Jawaharal Nehru believed the failure of the Great Leap Forward left China crippled and unable to push India's military out of the disputed territory.
- ⁷⁵ Theodore Sorensen, Kennedy, p. 681.
- ⁷⁶ Theodore Sorensen, p. 724.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 661-666.
- ⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 661-666; Roger Hilsman, To Move A Nation, pp. 339.
- ⁷⁹ Theodore Sorensen, Kennedy, pp. 661-666.
- ⁸⁰ Gordon H. Chang, "JFK, China and the Bomb," p.1292; Theodore Sorensen, pp. 719-746.

⁸¹ Gordon H. Chang, p. 1294; Hilsman Summary of President's Views January 22, 1963, Box 5 Hilsman Papers, JFKL.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 1299-1305. The argument that Kennedy would have preferred to have Moscow act alone ignores the fact that the U.S. would have functioned as a Soviet military ally if Khrushchev agreed to act alone against China while Kennedy winked.

⁸³ John J. Martino, Executive Secretariat Department of State, to Mr. Read October 2, 1964, "A search of our records of the Test Ban Treaty negotiations in Moscow fails to reveal any Harriman proposal for a joint U.S.-U.S.S.R effort to slow down Red China's nuclear weapons development.....Harriman probed USSR knowledge of Chinese capacities and attitude toward them....Khrushchev was obviously unwilling to talk at much length on the question and he tried to give the impression of not being greatly concerned. One of the reasons that the Chinese issue was raised with Khrushchev was Harriman's theory that Khrushchev's interest in a test ban treaty flowed from his desire to isolate Red China in the international communist movement. Aside from this Harriman was also under instructions to express the President's great concern over Chinese development of nuclear weapons." Box 539, Averell Harriman Papers, Library of Congress (hereafter cited as LC).

⁸⁴ Gordon H. Chang, "JFK, China and the Bomb," pp. 1299-1305.

⁸⁵ Timothy Maga, John F. Kennedy and New Frontier Diplomacy, pp. 118-119.

⁸⁶ Thomas L. Hughes to Secretary of State Rusk, "Possibility of greater Chinese Communist Militancy," Department of State Bureau of Intelligence and Research, August 12, 1963, Box 15, John Thomson Papers, JFKL.

⁸⁷ Roger Hilsman, To Move A Nation, pp. 348-349.

⁸⁸ Roger Hilsman, p.348-350..

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.348-350..

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 348-349; Fetzer, "Clinging to Containment," pp. 196-197.

⁹¹ Schlesinger, One Thousand Days, pp. 479-480; Arthur Schlesinger, Robert F. Kennedy and His Times, (Boston, 1978) p.418; Chester Bowles, "The "China Problem" Reconsidered, *Foreign Affairs*, April 1960, pp. 476-486; Chester Bowles OH, JFKL, pp. 6-7; Bowles, Promises to Keep, p.391.

⁹² Christopher Matthews, Kennedy and Nixon: The Rivalry that Shaped Postwar America, (New York, 1996), pp. 158-163

⁹³ Hilsman, To Move A Nation, pp. 302-303; Dulles, American Policy, p.190.

⁹⁴ Hilsman, To Move A Nation, pp. 302-303.

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- ⁹⁵ Bachrack, Committee of One Million, p.179.
- ⁹⁶ Walt Rostow OH, JFKL, p.25.
- ⁹⁷ Schlesinger, One Thousand Days, pp. 479-480; James C. Thomson, Jr., "Dragon Under Glass: Time for a New China Policy," *The Atlantic*, October 1967 pp. 55-61.
- ⁹⁸ Leonard A. Kusnitz, Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: America's China Policy, 1949-1979, (Westport, CT: 1984), pp. 95-96. *Italicized emphasis in the original document.*
- ⁹⁹ Robert Ferrel, Eisenhower Diaries, (New York, 1981), p.425; Reeves, Profile of Power, pp. 29-33.
- ¹⁰⁰ Fred Greenstein and Richard Immerman, "What did Eisenhower tell Kennedy about Indochina? The Politics of Misperception," *The Journal of American History* September 1992, pp. 568-587.
- ¹⁰¹ Schlesinger, One Thousand Days, pp. 479-480; Galbraith, Ambassador's Journal, p.9; Reeves, Profile of Power, p.33.
- ¹⁰² Jams C. Thompson Jr., "How Could Vietnam Happen?," *The Atlantic*, April 1968, pp. 47-52.
- ¹⁰³ Matthews, Kennedy and Nixon, pp. 185-186.
- ¹⁰⁴ Thompson, "How Could Vietnam Happen?," pp. 47-52.
- ¹⁰⁵ Edwin O. Guthman and Jeffrey Shulman, editors, Robert Kennedy In his Own Words: The Unpublished recollections of the Kennedy Years, (New York, 1988), pp. 394-405; Fetzer, "Clinging to Containment," pp. 181.
- ¹⁰⁶ Mark J. White, The Cuban Missile Crisis, (London, England, 1996), pp. 5-6.
- ¹⁰⁷ John F. Kennedy, with Allen Nevins editor, The Strategy of Peace, (New York, 1960).
- ¹⁰⁸ Public Papers of the President of the United States, President John F. Kennedy, 1961, (hereafter cited as JFKPP61), (Washington, D.C., 1962), pp. 2-6.
- ¹⁰⁹ Sorenson, Kennedy, p.199.
- ¹¹⁰ Letter from the President of the Republic of China to President Kennedy April 1, 1961, Box 113a, POF, JFKL.
- ¹¹¹ Letter from the President of the Republic of China to President Kennedy April 17, 1961, Files Box 113a, POF, JFKL; Letter to the President of the Republic of China from President Kennedy May 8, 1961, Box 22, NSF, JFKL.

¹¹² "Notes on the Chinese Civil War, May 1, 1961," Box 14, James Thomson Papers JFKL; During June 1962, the People's Republic built up forces along the Taiwan straights in the Fukien area. U.S. analysts were not clear about whether Mainland China was preparing for a defensive or offensive maneuver because they realized U.S. policy sent mixed signals to Peiping. The mixed signals regarding U.S. intentions resulted from Kennedy's decision not to speak out against the Republic of China's publicly stated goal to regain the mainland and to offer logistical support to Chiang's small raids on the mainland while using Taiwan as a base for gathering U.S. intelligence. To clear up the apparent confusion over U.S. intentions, Kennedy sent Ambassador Averrel Harriman to meet with Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin with a diplomatic message. "We had no intentions under existing circumstances of giving Chiang encouragement or support for an attack on the mainland," Harriman told the Soviet Ambassador. "ChiNats would take no offensive action without full consultation and prior agreement with the United States." He assured Dobrynin that despite appearances, Admiral Alan Kirk, the Ambassador to China and an expert in amphibious warfare, had not been selected by Kennedy to offer military advice to Chiang. The same message was repeated to Ping-nan Wang, the Ambassador of the People's Republic to the Warsaw talks. Kennedy then approved the release of a statement by the State Department to note that the U.S. diplomatic move at the Warsaw talks. FRUSXXII, pp.267-269, pp.283-284. At the urging of UN Ambassador Adlai Stevenson, Kennedy made a public statement at his June 27, 1962 press conference. In his opening statement Kennedy pledged to defend Quemoy and Matsu while noting "we are opposed to the use of force in this area." Kennedy also instructed the U.S. embassy to tell Chiang to refrain from making hostile statements because the U.S. wanted to make Mainland China appear as the aggressor. FRUSXXII pp.281-284.

¹¹³ Department of State Policy Planning Council, "U.S. Policy Toward China," October 26, 1961, p. 77. "There appears to be no action open to us, short of operations against the actual installations where the Chinese Communists are conducting their nuclear development program, by which we could expect to put off the time they may be able to explode an atomic device. According to our estimates this might be as early as 1962." Box 14, James Thomson Papers, JFKL.

¹¹⁴ Foreign Relations of the United States, Northeast Asia, 1961-1963, Vol. XXII, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996, (hereafter cited as FRUSXXII), pp.216-217.

¹¹⁵ Guidelines for Anticipation of and Reaction to Initial Chicom Nuclear Detonation undated, Box 15, James Thomson Papers, JFKL.

¹¹⁶ Dulles, American Policy, p. 192; Dean Rusk OH, JFKL, pp. 1-3.

¹¹⁷ Jeff Broadwater, Adlai Stevenson and American Politics: The Odyssey of a Cold War Liberal, (Chapel Hill, NC: 1994), p.200.

¹¹⁸ Jean H. Baker, The Stevensons: A Biography of An American Family, (New York, 1996), p.408.

¹¹⁹ Bowles, Promises to Keep, p.396.

¹²⁰ Thomson, "Making of U.S. China Policy," pp. 220-243.

- ¹²¹ Edward Claffin, with preface by Pierre Salinger, JFK Wants to Know: Memos from the President's Office, 1961-1963, (New York, 1991) pp. 117-118.
- ¹²² Schlesinger, One Thousand Days, pp. 479-480; Dulles, American Policy, p.194.
- ¹²³ Baker, The Stevensons, p.408.
- ¹²⁴ Averell Harriman to Dean Rusk, "Possible Visit by Mr. Luce to Communist China," January 3, 1963, Box 565, Averell Harriman Papers, LC.
- ¹²⁵ Edgar Snow to Averell Harriman, October 4, 1962, Box 504, Averell Harriman Papers, LC; John Maxwell Hamilton, Edgar Snow: A Biography, (Indiana, 1988), p.147, p.246; Snow was able to rib Harriman about his wealth because they were old friends. During World War II, Harriman served as Ambassador to Russia and frequently discussed foreign policy with Snow because he was working in Moscow as a journalist. Harriman considered Snow to be a useful source of information on policy. He wanted a "public debate" with Snow on Kennedy's China policy, but Rusk was not interested.
- ¹²⁶ Benjamin Bradlee, Conversations With Kennedy, (New York, 1975), p.113.
- ¹²⁷ Matthews, Kennedy and Nixon, p. 193.
- ¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 193.
- ¹²⁹ Benjamin Bradlee, Conversations with Kennedy; Ben Bradlee, A Good Life: Newspapering and Other Adventures, (New York, 1995), Chapters 9 and 10.
- ¹³⁰ Letter from Roy Howard to Mayling Kai-shek, September 9, 1961; Letter from Roy Howard to Mayling Kai-shek, October 2, 1961, Box 320, Roy Howard Papers, LC; On June 26, 1961, Kennedy asked Ambassador Stevenson to talk about the China problem in the UN with Roy Howard and Hedley Donovan, the editorial director of *Time-Life*. Stevenson reported back on July 3rd that "Howard had been very cooperative and would try to use his influence on Chiang not to veto the admission of Mongolia." FRUSXXII, pp.81-82, p.134.
- ¹³¹ President John F. Kennedy memorandum to McGeorge Bundy, September 5, 1961, Box 62, POF, JFKL; Letter from Roy Howard to Mayling Kai-shek, September 16, 1961, Box 320, Roy Howard Papers, LC.
- ¹³² Arthur Krock, Memoirs: Sixty Years on the Firing Line, (New York, 1986), pp. 369-372.
- ¹³³ Ibid., pp. 357-358.
- ¹³⁴ Joseph Alsop letter to John F. Kennedy, June 21, 1963, Special Correspondence, POF, JFKL.
- ¹³⁵ Robert W. Merry, Taking On the World: Joseph and Stewart Alsop Guardians of the American Century, (New York, 1996), p. 208; pp. 396-406.

- ¹³⁶ David Warsh, "The Numbers Junkie; Economic Principals," *Boston Globe Economy Section* March 3, 1996, p. 77.
- ¹³⁷ Joseph W. Alsop with Adam Platt, "I've Seen the Best of It:" Memoirs, (New York, 1992), pp. 458-459.
- ¹³⁸ Joseph Alsop "The Coming Explosion in Red China," *The Saturday Evening Post*, August 7, 1962 included in Alsop letter to Averell Harriman, "Normally I Don't Beg Friends in Government to Read Anything I've Written," July 27, 1962, Box, 430, Averell Harriman Papers LC.
- ¹³⁹ Alsop, "I've Seen the Best of It." pp. 458-459.
- ¹⁴⁰ FRUSXXII, p.246.
- ¹⁴¹ Alsop, "I've Seen the Best of It, p.464; p.438; Edwin M. Yoder, Joseph Alsop's Cold War: A Study of Journalistic Influence and Intrigue, (Chapel Hill, NC: 1995), pp. 174-175.
- ¹⁴² Hoffman, Journalism as Illusion, pp. 61-73.
- ¹⁴³ T. Christopher Jespersen, American Images of China, 1931-1949, (Stanford, CA: 1996), pp. 133-134.
- ¹⁴⁴ Guest List Luncheon at the White House Monday, July 31, 1961 at One O'clock, Box 113A, POF, JFKL; Robert W. Komer Memorandum to McGeorge Bundy and Walte Rostow, "Using the Chen Cheng Visit," July 20, 1961; Robert W. Komly Memorandum to McGeorge Bundy, September 5, 1961 Box 22, NSF, JFKL.
- ¹⁴⁵ Hoffman, Journalism as Illusion, pp. 61-73.
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Chapter Seven

Profiles in Spin: An Epilogue to the First Rough Draft

Kennedy's Information Strategy and History

Origins of the Camelot Legacy:

During the weeks that followed President John F. Kennedy's funeral the nation continued to mourn as Americans tried to make sense of his tragic assassination. Television had come of age with three days of extended live coverage of funeral arrangements that Jacqueline Kennedy had orchestrated hastily with White House aides. Grieving still, the former First Lady worried about her future reputation along with President Kennedy's place in history and sought weary refuge at her family's estate in Hyannis Port.¹

"Shattered" and painfully aware of his family's political ambitions, Robert Kennedy wanted the investigation into who had murdered his brother closed as soon as possible.² Mrs. Kennedy was very upset by newspaper columns about President Kennedy's legacy. "Bobby, I've got to talk to somebody," she said. The entire Kennedy family was available to offer emotional support.³ Television was available for Mrs. Kennedy to make a statement, but she was too distraught to go on camera. Fully aware of how the President used "chosen Kennedys" to portray his image and write the first draft of history, she decided to take control with a phone call to Theodore White at *Life* magazine.⁴

White could sense anger in her voice as she fretted about journalists like Arthur Krock or Merriman Smith writing the history of the New Frontier. *Life* stopped the presses, spending thirty thousand dollars an hour, while White drove from New York to Cape Cod during a northeaster on Friday, November 29th. Mrs. Kennedy appeared tired and still in shock, but she was without tears. “What bothered her was history,” White wrote. “She wanted me to rescue Jack from all these “bitter people” who were going to write about him in history. She did not want Jack left to historians.” “I was her instrument,” White recalled.⁵

Mrs. Kennedy confessed that when her daughter Caroline asked her for a prayer she told her to say: “Please, God, be nice to Daddy.” White realized she was really saying, “Please, History be kind to John F. Kennedy.” She wanted the Kennedy years to be remembered as “*Camelot*.” *Camelot* was Alan Lerner’s popular Broadway musical adaptation of Terence H. White’s classic, The Once and Future King which depicted the romantic legend of King Arthur and his magical court. “There’ll never be another *Camelot* again,” she said.⁶

After taking eleven pages of notes, White was shown to a servant’s room. At two in the morning, he returned to Mrs. Kennedy with the first draft. The article described President Kennedy’s “hero idea of history, the idealist side. And the other side, the pragmatic side.” The reference to President Kennedy’s pragmatic side was edited out of the final draft. Mrs. Kennedy added a final sentence to glorify her husband’s heroic side. “For one brief moment there was *Camelot*,” she wrote.⁷

White dictated the story to his editor from the kitchen at the Kennedy compound. His editor wanted less emphasis on *Camelot*, but White persisted knowing that it cost *Life* thirty thousand dollars an hour to quibble. “Hey, is she listening to this now with you?” the suspicious editor inquired. Mrs. Kennedy was within earshot and insisted upon *Camelot* as the New Frontier’s epilogue. The story was published in accordance with Mrs. Kennedy’s wishes

and the legend of *Camelot* was born in American folklore. “The magic *Camelot* of John F. Kennedy never existed,” White later confessed.⁸

Nevertheless, the myth of *Camelot* became more persuasive after Arthur Schlesinger and Theodore Sorensen wrote memoirs that followed in accordance with the public record created by President Kennedy's information strategy to influence the press. He had “leaked” selected classified material with President Kennedy's permission and later removed sixty-seven boxes of presidential papers, including seven classified boxes from the White House with permission from the General Services Administration. The memoir Kennedy was based upon material the President had wanted used, but Sorensen apparently remained unaware of key details in the New Frontier's foreign policy. He nonetheless crafted the memoir that President Kennedy had planned to write.⁹

The posthumous image of *Camelot* has remained formidable because of the classification and handling of documents during the Kennedy years. Documents classified for reasons of national security are released after years of complex interagency review procedures. The scholarship on Kennedy has remained in a constant state of flux as new documents have been slowly declassified since the close of the Cold War.

The scholarship on Kennedy is also influenced by the terms and conditions donors are allowed to make when donating material to the John F. Kennedy Library. As a result, President Kennedy's heirs retain control over the dispensation of key materials while the National Archives retains ownership of the documents based upon the fulfillment of the original deed.

The control over documents allowed Jacqueline Kennedy and Robert Kennedy to enter a contractual relationship with William Manchester to write an authorized study, Death of A President. The arrangement gave the Kennedys editorial control over how President Kennedy was portrayed.¹⁰ Scholars on favored terms with the Kennedy family have received access to

material not available to other scholars: Doris Kearns Goodwin has had special access to Joseph Kennedy's papers for The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys; and Arthur Schlesinger had special access to Robert Kennedy's diary for Robert Kennedy and His Times.¹¹ For a Kennedy loyalist such as Paul Fay, Mrs. Kennedy felt comfortable enough to advise him politely to remove profanity from his memoir, The Pleasure of His Company. "It's like talking about the wart on Lincoln's nose," said President Kennedy's sister Eunice Shriver.¹²

According to historian Nigel Hamilton, a lawyer representing the Kennedys asked him to change his "attitude" in scholarly writing and lectures on Joseph and Rose Kennedy.¹³ John Davis, a biographer and cousin of Jacqueline Kennedy's, has claimed that the Kennedy Library follows "a policy of keeping most of its important resources closed to the public."¹⁴ Ronald Kessler, the author of Sins of the Father, recently wrote that the Kennedy Library was guilty of "improperly censoring material because it detracts from the Kennedy image."¹⁵

Kennedy's Press Secretary Pierre Salinger has recently emerged as an outspoken opponent of the *Camelot* myth. "The White House career of John Kennedy cannot be *Camelot*," Salinger told Robert Novak. "That is a total joke." "You have to look at the truth of the John Kennedy presidency," he added. According to Salinger any assessment of President Kennedy must be balanced with an examination of his positive and negative contributions.¹⁶

President Kennedy's Dilemma and the Press:

The case studies for this research reveal that the President approached foreign policy pragmatically and postponed major changes until he recaptured the White House for a second term. This study's reexamination of the New Frontier supports Salinger's assessment of Kennedy's record. Very conscious of blemishes in his image as a Cold Warrior, Kennedy

developed an information strategy to influence the news. Subsequently, the “chosen Kennedys” gave the first rough draft of history a makeover that covered over the rough edges of the New Frontier’s foreign policy with glossy *Camelot* mythology.

President Kennedy was elected with a promise to “get the country moving again,” but faced a series of crises within his first months in office. In October 1961, Sorensen turned to Walter Lippmann for advice on an upcoming address at the University of North Carolina. “We would like to answer — affirmatively not defensively the various attacks on the ‘firmness’ of our foreign and military policy,” Sorensen wrote. Kennedy felt boxed in by critics who called negotiations appeasement and pigeonholed policy as either hard or soft. He did not have an answer for the charge that he was “unwilling to follow tough words with tough action” in Cuba, Laos, and Berlin. “But how do we describe our policy in such matters so that the average citizen can understand and embrace it?” Sorensen asked.¹⁷

Lippmann answered by urging that “the President begin to make people realize what they don’t realize at all, what it means to conduct great diplomatic affairs like Southeast Asia, Cuba, and Berlin in the new and revolutionary nuclear age that has just begun.” In effect, Lippmann wanted the New Frontier to follow the advice outlined in President Kennedy’s book Profiles in Courage. He recommended emulating Winston Churchill’s oratory style with a speech that placed Kennedy on the offensive for what he believed was right.¹⁸

Borrowing from Churchill’s dramatic rhetoric, Lippmann ghosted a speech that attacked “confused men” who look at Berlin, Southeast Asia, and Cuba as a choice between “appeasement and surrender.” President Kennedy needed to mobilize the country aggressively and educate the public to recognize the “differences between appeasement and negotiation.” But Sorensen could not persuade Kennedy to deliver the speech. Nevertheless, the secret was

safe because Lippmann never revealed the President's dilemma and rejection of bully pulpit style leadership in foreign policy.¹⁹

Kennedy's intense concern regarding public relations in foreign policy supports earlier work in separate studies by John Maltese and Cathy Franklin which identified the New Frontier's concern for public relations as the foundation for the development of the White House Office of Communications, the development of systematic tracking poll efforts, and sophisticated strategies to influence public opinion through television and the printed word. President Kennedy's approach toward influencing the news media focused primarily upon the printed word and relied upon instincts. Using his access strategy, Kennedy emphasized cultivating individual relationships with reporters and publishers from newspapers and magazines. He was effective at using television, but opted to reserve "the gadget," as he called it, for live press conferences and to strike high notes.

The findings in this study support John Paletz and Robert Entmann's conclusion that policy alternatives originate with presidents and other elites who attempt to influence the news in their favor. President Kennedy was concerned about the Cold War and challenging those elites who advocated a strong stance. His information strategy rejected Lippmann's advice and reflected his policy preference to win the Cold War on the cheap with a tough pragmatic stance. The case studies highlight Kennedy's role in developing information strategy for foreign policy and support Max Lerner's conclusion that in the policy-making process presidents serve as "communicator-in-chief." He intuitively believed that it was important to influence the news to influence public opinion. This study has shown that Kennedy's information strategy attempted to frame reality for the news media through political appointments, individual contacts with reporters, press conferences, and speeches. His goals were to stop Communism, keep his options open, get reelected, and shape the first draft of history.

The New Frontier never sparked a debate over American foreign policy because President Kennedy decided not to challenge the “firm” policies already set in place to fight the Cold War. There remained an atmosphere of ongoing crisis because Kennedy chose not to emphasize his willingness to negotiate or be pragmatic when dealing with Communism. The information strategy inevitably limited options Kennedy considered feasible, thus framing the New Frontier’s foreign policy agenda. The documentary evidence presented in the case studies suggests that Kennedy’s foreign policy was heavily influenced by a pragmatic view of the world and concern for stopping Communism. In each case study, Kennedy’s strong Cold Warrior image produced a dilemma in foreign policy that he attempted to resolve with tactical use of appointments, access, speeches, and press conferences.

This study adds to scholarship in the literature on the presidency and political communication by identifying the uniqueness of the Kennedy era in terms of presidential relations with the press and foreign policy. The case studies support Harold Innis and Joshua Meyerowitz’s theories that throughout history communications technology has shaped the relationship between governments and citizens. The assassination of President Kennedy actually promoted television news with unprecedented live coverage. Here was the final crisis in a presidency marked by a series of crises in foreign policy including the Cold War’s first nuclear confrontation, but for viewers it marked the first time that television offered a window to watch history unfold minute by minute. Throughout the Kennedy years, television had offered viewers only fleeting glimpses of the stage of world politics.²⁰

President Kennedy used television on his own terms through live speeches and press conferences and made foreign policy decisions without the pressure of live on the scene cameras. Satellite technology was still developing and live television required transporting heavy equipment and technicians to recreate studio conditions in the field while covering a

breaking foreign policy event. Adding to Kennedy's information strategy advantage strategy was the tendency of journalists to rely heavily upon official sources for news. Earlier work by Kern, Levering, and Levering found that the news media relied primarily upon government sources for information during the Kennedy era, but it was beyond the scope of their study to examine information strategy and the New Frontier's policy dilemmas and options.

This study contributes to scholarly understanding of political communication and the American presidency by identifying the uniqueness of the Kennedy period as an era of transition to television and the high-water mark for the print press. Nonetheless, President Kennedy's effort to manipulate the press also represented continuity following a tradition dating back to President George Washington. President Kennedy's efforts as Editor-in-Chief to develop personal relationships with journalists to influence reporting emulated President Franklin Roosevelt's handling of the Great Depression and World War II. After learning that Roosevelt rationed fireside chats on radio, Kennedy worried about overexposure on television and decided to focus primarily upon influencing newspaper and magazine reporters. He was the last president who could selectively use television on his own terms while making foreign policy.

The case studies of Kennedy's foreign policy underscore John Tebbel's and Sarah Watts's conclusion that the relationship between the press and the president is influenced by evolving technology and news industry norms and practices. Reporters overlooked questions regarding Kennedy's personal life and health because of the norms and traditions of the era. The New Frontier's version of foreign policy events went virtually untested because the press corps deferred to the White House and trusted official sources. The spin that Kennedy personally displayed to individual reporters, or on live television during press conferences and speeches, never met the intense scrutiny that has characterized political reporting in the post-Vietnam / Watergate era. The White House benefited from the absence of live on the scene

television coverage of major foreign policy events. Yet, Kennedy never used his seemingly apparent advantage to change the course of American foreign policy or challenge the Cold War consensus.

This study confirms James Piffner's conclusion that the Kennedy era was a "key turning point" in how presidents use the media. In Cuba and Vietnam, President Kennedy's information strategy relied upon constantly spinning and framing events for individual reporters and the public in press conferences and speeches, but without considering the long term results for future presidents. The "news management" charges regularly made against Kennedy were the first signs of the emerging credibility gap and cynicism that dogged the White House in the Vietnam and Watergate era. The President's information strategy for foreign policy allowed him to have it both ways in foreign policy, but unwittingly sowed seeds that would make relations with the press more difficult had he lived for a second term. A tragic untimely death allowed Kennedy to leave the political stage as a fallen hero without facing the consequences of his foreign policy and news management decisions, especially in regard to Vietnam.

The general conclusion drawn from the case studies is that President Kennedy's foreign policy information strategy was motivated by his desire to stop Communism without paying the full cost and political concerns regarding the perception news stories created of his handling of the Cold War. The documentary evidence supports the conclusion that Kennedy handled his public relations dilemma by following political instincts and lacked a social scientist's approach to public relations. Lawrence Jacobs and Robert Shapiro recently found that Kennedy used polls systematically to "prime" public opinion during the 1960 election and suggested that this might have become Kennedy's governing strategy.²¹ This study has found evidence that polls were consulted by President Kennedy on an ad hoc basis to understand public opinion, but no

evidence to support the conclusion that polls were systematically employed as part of a governing strategy to “prime” public opinion.

For a feedback mechanism, Kennedy primarily relied upon daily newspapers and weekly magazines. He sought to use personal relationships with individual members of the press to influence what was being printed about foreign policy. He often called journalists and publishers after reading an article to express dismay or satisfaction. This finding supports earlier work by William Spragens that described the president’s relationship with the press as a dynamic process with a two-way “feedback loop.”

Salinger called Kennedy’s personalized approach with its emphasis on direct contact with individual reporters an “open beat system.” The distinction failed to recognize that the President and other advisers actually chose the reporters who had personal access. This study introduced the concept of the “chosen Kennedys” to emphasize the point that access to the President came with expectations of cooperation.

Worried about a strong majority in the 1964 election, the President’s access strategy sought to cultivate “chosen Kennedys” to bolster his image as a Cold Warrior. Many reporters were granted access, but Kennedy had mixed results with journalists such as Arthur Krock and James Reston of the *New York Times*, the syndicated columnists Walter Lippmann, Marguerite Higgins, and Joseph Alsop. Knebel, Krock, and Reston all became critics of Kennedy’s “news management.” Lippmann criticized Kennedy for being caught unprepared in Berlin and being “too firm” and not educating the public while Alsop always urged “firmness.”

Benjamin Bradlee of *Newsweek* and Charles Bartlett of the *Chattanooga Times* were the only journalists to accept the demands of Kennedy’s full calling and became the most reliable of the “chosen Kennedys.” Hugh Sidey of *Time* came close, but Kennedy always held reservations about his tendency to reveal too much insiders’ information. *Time* editors rewrote the

dispatches Sidey filed and frequently snapped at Kennedy's handling of foreign policy. After using precious time cultivating journalists, Kennedy was often left frustrated because Washington's supposedly tame lapdogs often refused to be trained not to snap and bite.

But when Kennedy needed support for something Washington journalists believed in, they often cooperated to protect national security. The President understood how to manipulate the Cold War values of the press, and it was in this sense that they sometimes functioned as tamed lapdogs. He was able to successfully appeal to Reston and the publishers of the *New York Times* before the Bay of Pigs and during the Missile Crisis. Henry Luce, the publisher of *Time-Life*, and Phil Graham, the publisher of the *Washington Post* and *Newsweek*, also cooperated during the Missile Crisis. Charles Bartlett and Stewart Alsop helped Kennedy cultivate a heroic image following the Missile Crisis with an exclusive insiders' account for the *Saturday Evening Post*.

The special attention that Kennedy paid to Luce did not prevent criticism of his handling of the Bay of Pigs or make it easier to change China policy. Luce educated the President on the "facts of life" when Kennedy expressed doubts about whether he could win the fight for "one-China" in the United Nations. Luce's policy to rewrite dispatches from Saigon and parrot the White House line meant that Kennedy never had to ask *Time* for help in portraying success with respect to Vietnam. Nonetheless, Kennedy realized that Luce had to be appeased if the New Frontier abandoned Saigon before South Vietnam could stand on its own.

Luce viewed *Time* as a forum to fight the Cold War and Kennedy was able to count on him when he needed hawkish support, especially during the Missile Crisis. Nonetheless, *Time* pressured Kennedy to take a tougher stand during the Berlin Crisis by warning him that Americans were prepared to risk their lives to fight Communism. The President was congratulated only after making a speech that sounded tougher.

Kennedy privately talked about changing U.S. foreign policy with Bartlett and Bradlee, but did not consider how difficult change would become after spending four years emphasizing continuity. The President selected many journalists to be “chosen Kennedys,” but Bradlee and Bartlett were the only ones whom he trusted enough to reveal the dramatic changes he planned after the 1964 election.

The case studies suggest that Bartlett collaborated with Kennedy on fewer stories while functioning more as a close friend and political adviser than did Bradlee. Bartlett remained reluctant to push his career forward at Kennedy's urging. Bradlee's career skyrocketed with access to Kennedy. The President regularly discussed future stories in *Newsweek* with Bradlee while counting on him to fend off rumors of a “first wife” and criticism over “news management.” Bradlee did not know enough about U.S. foreign policy to offer advice when the President discussed China policy, but he never revealed Kennedy's doubts. He understood that Kennedy preferred not to “go public” or challenge political opponents to a debate over the future direction of American foreign policy.

But the longer President Kennedy postponed challenging American foreign policy in public the more difficult it would become to extricate himself from commitments he made without damaging his prestige and credibility. Potential critics were not going to disappear from the American political landscape. Continuity was the price the New Frontier paid for ambivalent leadership and Kennedy's early decision to reject Lippmann's advice to educate the American public about the need for great diplomacy in the nuclear age.

President Kennedy simultaneously denied “news management” charges while trying to manipulate press coverage of his foreign policy. Experience as a reporter allowed Kennedy to gain insight into the values and news gathering practices of the working press. Earlier studies by Aronson, Herman, and Chomsky concluded that Kennedy offered “cronies” access in

exchange for uncritical press. The case studies for this research lead to the conclusion that President Kennedy attempted to cultivate individual reporters and publishers with mixed success. Reporters such as Alsop, Bartlett, Bradlee, and Sidey often served as “cronies” or “chosen Kennedys” by cooperating with the President. But Kennedy was not always satisfied with their reporting and often had ambivalent feelings concerning the direction of U.S. policy, but opted not to use his close relationships with reporters to generate articles designed to educate the public about the need to change U.S. foreign policy.

The President’s efforts to bring reporters actively into the foreign policy-making process supports Bernard Cohen’s conclusion that journalists are part of the “interplay of politics” and that the news media and government have a symbiotic relationship. Kennedy’s relationships with reporters underscores Doris Graber’s point that reporters are part of the political environment and do more than report the news. Kennedy viewed reporters as tools and used them to portray his foreign policy and shape his Cold Warrior image, but he also had to deal with the personal agendas of such powerful journalists as Alsop, Lippmann, Reston and Luce. Lippmann wanted Kennedy to educate the public about the need for great diplomacy in the nuclear age while Alsop and Luce wanted him to get tough in Vietnam and other areas of the world. Reston wanted access to Kennedy after Vienna, but later repaid the favor with “news management” charges.

These findings support Rourke’s, Carter’s, and Boyer’s conclusion that the press and government have a schizophrenic relationship that is both antagonistic and symbiotic. Although the “chosen Kennedys” often played the role of adoring lapdog, the charges of news management and the threat of criticism regarding the New Frontier’s handling of the Cold War remained. The President often tried, but did not always succeed in cultivating cooperation from the watchdogs in the press corps. For example, while Luce was prepared to cooperate with the

White House on Vietnam and during the Cuban Missile Crisis, Kennedy was not able to personally convince him of the need to change China policy. Luce “belly-ached” that Kennedy needed to demonstrate his support for the Republic of China. Ultimately, the President decided to postpone changing China policy and offending *Time-Life* until he was safely reelected.

The case studies support O’Heffernan’s mutual exploitation theory of media influence in foreign policy where the government and the media are mutually dependent and exploit each other for news. Throughout the case studies President Kennedy attempted to influence the press, but policy decisions were simultaneously influenced by his concerns about the press reaction. Benjamin Bradlee cooperated with Kennedy on stories for *Newsweek* in exchange for access. The case study on China provided an example of Kennedy offering Luce access, but not changing policy to avoid criticism. The decision to not reveal Robert Kennedy’s secret negotiations with Ambassador Dobrynin with regard to Cuba provides another example of policy decisions being influenced by the President’s concern about press reaction. Alsop and Bartlett publicized Kennedy’s version of the Missile Crisis as a heroic effort that rejected Stevenson’s Caribbean Munich. The mutual exploitation at work behind the President’s access strategy allowed him to use “chosen Kennedys” to keep his hand concealed while negotiating and avoid defending his decision in public.

O’Heffernan found that the media limit options in foreign policy or force policy-makers to take a broader view. Lippmann encouraged Kennedy to take a broader view, but the President as “communicator-in-chief” made the decision to postpone major changes in foreign policy and not to challenge the consensus view among journalists and other elites until after the 1964 election.

A lapdog tendency among reporters allowed Kennedy to talk openly about foreign problems without fearing critical or sensational headlines the next day. Benjamin Bradlee

provided the most prominent example of this tendency. He never revealed the President's revelation that he wanted to change China policy, but preferred to wait until he was safely reelected. Norman Cousins was another example functioned by functioning as an envoy and offering political advice during negotiations with Khrushchev for the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Lippmann acted as a political consultant by offering the White House a strategy to challenge the Cold War consensus. The case studies on Cuba and Vietnam provided evidence that President Kennedy often manipulated the lapdog tendency of the press corps to trust him at his word.

The culture of journalists working in Washington paid deference to the Office of the President of the United States. Journalists respected Kennedy's private life and did not question his character. They never considered whether the President's extramarital affairs could risk national security secrets or lead to political blackmail. The consensus view among American journalists accepted information from the White House as truth that future generations would recognize as 'spin' on the facts. In the area of national security, Kennedy could appeal to journalists for assistance. This helped him move forward with the Bay of Pigs and put a positive spin on Vietnam.

Kernell called the techniques used to influence the press "the Kennedy system" for circumventing the Washington press corps to influence public opinion. Nevertheless, this study has found that President Kennedy remained reluctant to challenge the Cold War consensus for foreign policy. The case studies provide evidence that Kennedy regularly used press conferences and speeches to "go public," but downplayed ideas that challenged the policies he inherited or threatened his 1964 electoral prospects. Although he made a dramatic Peace Speech at American University that seemed to challenge the Cold War consensus, he scheduled the speech between two major addresses on Civil Rights and rejected prime time television

because he did not want to strike a high note. The Peace Speech was primarily a gesture to encourage the Test Ban negotiations. It represented a victory for Sorensen and other liberal advisers, but remained a hollow caricature of the dramatic Peace Offensive they had originally proposed as the New Frontier's hallmark. The passage of the Limited Test Ban Treaty seems to provide the only example of Kennedy challenging the Cold War consensus in televised press conferences and speeches. To gain Senate ratification Kennedy promised expanded nuclear testing programs underground.

President Kennedy needed to use the press to keep options open and establish his agenda of priorities in foreign policy. Kennedy's use of speeches before the Berlin Wall was erected provides an example of how presidents use the press to signal foreign leaders of U.S. intentions in foreign policy. But the Peace Speech is an example where Kennedy only reluctantly used the press to build domestic support for policy priorities that challenged the Cold War consensus. The case studies presented herein suggest that the press did not constrain Kennedy's options in foreign policy. Worried about electoral defeat, the President decided not to challenge the Cold War consensus in regards to China, Cuba, and Vietnam. Convinced that world leaders would not respect an American president who proposed peace without first demonstrating strength, Kennedy continuously walked a tight-rope attempting to balance arms control with the need to use tough military options to stop Communism. Lying in wait under the tight-rope were domestic political opponents along with Khrushchev and other Communist leaders who wanted the President to fall.

Kennedy used his information strategy to influence journalists, but rarely revealed his pragmatic approach toward foreign policy. He believed that revealing his hand would make the U.S. appear weak, encourage foreign aggression, and set off another Red Scare. In short, he wanted a tough Cold Warrior image, but without always paying the full price. At the Bay of

Pigs, Kennedy publicly took responsibility, but quietly blamed others for bad advice and downplayed his own role in shaping the invasion. The early memoirs by Salinger, Sidey, Sorensen, and Schlesinger ignored Operation Mongoose and downplayed Kennedy's role in securing the release of the Cuban Brigade. President Kennedy was able to walk away from the Cuban Missile Crisis and describe its entertainment value through Sidey, who wrote Kennedy's reelection biography in 1963 without mentioning Robert Kennedy's diplomatic role as behind-the-scenes envoy or that the UN was the President's final trump card to avert a crisis.

After declaring the crisis had concluded, Kennedy used favored journalists to get his version of events before the public and into the "first rough draft" of history. Stevenson was saddled with the charge that he wanted a Caribbean Munich, but the President never mentioned that Curtis LeMay had criticized the decision to opt for a blockade and talks at the UN while postponing invasion and air strike plans. LeMay had ridiculed Kennedy for dovishly postponing strong military action while following in the footsteps of those who supported negotiations and appeasing Hitler at Munich. The country never learned about the President's willingness to resort to diplomacy or his concerns regarding tactical nuclear weapons being used against Americans in an invasion of Cuba. Rather than representing the high-water mark at Gettysburg, the final outcome in Cuba only meant a resumption of the status quo.

For the past thirty-five years the heroic legend that the President created for the Missile Crisis has been part of American popular culture where it has remained unchallenged because materials contradicting the macho Kennedy image remained classified. During a program featuring the recent release of 15 hours of ExComm tapes, Ted Koppel the host of *ABC's Nightline* called the Missile Crisis "an enormous public relations victory, both in terms of the pressure that it did not put on the Turks and NATO, and also in terms of the perception that the American public and that we were eyeball to eyeball, and the other guy just blinked."²²

The experience of Laos and the Vienna Summit left President Kennedy convinced, rightly or wrongly, that he needed to prove himself to Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev. Khrushchev had handed him an ultimatum on the Berlin question, but for Kennedy the place to prove himself became Vietnam. During the Berlin Crisis, the President turned to Reston and asked him to write a column that warned Moscow not to misinterpret his silence for unwillingness to use nuclear weapons to defend American interests. Nevertheless, Kennedy went out of his way to signal Khrushchev with speeches that emphasized that the U.S. cared only about access rights to West Berlin. He was relieved when the Berlin Wall went up and did not tear it down because he had no desire to fight a war over the East German refugee problem.

Preferring peace and an arms control agreement, Kennedy had a setback when Khrushchev resumed nuclear testing. The crises filled Kennedy with determination to show the Soviet Premier that he could be tough. Holding the line against Communist expansion in Southeast Asia, China, and Cuba were deemed important by Kennedy to prove to Khrushchev and Mao Tse-tung that the U.S. would not back down. Believing that it would send the wrong signal to the Communist world, the President rejected a Peace Offensive. Instead, Kennedy opted to have the best of both Alsop and Lippmann with diplomatic overtures juxtaposed against nuclear tests, an arms build-up, and a speech by Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric that emphasized U.S. power was "second to none." Kennedy's own remarks in speeches and press conference emphasized his willingness to defend U.S. interests while pursuing peace from a position of strength. His determination to demonstrate strength may have inadvertently encouraged the events leading up to the Cuban Missile Crisis.

The Missile Crisis allowed Kennedy to demonstrate strength to Khrushchev, whereupon both leaders became more interested in the Limited Test Ban Treaty. To get an arms control treaty, Kennedy turned to journalist Norman Cousins to signal Khrushchev that he was

interested in peace. Kennedy also gave a Peace Speech to signal his intentions, but scheduled the speech during a week of Civil Rights speeches and did not go on prime time to strike a high note. Still cautious, Kennedy waited to go on television until after Khrushchev signed the Limited Test Ban Treaty. But the President never publicly revealed his willingness to take risks in alliance with Khrushchev to take out China's nuclear program.

Kennedy realized that U.S policy towards Mainland China needed to recognize reality, but educating the American public risked political criticism. "The President, regardless of any personal views he may have, probably cannot afford to be officially associated with a two China idea," Colonel Julian Ewell noted during a White House Staff meeting in October 1961. "This was followed by a long discussion of how the Berlin and Chinese Communist situations are somewhat the same, i.e., how far do you go in recognizing an existing fact?"²³ "He was still too sensitive to the "soft on Communism" charge," Sorensen later recorded, "...too conscious of the narrow margin by which he had been elected, and too concerned about Congressional hostility to try bold innovations in China policy." "Let's face it," Kennedy judged, "that's a subject for the second term."²⁴

Mao's tough rhetoric also left Kennedy with the impression that a radical China planned to expand throughout Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, China participated in the negotiations for the neutralization of Laos when Kennedy decided not to raise the stakes. Kennedy had no blueprint for settling Vietnam, but opted to gradually raise the stakes. Nonetheless, he privately told Bartlett that the U.S. did not have a chance to prevail, but did not expect to get reelected if he let Vietnam fall to Communism.²⁵

Kennedy never revealed pessimism in public regarding the possibility of prevailing in Vietnam. The information strategy for Vietnam revealed the weaknesses in the President's strategy because he was unable to keep resident reporters from filing pessimistic accounts.

Throughout the Kennedy years, the reporters in Vietnam supported the war and wanted more done. The emphasis on positive news in Vietnam along with President Kennedy's own remarks, left the American public with an overly optimistic picture of progress.

The bully pulpit was always available to President Kennedy to inform the country that stopping Communism in Vietnam meant much sacrifice: instead he conjured up "light at the end of the tunnel." The public relations war in Vietnam denied worsening reality and staked the President's credibility against reporters in-country who already supported the war. Kennedy attacked the credibility of the Saigon reporters by sending Alsop and Higgins to Vietnam, but the tactic added to the pressure not to negotiate or withdraw. Kennedy succeeded in maintaining plausible deniability in Diem's overthrow, but probably benefited from the feelings of "glee" that Halberstam and other reporters shared in Vietnam. The coup eliminated a public relations problem while greasing the slope for deeper American involvement in the intrigues of Saigon politics and the Vietnam War.

Before Diem's assassination, Kennedy recognized that the expansion of television news from fifteen to thirty minutes meant that the White House would have to focus more attention on television. The era of transition was coming to a close, but Kennedy did not live to witness what increased television coverage meant for making foreign policy. He was the last American president who could think of using television only to strike a high note and conduct foreign policy without the pressure of the camera's critical eye. The White House had time to deliberate and choose a response during the Missile Crisis before informing the public. When the Berlin Wall went up, Kennedy went sailing and avoided the press without media helicopters following. Vietnam remained a battle among print reporters throughout the Kennedy years because television news cameras remained at home.

During a second term, increased television coverage would have raised the pressure on the White House to fill the airwaves before critics could point to the “warts” in President Kennedy’s foreign policy. The daily pressure to be on the air first would have presented a dilemma because Kennedy had always exercised caution in using television because of his fears about overexposure. It would have been more difficult to influence television on a day-to-day basis and keep walking the tight-rope because his strategy to influence print journalists already had only mixed results. Criticism could not be kept out of the press, although the President tried by not challenging the Cold War consensus in public statements, or by privately offering access to journalists. Indeed, Kennedy had staked his reputation on the promise to stop Communism around the world. The belief that it was possible to defeat Communism on the cheap allowed Kennedy to remain ambivalent about possibly changing his policy.

Richard Neustadt’s formula of presidential power based upon reputation required President Kennedy to maintain a strong image as a Cold Warrior and live up to election promises to stop Communism.²⁶ Washington’s perceptions regarding Kennedy’s handling of foreign policy needed to be influenced in order for him to make the wheels of power spin and get reelected. To advisers and “chosen Kennedys,” the President confided that after he was reelected he could then change U.S. foreign policy. But in the back of his mind, the President worried about what historians might write if he did not stay “firm” enough as a Cold Warrior. Indeed, Kennedy never wanted to go down in history as a second term appeaser who failed to learn the lesson of Munich or Why England Slept.

Kernell identified part of the Kennedy legacy as the tactics of “going public” through televised press conferences and speeches to influence public opinion. The case studies for this research suggest that Kennedy actually hesitated about using television to strike a high note or educate the public about diplomatic options in foreign policy and granted access to the print

press with an eye toward foretelling history. He viewed the printed word in the press as the handmaiden of history. Driven by instincts, President Kennedy reacted to events and functioned as Editor-in-Chief trying to influence “chosen Kennedys” who would write the first draft of the New Frontier’s history. Bradlee later described himself as the “historian in the doghouse” because he realized that Kennedy’s “spin control” had the short term goal of getting reelected and long term desire for “history control.”

In the White House, President Kennedy thought about history, but remained “deliberately elusive in his approach.”²⁷ As mentioned earlier, Kennedy had installed a taping system in the White House to record meetings and phone calls for his own memoir.²⁸ Recognizing that the household staff in the White House might overhear conversations, the President prohibited them from writing memoirs. Kennedy hired Schlesinger because he was a historian, and assumed he would write a memoir. Knowing that some aides would write memoirs, the President remained guarded in conversations so that no one knew all of his thoughts and motives. The only exception was Sorensen who kept full records for a memoir. After President Eisenhower’s part-time speech writer, Emmet Hughes, wrote a critical memoir in 1963, Kennedy said, “I hope that no one around here is writing that kind of book.”²⁹ Victor Lasky’s critical 1963 biography, JFK: The Man and the Myth, also upset the President.³⁰ Nonetheless, Kennedy did not need to worry about Sorensen’s loyalty because his memoir never intended to be critical or neutral. “I am able to write here only of the peaks,” Sorensen warned in the prologue.³¹

Sorensen observed that President Kennedy measured his performance more carefully than most politicians and “cared deeply about how that performance would be measured by future historians as well as contemporary voters.” “History depends on who writes it,” Kennedy often said. Believing that future historians would rely upon newspaper and magazine accounts of the New Frontier, Kennedy complained about the “consistent inaccuracy” of reporters.³²

Kennedy believed that the proper responsibility of the press in the Cold War was to get the facts right when writing about national security. He worried about what foreign enemies would read in the press, but also worried about the “first rough draft” of history. He did not like criticism and frequently complained about small words and details buried inside an otherwise complimentary story. Kennedy wanted cheerleaders who portrayed him as a hero in the Cold War.

President Kennedy knew how to manipulate the press to put on a show, and believed that the American public preferred a hero in the White House over a negotiator. The most vivid example was Kennedy's use of press conferences, public speeches, and access to downplay diplomacy and cultivate a heroic tough image for handling the Cuban Missile Crisis. “Jack had this hero idea of history, the idealist view,” as White put it.³³

“Many newsmen and news stories had a role in shaping the Kennedy legacy,” recalled Sorensen.³⁴ From the outset of his presidency, Kennedy personally cultivated columnists, editors, and publishers by offering access to personal time and individual attention. They were treated as friends, confidantes, and political advisers. Kennedy enjoyed gossiping with reporters to learn what was going on behind-the-scenes at newspapers and magazines. He often offered suggestions for stories and developed a reputation for being a great source. Nonetheless, the President mostly offered “Profiles in Spin” designed to persuade voters and assure his place in history.

Untangling the Kennedy Legacy:

“Spinning history” paid off handsomely for the Kennedy legacy in the short term, but the ongoing eulogy of Camelot created unrealistic expectations in the American electorate for future

presidents and their handling of foreign policy. President Kennedy's information strategy exercised leadership that underscored the benefits of a tough heroic military stance while downplaying the benefits of tough pragmatic diplomacy. Kennedy understood the American desire to be entertained by a good show with a witty hero, but the tough image he cultivated also boxed off options for foreign policy. For example, it was left for President Richard Nixon to play the China card nearly a decade after the New Frontier.

Political scientists need to reassess the Kennedy legacy in terms of his willingness to postpone any challenge to the Cold War consensus in American foreign policy until after he was safely reelected. This study lays the groundwork for a reassessment of the Kennedy legacy in the scholarly literature of numerous disciplines. Ultimately, the effect of Kennedy's decision to "spin history" has even become entangled in the work of highly respected political scientists such as Richard Neustadt and James Barber.³⁵

According to Barber's typology, the personality of a president will influence their approach to power and style in office. Presidents are either active or positive in their approach to the job and active or negative in terms of whether they enjoy being the President. Barber categorized Calvin Coolidge as a passive-negative and Richard Nixon as an active-negative. Franklin Roosevelt and Kennedy were classified as active-positives.³⁶

The case studies suggest that Kennedy behaved as a passive-positive in regards to his information strategy and decision not to change U.S. foreign policy until after he was reelected. Obviously, Kennedy enjoyed being in the White House, but postponing decisions about Vietnam and China until after the 1964 election raises questions about his activist character. The role of diplomacy in resolving the Missile Crisis was downplayed while Kennedy brought the world to the brink only to return to the status quo.

Kennedy's view of the press suggests that he agreed with the point Neustadt made in 1960 that the press was important to creating expectations in Washington of his reputation which would increase or diminish his power to persuade.³⁷ Yet, even Neustadt has altered his interpretation of Kennedy.³⁸ In regard to Diem's assassination, he is harsher on Kennedy: "That test he flunked."³⁹

But Kennedy's concern for the printed word as the first rough draft of history eluded Neustadt. Perhaps Kennedy understood that Neustadt relied heavily upon the public record himself in assessing previous presidents. For all Presidents, concern for historical reputation can invade decision-making by offering the temptation to spin the facts for immediate political gains and history.

President Kennedy's quest to control the historical reputation of the New Frontier benefited from presiding over a transition era in the Washington press corps. He focused upon the printed word and used television to strike a high note and force newspapers and magazines to pay attention to his interpretation of events in foreign policy. Kennedy could interpret reality effectively in foreign policy because of the Cold War consensus in the press corps and a culture of trust. The "chosen Kennedys" helped the President, but were unable to prevent criticism in the press.

The "news management" charges against Kennedy and subsequent revelations about his behind-the-scenes record in foreign policy laid the foundation for a culture of distrust between the government and the press. The techniques Kennedy used to influence the press, however, provided lessons for future presidents in how to exercise power by manipulating the press. President Kennedy himself would feel restricted in the present era with an aggressive press corps that now employs Walter Winchell style gossip as a test of electability. Private

confidences with journalists are more difficult for modern presidents under the glaring eye of twenty-four hour news cycles and live satellite coverage of foreign policy.

President Kennedy himself sensed that times were changing shortly before his death and realized that he must adjust his tactics to compensate for the expanded thirty minute television news format. At the time of his tragic death, an election was on the horizon and the “news management” charges were lurking in the background along with blemishes in his foreign policy waiting for the klieg lights of political opponents. If Kennedy lived, he would have faced pressure to move away from a reactive strategy to develop disciplined tactics to influence television on a day to day basis. The charge of “news management” that dogged him in the print press certainly promised that he would face difficulty escaping similar criticism under the hot glare of live television.

Nonetheless, “news management” is a charge that has followed each subsequent occupant of the White House. Press criticism and the advent of live television allowed Kennedy to gain notoriety as the first television president, but his interest in the printed word has been overlooked until this study. Television remained a nifty “gadget” that President Kennedy experimented with and reserved to influence print journalists. Kennedy's emphasis on the printed word marked the end of an era and the high-water mark of print journalism's dominance. He was the last American president who could think of newspapers and magazines as the lifeblood of American politics.

The difficult task of overseeing the next step in the transition of the American presidency from Editor-in-Chief to Producer-in-Chief was bequeathed to President Johnson. The New Frontier's tactics to go around the printed press with live television left misleading advice because Kennedy's instincts focused upon influencing the printed word. President Kennedy's

foreign policy never faced an impatient swarm of hungry camera eyes and his information strategy never dealt with the “feeding frenzy” of modern political television.

Notes

- ¹ Theodore H. White, In Search of History: A Personal Adventure, (New York, 1978), pp.517-520.
- ² Arthur Schlesinger, Robert Kennedy and His Times, (New York, 1978), pp.612-614; Ronald Kessler, Sins of the Father, (New York, 1996), pp.1-3.
- ³ Camelot Documents from the Papers of Theodore H. White, (hereafter cited as Camelot Papers), John F. Kennedy Library, (hereafter cited as JFKL).
- ⁴ White, In Search of History, pp.518-519.
- ⁵ Ibid., p.520; Camelot Papers.
- ⁶ Ibid., pp.523-524; Fredrick Loewe, Camelot: A New Musical. Book and lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner. Based on The once and future king, by T. H. White. (New York, 1961); Terence H. White, The Once and Future King, (New York, 1958).
- ⁷ Camelot Papers.
- ⁸ White, In Search of History, pp.524-525.
- ⁹ Spencer Rich, "Sorensen Nomination In Trouble; Senators Cite His Affidavits on Classified Data Use," *Washington Post*, January 16, 1977; Spencer Rich, "Sorensen Defended By Carter; CIA nominee Faces Senate Opposition At hearing Today," *Washington Post*, January 17, 1977.
- ¹⁰ Camelot Papers; Nigel Hamilton, J.F.K., Reckless Youth, (New York, 1992), p.869.
- ¹¹ Fox Butterfield, "Secet Tapes May Be Made Public," *The New York Times*, February 5, 1993, p.12. In February 1996, Michael Kennedy and Robert Kennedy Jr. traveled to Cuba and presented Fidel Castro with documents from the National Security File for Cuba, William Atwood folder 9/63-11/63. *The New York Times* reported on the front page on February 19, 1996 that Michael Kennedy told Castro that the documents indicated that President Kennedy planned to change Cuba policy. "Have they all been declassified?" Castro asked. The documents were not available when this author traveled to the Kennedy Library and it was necessary to file a mandatory review request on April 27th.
- ¹² Hamilton, J.F.K., Reckless Youth, p.869.
- ¹³ Nigel Hamilton, "A Plea to the Kennedys," *The New York Times*, January 22, 1993, p.25.
- ¹⁴ Alex Beam, "An Intruder Scales the Walls of Camelot," *The Boston Globe*, January 27, 1993, p.11.
- ¹⁵ Ronald Kessler, "History Deleted," *The New York Times*, April 30, 1996, p.21.
- ¹⁶ CNN Crossfire Transcript # 1638 April 24, 1996.

¹⁷ Theodore Sorensen memorandum to Walter Lippmann, October 5, 1961, Box 105, Walter Lippmann Papers, Yale University Library.

¹⁸ Walter Lippmann memorandum to Theodore Sorensen October 6, 1961, Box 105, Walter Lippmann Papers, Yale University Library.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Sorensen, The Kennedy Legacy, p.98; Mary Ann Watson, The Expanding Vista: American Television in the Kennedy Years, (New York, 1990) pp.75-89; Bradley S. Greenberg and Edwin Parker, The Kennedy Assassination and the American Public: Social Communication in Crisis, (Stanford, California, 1965).

²¹ Lawrence Jacobs and Robert Shapiro, "Issues, Candidate Image, and Priming: The use of Private Polls in Kennedy's 1960 Presidential Campaign," *American Political Science Review*, Fall 1994, pp.527-540. The authors raise the question of whether Kennedy used polls for a priming strategy while he was in the White House.; Lawrence Jacobs and Robert Shapiro, "The Rise of Presidential Polling: The Nixon White House in Historical Perspective," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Spring 1995, pp.163-195. The authors "suggest" Kennedy was the first American president to develop a "public opinion apparatus" without systematically examining the historical record of earlier administrations. They also argue that during the Kennedy years public opinion polling was not conducted on an ad hoc basis, but while noting that there were only sixteen polls filed in the Kennedy Library. The authors concluded that the "public opinion apparatus" was centralized in the White House, but without providing memos and documentary evidence outlining in specific detail Kennedy's "routinized procedures for assembling public opinion data." Examination of the files at the Kennedy Library cited by the authors produced an eclectic mix of polls including a smattering of survey reports specifically intended for the White House and others with questions about Kennedy piggybacked in surveys for the Democratic National Committee. The documentary evidence currently available at the Kennedy Library supports the conclusion that the White House was concerned about public opinion and sometimes used polls, but adopted an "ad hoc" approach toward gathering data from public opinion studies and commissioning customized survey research.

²² ABC Nightline, Ted Koppel interview with Robert McNamara, October 24, 1996, Transcript #4024-1.

²³ Foreign Relations of the United States, Northeast Asia, 1961-1963, Vol. XXII, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996, p.151.

²⁴ Ibid., p.199.

²⁵ Thomas G. Paterson, Kennedy's Quest for Victory, p.10, see also Charles Bartlett, "Portrait of a Friend," in Kenneth W. Thompson, ed., The Kennedy Presidency, (Lanham, MD, 1985), p.16.

²⁶ Richard Neustadt, Presidential Power, The Politics of Leadership, (New York, 1960), pp.86-107.

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- ²⁷ Theodore Sorensen, Kennedy, (New York, 1965), p.5.
- ²⁸ Richard Reeves, Profile of Power, (New York, 1993), p.304.
- ²⁹ Sorensen, Kennedy, p.5.
- ³⁰ Ibid., p.25.
- ³¹ Ibid., p.7.
- ³² Ibid., pp.3-4.
- ³³ Camelot Papers
- ³⁴ Theodore Sorensen, The Kennedy Legacy: A Peaceful Revolution for the Seventies, (New York, 1969), p.70.
- ³⁵ Gary Wills, The Kennedy Imprisonment: A Meditation On Power, (New York, 1982), pp.182-187.
- ³⁶ Bruce Russett and Harvery Starr, World Politics: The Menu for Choice, (New York, 1989), pp.303-304.
- ³⁷ Neustadt, Presidential Power, The Politics of Leadership, (New York 1960), pp.86-107; Richard Neustadt Presidential Power, The Politics of Leadership, (New York, 1990)
- ³⁸ Ibid., p.308. Neustadt later noted that Kennedy saw “patent disadvantages” to negotiating in public. In the event that Robert Kennedy’s negotiations broke down, he noted that President Kennedy kept the United Nations on stand-by because he was ready to face public criticism to prevent nuclear war. According to Neustadt, in the event that the crisis spun out of control Kennedy faced only a “slightly longer-run” disadvantage.
- ³⁹ Ibid., pp.172-173. He called Kennedy's escalation of U.S. involvement “the reverse of ‘committal.’” In terms of what Kennedy wanted to accomplish Vietnam remained a low priority on the New Frontier’s agenda. “No doubt there was a frightful lapse in management,” he said.

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