

and inter-communist politics and from the Soviet misperception of Kennedy's resolve in providing a rationale for Soviet emplacement of missiles in Cuba.

Khrushchev rapidly found, however, that he had read Kennedy incorrectly. The US Government was adamant in its refusal to accept the emplacement of missiles in Cuba and was capable of preventing the completion of Soviet sites by means of a quarantine on further shipments and, arguably, by destroying them with conventional air power. Given the shortcomings of its force projection capabilities at the time, the only option left to the Soviet Union in the event of such an attack was escalation, either through a strategic nuclear attack on the United States or through the initiation of hostilities in Europe, where the Soviet Union enjoyed conventional superiority. Neither of these options was particularly promising, given US superiority in strategic nuclear weaponry. It was not surprising, therefore, that the Soviet Union backed down by removing the missiles and pledging to deploy no further nuclear systems in Cuba in return for an American pledge not to attack Cuba, something which by then the United States had no intention of doing anyway.

The Soviet Union occasionally tests the limits of this undertaking, as in 1970, when American reconnaissance capabilities detected preparations for a nuclear submarine base at Cienfuegos.³⁵ On the whole, however, they have abided by the agreement, and when challenged on potential violations, as in the case mentioned above, they have desisted. The agreement issuing from the Cuban Missile Crisis is perhaps the longest standing and most effective regional security arrangement between the two superpowers.

The debacle in Cuba contributed to Khrushchev's demise in 1964. More importantly, for our purposes, it put a rather sudden end to high risk Soviet ventures in the Caribbean Basin and — in conjunction with US belligerence on the Vietnam issue and intervention in the Dominican Republic — in the Third World generally. Khrushchev's successors returned to the caution that had characterized Soviet policy in Latin America in the 1950s. They refused to back Castro's efforts to launch guerrilla struggles elsewhere in the region, preferring to counsel local communists to eschew violence and to pursue instead a peaceful transition to socialism. They openly criticized the various Cuban-backed guerrilla movements

³⁵ H. Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little Brown, 1979), pp. 635-52.