



0. A SECRET DEAL - Story Preface

1. MISSILES IN CUBA

2. OPERATION ANADYR

3. OPERATION MONGOOSE

4. AMERICA'S FIRST WARNING

5. THE KENNEDY BROTHERS

6. KENNY O'DONNELL

7. THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

8. EX COMM and The Crisis

9. A CLEAR AND PRESENT DANGER

10. THE CRISIS WORSENS

11. EYEBALL TO EYEBALL

12. BATTLE PLANS

13. CLOSE TO THE EDGE

14. AN AMERICAN DEATH

15. A SECRET DEAL

16. THE TRUTH on ENDING the CRISIS

17. A DIFFERENT VERSION

18. KHRUSHCHEV BLINKS

19. THE AFTERMATH

Anatoly Dobrynin, the Soviet Ambassador to the United States during the Cuban Missile Crisis, meets with President Kennedy in the White House Oval Office. Dobrynin played a key role—with Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy—in resolving the stand-off between the two countries during October of 1962 (thereby averting a nuclear confrontation). Image online via U.S. National Archives.

The Kennedy Administration needed a breakthrough. Although U Thant (Secretary General of the United Nations) had called for a time-out, and Khrushchev appeared to agree, war seemed inevitable.

By "Black Saturday" (October 27), the President was concerned about political fall-out. If he did not accept Khrushchev's proposal to exchange missiles for missiles, the United States - not the Soviet Union - would look like the aggressor. How could the President get out of the missiles-in-Turkey box?

No longer a hawk, and past his personal chagrin at being misled by the Soviets, Bobby held the key.

Throughout the day, he built a consensus among Ex Comm members. Bobby and Ted Sorensen urged the President to accept Khrushchev's offer not to invade if the missiles were immediately removed. Verbally disagreeing with the President, Bobby also urged the United States should make no formal reply to the troubling terms of Khrushchev's most recent letter.

The President agreed and, using language originally drafted by Adlai Stevenson as a starting point, the letter was sent by 7:45 p.m. A notable difference between the two versions? The actual response did NOT mention Turkey.

While most of the Ex Comm members took a break, JFK met with a handful of his closest advisers. He had to respond in some way to the Kremlin's concern about missiles in Turkey.

The President and Dean Rusk instructed Bobby to privately meet with Anatoly Dobrynin, the Soviet Ambassador. Bobby would not merely advise him of the President's letter. He would raise an issue that was neither a written part of the deal nor a formal understanding.

Bobby memorialized the event in his manuscript for *Thirteen Days* (which was published after his assassination). The book, however, makes no mention of this secret discussion.

Dobrynin, during an Oral History Conference by crisis participants in January of 1989, confronted the

Americans. Why was this important point - this missile trade - never acknowledged? Ted Sorensen, the uncredited editor of Bobby's book, [explained](#) (scroll down 45%) why *Thirteen Days* is silent on the subject. Sorensen had deleted all references to it from Bobby's manuscript. The topic was, after all, still secret. How can we learn what the two men actually discussed and how they backed their respective countries away from the brink of war? We can look at Dobrynin's telegram to Moscow which he wrote immediately after the meeting at Bobby's office. And we can examine the Attorney General's memo. They are both very enlightening.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

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