

# "One Hell of a Gamble"

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**KHRUSHCHEV,  
CASTRO,  
AND  
KENNEDY,  
1958-1964**

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## The Education of a President

### A Cruel April

The failure on the shores of Cuba left Kennedy with several awkward decisions. John Kennedy hated to lose. But here it was not simply a matter of a lost love or game of football; at stake was the world's impression of the new leadership in Washington and the administration's own self-image.

"Right now the greatest problem we face is not to have the whole of our foreign policy thrown off balance by what we feel and what we do about Cuba itself," as Walt Whitman Rostow, McGeorge Bundy's deputy and one of the more imaginative members of the National Security Council staff, put it to Kennedy. Rostow suggested returning to the "Grand Strategy" of the administration: "Our central aim has been to bind up the northern half of the Free World more closely and begin to link it constructively with the south." Having seen Robert Kennedy breathing fire around the Oval Office, Rostow worried that the president might try again to remove Castro before repairing the damage to U.S. foreign policy caused by the Bay of Pigs fiasco.<sup>1</sup>

Central to the administration's original strategy was a relaxation of tensions with the Soviet Union. The term "détente" first appeared in 1955 as a way of describing a reprieve in the struggle with Moscow, after Khrushchev met with the leaders of France, Britain, and the United States in Geneva. The "spirit of Geneva" did not survive the 1956 Hungarian revolution and the Suez crisis of the same year. But public hunger for détente, especially in Europe, encouraged another period of hope in 1959 when Khrushchev became the first Soviet leader to agree to cross an ocean on official business. This second détente had also been short-lived, ending with the Gary Powers incident, in May 1960, when the Soviets shot down a U-2 spy plane and subsequently walked out of a great-power summit in Paris. In 1961 the youthful Kennedy administration had wanted to try again.

Kennedy knew that in giving the green light to the planners of the Bay of Pigs operation, he had risked increasing U.S.-Soviet tensions. Just five days before the first U.S. airplane took off from Central America to bomb targets in Cuba, Kennedy and Khrushchev had agreed to a June 3 summit in the Austrian capital, Vienna. Yet, as we have seen, the administration's fervent desire to do something about Castro, the bureaucratic forces pressing for the use of covert action, and Kennedy's and his advisers' stubborn belief that the Soviets would inevitably accept anything that happened to Castro argued for going ahead with the CIA's plan.

In the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs operation, however, the White House perceived its first objective to be restoring Europe's faith in Kennedy, not rekindling the possibilities of a summit. "Kennedy has lost his magic," commented one European leader in summing up the effect of the disaster in Cuba on overseas opinion.<sup>2</sup> In Britain, a country for which Kennedy felt a special affection, the *Financial Times* spoke of the "barely credible ineptness" of the Cuban venture, while William Reese-Mogg at the *Sunday Times* wrote that the Bay of Pigs operation was "one of the really massive blunders . . . perhaps the most obvious White House mistake since President Roosevelt's plan to pack the Supreme Court."<sup>3</sup> At Oxford a group of fourteen American Rhodes Scholars expressed their dismay at the spectacle of this relatively young and intelligent Harvard graduate not living up to his promise:

We had hoped that under [the] new Administration US foreign policy would reach new levels of honesty and goodwill. We did not expect our Ambassador to [the] UN would have to resort to deception and evasion; that our actions would have to be justified by balancing them against Soviet suppression in Budapest; and that consequently world opinion would turn against them.<sup>4</sup>

The world seemed a much better place for Nikita Khrushchev at the end of April 1961. Each of Kennedy's headaches presented him with a new opportunity. The flight of Yuri Gagarin on April 12, the first man to travel into space, extended the streak of Soviet technological firsts that began with the launch of Sputnik in 1957. Three days after Gagarin safely returned to earth, the Kremlin got another boost when the American effort to overturn Castro ended up a humiliating disaster.

Khrushchev understood that such victories were magnified in the rarefied atmosphere of a political war. The Gagarin flight and the triumph of Castro signaled the virility of the socialist bloc. Had he not predicted such achievements in his January speech to the Soviet people on the next phase of international communist work? "Our epoch," he had asserted, "is the epoch of the triumph of Marxism-Leninism."<sup>5</sup>

Even events in Southeast Asia, an area where the Soviets competed for influence with the increasingly ornery Chinese, were encouraging. In December the

Soviet air force had begun airlifting supplies to the Pathet Lao, a communist guerrilla movement in the hills of Laos. The Pathet Lao looked primarily to the North Vietnamese and the Chinese for assistance, but by establishing a regular airlift and increasing supplies as needed, the Soviets had built up some leverage for themselves. After some setbacks in the first months of 1961, the Pathet Lao had begun to make gains in an effort to take the capital, Vientiane, and the royal seat farther in the interior. When their drive began to slow once more, the Pathet Lao were asked by the Soviets to accept a cease-fire. Though the guerrillas initially refused, determined to demonstrate their independence from Moscow, they did eventually agree to one. Despite the inconsistency of his Laotian allies, Khrushchev had every reason to view events in Laos as confirming his optimistic evaluation of the future for communism in the developing world.

### The Soviets Go First

Khrushchev waited for the outcome of the battle at the Bay of Pigs to resume discussion of a summit. On April 18, when the KGB's Spanish-language experts were straining to hear every possible radio report and the situation on the battlefield seemed chaotic, the Presidium authorized a very stern letter to John F. Kennedy criticizing him for sponsoring this attack on Cuban sovereignty. Four days later, with the roundup of the Cuban exiles nearly complete and the U.S. naval task force on its way home, Khrushchev could afford to be magnanimous. He had his foreign minister, Andrei Gromyko, soften a second stern statement, this time a response to a Kennedy justification of the operation, with an oral coda. "Comrade Khrushchev," Gromyko explained to the U.S. embassy, "feels compelled to answer the president by letter, and to express his understanding of the president's announcement; but he hopes that the differences which have arisen recently would be resolved and U.S.-Soviet relations improved, if this be the wish of the U.S. president and the American government."<sup>6</sup>

Moscow waited a week and, having received no word from the White House about the planned Vienna meeting, explicitly asked about the fate of the summit. Gromyko called the U.S. ambassador, Llewellyn Thompson, into his office on May 4.<sup>7</sup> Reading from a prepared paper, Gromyko deplored the "fact that discord [has] occurred of late between our two countries in connection with events regarding Cuba." The Kremlin wanted to know whether Kennedy still intended to meet Khrushchev at Vienna. Was Kennedy's proposal for an exchange of views at the highest level still "valid"? Gromyko asked.

Khrushchev believed that a summit would work to his advantage. In 1960 the Soviets had sacrificed a summit to display their anger over the U-2 incident. This time Khrushchev clearly thought that the value of meeting Kennedy overrode the propaganda gains from blaming the loss of one more chance for peace on American misbehavior.

In looking at Khrushchev's behavior, the State Department's veteran Sovietologist Charles Bohlen emphasized for Kennedy the "duality" of this man's foreign policy. Even as Khrushchev advocated "peaceful coexistence," he armed national-liberation movements and repeatedly threatened nuclear war while bluffing about the size of the Soviet arsenal. Since 1958 Khrushchev had periodically warned the West that if it did not accept his formula for "eradicating the splinter" of West Berlin from the flank of the socialist states, he would see to it that U.S., British, and French soldiers were barred from protecting that city.<sup>8</sup>

As Khrushchev oriented himself and the Soviet leadership to the ways of the new president in Washington, there was less a duality than a conflict of priorities. Despite the successes of April 1961, there were real challenges to Khrushchev's optimistic worldview, stemming from issues central to Soviet power—the U.S.-Soviet military balance and Soviet influence in Central Europe, the crucible of the century's two world wars and possibly of the third, if the Cold War ever got hot.

Since consolidating his hold on the Kremlin, Khrushchev had worked to introduce sweeping changes in the European postwar settlement. Khrushchev had demanded that the other three victorious powers of World War II—France, Great Britain, the United States—join him in signing a peace treaty with both of the Germanies, the three Western occupation zones, which had been fused to form the Federal Republic of Germany, and the Soviet occupation zone, now called the German Democratic Republic. The falling out of the Grand Alliance had prevented this from happening in 1945, and though a peace treaty might have seemed innocuous enough in 1961, its implications were potentially explosive for the West. Hitler's capital had been Berlin, a city in the northeast quadrant of the old Reich. Each of the Allies considered the city a symbol of the defeat of fascism, and despite its being one hundred miles into the Soviet occupation zone, the city was divided in four at the end of the war, with each of the victorious powers controlling a portion. The Soviets never reconciled themselves to this Western island in their sphere of influence. In 1948 Stalin had closed all of the land routes to the city in a brazen attempt to force his former allies to leave Berlin. Washington had responded with the Berlin airlift, which rallied the morale of the Berliners living in the three Western areas and made Berlin into a symbol of freedom and Western resolve. Not wishing to repeat Stalin's mistake, Khrushchev hoped to be able to neutralize the city by means of a diplomatic offensive. In November 1958 he gave the Western powers an ultimatum. If they did not come to some agreement with both Germanies in eleven months, the USSR would unilaterally sign a treaty with East Germany, leaving the East Germans to decide on their own about the future of Western access to the divided city.

Two years later Khrushchev's pressure campaign had not succeeded in moving the Western powers any closer to the Soviet Union's position on Berlin. The only change in Central Europe since 1958 was the condition of East Ger-

many, whose economy was steadily deteriorating because of massive emigration. Some 100,000 East Germans, many of whom were professionals, were leaving the country through West Berlin each year. The situation was so bleak that in January 1961 Khrushchev was forced to promise the leadership of East Germany that he would resolve their difficult situation by the end of the year.<sup>9</sup>

Khrushchev was a gambler. The stakes were Berlin, and he was willing to bet that in a face-to-face meeting he could sway John Kennedy's opinion on Berlin. The Soviet leader believed that his demands were compatible with American interests and that it was due only to weaknesses in Eisenhower's leadership that an agreement had been elusive. In a profile written just before Kennedy's election, the Soviet Foreign Ministry had described him as "a complete pragmatist." Perhaps this pragmatist, Khrushchev hoped, could be persuaded that Berlin had to be the first step toward a *détente*. But a failure risked more grumbling among members of the leadership over Khrushchev's policy toward the American adversary. Not all of his colleagues in the Presidium agreed with his strategy of *détente* through negotiations. Comrade Khrushchev believes that the U.S. and the USSR can eliminate militarism by a stroke of the pen, murmured the newest member of the leadership, Dmitri Polyanski.<sup>10</sup> Khrushchev lobbied his colleagues almost incessantly about the need for U.S.-Soviet treaties, yet in focusing his energies on achieving movement on the matter of Berlin, he was holding such superpower agreements hostage. The risk was that, having talked his way up to the summit, he would return home with nothing.

### Kennedy's Gambit

The American who received Gromyko's question about the future of the summit sensed the seriousness of the Soviet leadership. Llewellyn "Tommy" Thompson, gave Kennedy six reasons why he should carefully consider returning to the pre-Bay of Pigs plan for a summit. Thompson, who was on his way to becoming Kennedy's most influential Moscow watcher, believed that the rough edges of Soviet foreign policy could be smoothed. The "prospect of a meeting," he argued in an "eyes only" message to Dean Rusk, would make the Soviets "more reasonable" in discussions on Laos, the nuclear test ban, and general disarmament. He also believed that the onset of better relations with Washington would influence Soviet decisions on how much to allocate to defense spending.<sup>11</sup>

In Washington, Kennedy could not decide whether to go ahead with the summit. The Bay of Pigs created conflicting imperatives in his mind. On the one hand, Kennedy did not want to seem eager to see Khrushchev. This would play into the hands of domestic opponents who had criticized his weak support for the Cuban counterrevolutionaries. Yet Kennedy was even more concerned that if he did not meet Khrushchev face-to-face soon, the Soviet leader might misinterpret the new president's actions as signs of weakness.

Kennedy had decided not to intervene militarily in Cuba and Laos. What did the Kremlin think of a U.S. president who did not intervene? Was his restraint a sign of strength or a sign of weakness to them?

Whenever faced with a close decision, Kennedy's instinct was to buy time. He instructed the State Department to have Thompson assure Gromyko that though the U.S. president had no intention of backing out of a summit, Kennedy was not sure whether everything could be put in place by early June. The White House knew that Khrushchev was about to leave the Kremlin for a two-week tour of Central Asia. Gromyko was to be promised that a decision would be ready before Khrushchev returned on May 20.<sup>12</sup>

While trying to make up his mind, Kennedy studied transcripts of Eisenhower's 1959 meetings with Khrushchev. They revealed two important things about the Soviet leader: he was clever and quick on his feet; and he was stubborn. To Kennedy these conclusions seemed less important than what the transcripts revealed about the seventy-year-old ex-president. Eisenhower had been colorless and his statements stilted. Kennedy respected the older man but thought his time to leave had come in 1956. And the transcripts from 1959 bore this out.<sup>13</sup>

Kennedy would do something different. He intended to lay out his thinking for the Soviet leader in advance of the summit. Kennedy was too impatient a man to be happy with the cumbersome nature of standard diplomatic practice. Too much would then be left to fate or to Khrushchev; and it would all take too long. What was the Soviet leader going to do or say? Kennedy's admiration for Tommy Thompson would grow into an important factor in the conduct of U.S. foreign policy by the time of the Cuban missile crisis. But in April 1961 Kennedy was not close enough to Thompson to use him as a confidential channel to the Soviets. So Kennedy turned to the man who had carried the fledgling administration's first message to Khrushchev in December 1960—his brother Robert.

Sometime in late April 1961, John Kennedy and his brother devised a private strategy to increase the prospects of success in Vienna. Robert had been heard muttering around the White House that the United States was on the verge of being seen as a paper tiger. John Kennedy, too, worried that the Bay of Pigs and the indeterminate outcome in Laos were sending the wrong signals about his resolve to use all means to defend U.S. interests overseas. But the brothers, especially the president, were equally concerned about the costs of a policy of unalloyed belligerence toward the Soviet Union. What could be gained by acting tough, if the end result was a war that few wanted and, in the nuclear age, nobody could control. There were areas where the United States and the Soviet Union could cooperate. If Kennedy could bring the Soviets to accept a significant bilateral agreement or two, on arms control or cooperation in outer space, then perhaps Khrushchev would begin to see continued good relations with Washington as a reason to curb Soviet support for Third World movements. Foreign policy intellectuals like Walt Rostow reinforced Kennedy's belief in the



value of stressing the linkage between Soviet activities in the Third World and the strategic competition between the superpowers. "If you want better relations with us, Nikita, then back off in Laos," was the idea.

At one time Kennedy hoped that an agreement on Berlin would provide the basis for better relations with the Kremlin. Kennedy had inherited this difficult puzzle from Eisenhower. The catechism of the New Frontier taught that Eisenhower's people had lacked the intellectual depth to deal creatively with foreign policy. Characteristically, Kennedy assumed that Berlin, like all of the other foreign problems, could have been solved if Dulles and company had not been so dull. Shortly after the inauguration, he asked Harry Truman's secretary of state Dean Acheson to come up with a plan.

In the midst of planning the ill-fated Bay of Pigs operation and while he became convinced of the increasingly pessimistic future for Southeast Asia, Kennedy got the bad news from Acheson. An architect of the Truman Doctrine, Acheson could not lend any reassurance to Kennedy. "There is no 'solution' for the Berlin problem short of the unification of Germany," Acheson advised.<sup>14</sup>

To have any chance of success in Vienna, John Kennedy would have to avoid the Berlin issue and focus Khrushchev's attention instead on an area where a mutually beneficial agreement was possible. The Kennedy brothers let no one into their secret as they came up with a plan to offer Khrushchev directly the chance to sign the first superpower arms control agreement ever.

Since 1958 Washington and the Kremlin had been negotiating a ban on all tests of nuclear devices. To facilitate these talks, in November of that year the Soviet Union had joined the United States and Great Britain in a moratorium on future testing. Traditionally these tests were done in the atmosphere, and there was increasing concern about the effect of the resultant fallout on plants and human beings. In recent years the United States had developed the technique of underground testing, which was much more expensive than atmospheric testing but had the advantage of seemingly not creating any biological hazards.

Dwight Eisenhower had wanted a test ban if a way could be found to verify Soviet compliance. Initially there was optimism among American scientists that even low-level underground tests could be detected. Analyses of the air could detect atmospheric explosions; but it was hard to differentiate underground tests from the approximately one hundred natural seismic events that occurred annually on the territory of the Soviet Union. In 1959 the U.S. scientific community reversed itself, saying that low-level tests, those that produced readings of less than 4.75 on the Richter scale, could not be differentiated from minor earthquakes with any reasonable level of accuracy. Eisenhower, whose greatest concern was the viability of international control of Soviet behavior, subsequently ordered the new position that each side should permit a certain number of on-site inspections to determine whether a seismic reading came from an earthquake or a nuclear test.<sup>15</sup>



Khrushchev had publicly endorsed a test ban even before Eisenhower. In 1956 he had argued that a test ban would be a step toward the eventual normalization of relations between the superpowers. But as U.S. verification requirements increased, Soviet interest began to wane. The 1959 report on the difficulties of differentiating between earthquakes and nuclear events only increased Moscow's reluctance to achieve an agreement. Whereas the U.S. side proposed an annual quota of twenty on-site inspections, each one to follow an unidentified seismic event, the Soviet were thinking in terms of a ceiling of three visits a year. The Soviets suspected that the Americans intended to exploit the seismic issue to spy on Russia. Khrushchev further complicated the negotiation in September 1959 by linking progress on the test ban issue to progress in achieving "general and complete disarmament," a seemingly utopian proposal for the elimination of all armed forces on both sides in phases, the first being the dismantling of strategic rockets. By 1960 the Soviets had added a new twist to their position. So upset were they by the role of the United Nations in the African country of the Congo, where they believed the world body was biased in its dealings with Moscow's ally, the Soviets began to demand not only a small number of inspections but a completely different inspection system. The plan on the table proposed a single administrator who would oversee inspections. Now the Soviets proposed a "troika" with one representative from the communist world, one from either the United States or Great Britain (the two Western nuclear powers), and one from the neutral world. The Soviets refused to believe that a so-called international civil servant could be impartial toward socialist countries.<sup>16</sup>

Despite this evidence of Moscow's recalcitrance, Kennedy selected the achievement of a nuclear test ban as the basis of his strategy for a successful summit. In the Eisenhower administration three different agencies contributed to disarmament policy: the State Department, the Department of Defense, and the CIA. Kennedy wanted to give disarmament a higher profile. He chose John McCloy, one of Henry Stimson's deputies in the War Department during World War II and the president of the Ford Foundation in the 1950s, to head the new Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. The day after the inauguration, McCloy circulated a series of proposals that the U.S. government might want to make in a new round of arms control negotiations. His staff proposed a test ban as the most likely area of agreement and then recommended changes in the Eisenhower administration's positions that could possibly bring this about.

The traditional powers in U.S. security policy, the State and Defense Departments, rejected many of McCloy's positions. But John Kennedy did not. In a private meeting with his brother, he decided to offer some of McCloy's concessions to the Soviets. He would use his brother to try to entice the Soviets with a new position on inspections. McCloy's people suggested a fallback position of ten instead of twenty inspections a year; and there was some talk in the State Department about possibly agreeing to twelve a year.<sup>17</sup> What if

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Kennedy could find a way to have the Soviets suggest ten as a compromise, which he could counter with an offer of fifteen, allowing the two sides to settle on twelve? In the end, this horse-trading would produce the first arms control agreement between the superpowers, which the leaders could announce at Vienna.

The Kennedy administration had reason to believe that the Soviets might go along with this bit of theater to reach an agreement. Ambassador Thompson in Moscow reported that the Kremlin was prepared to make real concessions to get a test ban.<sup>18</sup> And since the inauguration Soviet representatives in Washington seemed to be signaling a softness in their position on inspections.<sup>19</sup> A comment in early March by the chief of the TASS bureau may have encouraged John Kennedy, in particular, to think this compromise would be accepted by Khrushchev. On the matter of inspections Mikhail Sagatelyan, the chief of TASS, said "he was sure it would be possible to bargain on this matter and try to find common ground." Sagatelyan then became very specific: "Perhaps the Americans will be able to come down and the Soviets will be able to come up and they will meet in the middle somewhere around twelve or thirteen."<sup>20</sup> And from McGeorge Bundy, Kennedy may have heard that the chief KGB officer in town, Aleksandr Feklisov, was talking about the possibility of compromise on the inspection issue. A few days after Sagatelyan made his test ban comments, Feklisov told an American journalist, whose conversation was later reported to a Kennedy aide, Frederick L. Holborn, that a compromise was "possible."<sup>21</sup>

It was always assumed in Washington that on substantive matters Soviet representatives expressed only official views. Both Sagatelyan and Feklisov had stressed that they were merely expressing their own personal views, and Soviet records indeed show that these men were just fishing for intelligence to send to Moscow. Nevertheless, the Kennedys sensed a flexibility on the Soviet side. They hoped to convey to Moscow that the new administration could be just as imaginative and would be prepared to meet the Kremlin halfway. But to make this offer, to play this game within a game, President Kennedy needed a secret channel to Khrushchev. In late April 1961 Robert Kennedy went looking for one.

### Enter Georgi Bolshakov

Georgi Bolshakov joined the GRU, the intelligence service of the Red Army, after two years on active duty as first a Finnish-language interpreter and then a division-level intelligence officer. Returning to Moscow from the northwest front in 1943, he began a seven-year internship in the Soviet Union's main military intelligence schools. Even amid the bloody struggle against Hitler, the GRU maintained a grueling apprenticeship system. After passing his qualifying examinations to become an intelligence officer, Bolshakov was sent on a three-year course at the High Intelligence School of the General Staff.

Following this training, he transferred to the Military-Diplomatic Academy of the Soviet Army, where he stayed until 1950.<sup>22</sup>

Bolshakov, who had acquired impressive English-language skills in the course of his education, was sent to Washington in 1951 on his first foreign assignment. Ostensibly an editor for the TASS news agency, Bolshakov was expected to cultivate sources wherever he could find them. Although competitive agencies, the GRU and the KGB both used TASS to cover their activities. Bolshakov shared the TASS office with a number of KGB officers and even a few real Soviet reporters.

This first assignment lasted four years. In 1955 the GRU recalled Bolshakov and transferred him to the staff of the Soviet minister of defense, Marshal Georgi Zhukov. Bolshakov's personnel file lists his responsibilities in 1955 as "officer for special missions." Bolshakov may well have been Zhukov's intelligence briefer during the tense days of the Hungarian uprising and the Suez crisis of 1956. Zhukov's dismissal in 1957 disrupted Bolshakov's career. The steady rise in authority and proximity to power stopped, and Bolshakov found himself running an office in the department dealing with GRU veterans' affairs.<sup>23</sup>

By the end of the 1950s, Bolshakov's career was back on track. His return from obscurity seems to have been the result of his friendship with the first son-in-law of the Soviet Union, Rada Khrushchev's husband, Aleksei Adzhubei. A proverb captured the common view that Adzhubei had mastered the art of marrying well: "If you don't earn one hundred rubles, it's okay, as long as you marry like Adzhubei." Bolshakov had met Adzhubei while working for Zhukov. The connection brought Bolshakov a second chance at working for the GRU in the United States. It also made plausible Bolshakov's role in Washington as an intermediary between Khrushchev and the new U.S. president, John F. Kennedy.<sup>24</sup>

Bolshakov had met the U.S. journalist Frank Holeman when he was with TASS in the early 1950s. Born in 1922, Bolshakov was roughly the same age as the correspondent for the *New York Daily News*. Holeman had gotten his big break covering Congressman Richard Nixon's actions at the House Un-American Activities Committee hearings on Alger Hiss in 1948. From then on, Holeman was known as one of Washington's best Nixon watchers. After the Checkers issue broke in 1952, involving an alleged secret Nixon campaign fund, the *Daily News* assigned Holeman full-time to Nixon's vice presidential campaign. Holeman stayed with Nixon, riding with the candidate across the country aboard his train. In 1956 he was again assigned to Nixon. In the course of that grueling campaign, Holeman came to know the vice president quite well and, after the election, was one of the few journalists allowed into Nixon's private office on Capitol Hill.

It was a stand that Holeman took as chairman of the board of the National Press Club in the early 1950s that brought him to the attention of Soviet intelligence. In April 1951 the Czech government caused an international uproar by jailing the entire Associated Press bureau in Prague, including its

chief, William Nathan Oatis, on charges of espionage. It was the first time in the Cold War that a Western correspondent had been detained anywhere in the bloc. After Oatis "confessed" and was sentenced to ten years in prison, there were calls in Congress to retaliate by throwing all TASS reporters out of the United States. Had Congress pressed ahead with this action, Soviet intelligence would have lost a useful cover, but Moscow would have found other covers for its KGB and GRU representatives. Meanwhile, the National Press Club denounced the Czech action and also considered removing membership privileges from all Soviet journalists. Holeman, who was chairman of its board of governors, disagreed. He wanted the club to stay open to all so that they could "swap lies."<sup>25</sup>

The Soviets approached Holeman after this controversy to ask his assistance in helping the new Soviet press attaché, Aleksandr Zinchuk, to become a member of the National Press Club. After Holeman said he would do it, the Soviet embassy showed its appreciation by hosting a lunch for the U.S. journalist. It was at this affair that Holeman met Georgi Bolshakov. Holeman found Bolshakov engaging, and the two men began to meet infrequently—the Soviet intelligence officer in order to take the pulse of U.S. politics from a veteran observer and Holeman to learn about what lurked behind the façade of official Soviet positions.

Bolshakov liked Holeman. A few months before his death in 1989, Bolshakov wrote, "[O]ur families got to know each other, often paying host to each other."<sup>26</sup> Like the successful small businessman who knows how to mix sales and pleasure at the golf club, Bolshakov was self-confident enough to be able to socialize with his informants. This made him unusual in the Soviet colony in Washington.<sup>27</sup>

The GRU came to view Holeman as a useful informant. When Bolshakov was recalled to Moscow to serve on Marshal Zhukov's staff in 1955, Holeman was passed on to Yuri Gvozdev, ostensibly a cultural attaché, but in fact another member of the GRU station in the embassy. Gvozdev and Holeman continued the tradition of infrequent lunches. At one of them the GRU officer explained to Holeman that the Soviet government felt it needed a way to send private messages to the Eisenhower administration. Holeman approached the vice president about what the Russian had said. Nixon thought that Holeman should continue to meet with Gvozdev. "We want to keep as many lines of communication as possible." Holeman never arranged a meeting between Gvozdev and Nixon but served as a "carrier pigeon" between them.<sup>28</sup>

Nixon's defeat in 1960 did not close off the Holeman-GRU channel. Gvozdev left the United States in the fall of 1959; but the GRU replaced him with Bolshakov, who resumed the meetings with the American journalist. Holeman welcomed a chance to keep his Soviet channel open; and despite the Republican defeat, he hoped to be able to offer it to the New Frontiersmen streaming into Washington. Edwin O. Guthman, Robert Kennedy's press

secretary, was one of Holeman's friends in the new administration. Gvozdev had never met Nixon; but Holeman, possibly encouraged by Guthman or the attorney general, had a hunch that Robert Kennedy was the kind of man who might be willing to have a face-to-face meeting with a Soviet intelligence officer.

"Don't you think it would be better to meet directly with Robert Kennedy so that he receives your information at first hand?" Holeman asked Bolshakov on Saturday, April 29, 1961.<sup>29</sup> It was a novel suggestion. To date, no one at the Kremlin or even the GRU had entrusted Bolshakov with any messages for Americans. But wouldn't his bosses be pleased, Holeman added, if he could report on the musings of the president's brother? Bolshakov looked interested but cautioned that he would need the approval of the "embassy" to meet the attorney general.

What Bolshakov needed was permission from his boss, the chief of the GRU station in Washington, D.C. This officer, whose identity is still protected, could not quite believe his ears when he was told that the attorney general of the United States wanted to meet with one of his assistants. "Menshikov [the Soviet ambassador] maybe; but Bolshakov?" asked the GRU chief incredulously. He absolutely forbade Bolshakov's seeing Robert Kennedy. The next day, April 30, 1961, Bolshakov called Holeman to tell him that he could not see Robert Kennedy. These were his instructions, and he was supposed to follow them.<sup>30</sup>

Bolshakov had indeed found the prospect of meeting with Robert Kennedy extremely tempting; after all, he was considered the president's closest confidant. Bolshakov decided to take a risk on May 9 and meet Kennedy without authorization. The day was a national holiday, when all Soviet delegations around the world went on short staff to allow time to celebrate the victory over fascism in 1945. With most of his colleagues out of the office, Bolshakov could move around more easily.

Holeman called to invite him to a very late lunch. It was already 4 P.M., and Bolshakov had long since eaten. When Bolshakov asked why he was calling so late, Holeman responded that he had called around noon but that Bolshakov had been at the typesetters. Holeman suggested they meet at a restaurant in Georgetown.

Bolshakov had barely taken his seat when Holeman said that Robert Kennedy was ready to see him at 8:30 P.M. that night. Holeman planned to take Bolshakov to the entrance of the Justice Department at the corner of Tenth and Constitution. After Holeman told him the news, there was a short pause. Holeman wondered whether Bolshakov was scared. Bolshakov did not admit to any fear. With more than a touch of insincerity, he complained that he was not properly dressed to meet the attorney general—"I am not ready for this meeting." Holeman smiled, "You are always ready, Georgi."

A few hours later Holeman drove Bolshakov to the Justice Department. Government offices along Constitution Avenue were already closed. As

planned, Robert Kennedy had taken his private elevator down from his fifth-floor office. He exited past the security guard and waited outside for the Russian. Edward Guthman accompanied him. When Holeman and Bolshakov drew up, the attorney general and his aide were sitting on the granite steps.

"Mr. Attorney General, I would like to present Mr. Georgi Bolshakov." Bolshakov and Kennedy shook hands, and Guthman and Holeman left. As the newspaperman walked away, he caught a glimpse through the soft spring evening of the attorney general of the United States and the Soviet intelligence officer crossing Constitution Avenue to the Mall, the long green space linking the Washington Monument to the Capitol. Holeman's last image was of the two men engrossed in conversation as they turned toward the Museum of Natural History.<sup>31</sup>

Robert Kennedy chose his words carefully. "The American government and the president are concerned," he began, "that the Soviet leadership underestimates the capabilities of the U.S. government and those of the president himself." Recent events in Cuba, Laos, and South Vietnam, Kennedy added, were increasing the danger of Moscow's misunderstanding the administration's resolve. "[I]f this underestimation of U.S. power takes hold," warned the attorney general, "the American government will have to take corrective action, changing the course of its policies."<sup>32</sup>

Robert Kennedy wanted the Soviets to understand that his brother was prepared to depart from the foreign policy of the Eisenhower years, if shown the proper respect. Decrying a decade of "static and feeble" foreign policy, which weighed heavily around the neck of the new administration, Robert Kennedy assured Bolshakov that the president was striving for a "new progressive policy . . . consistent with the national interest." A successful summit could play a helpful role in solidifying this new course.

The background in place, Robert Kennedy made the pitch for a nuclear test ban summit. Although "the president has not lost hope," he explained, "[t]he unfortunate events in Cuba and Laos have somewhat cooled the president's passion for a general resolution of U.S.-Soviet relations." In particular, the president, who had invested "great hopes" in the negotiations in Geneva, did not want to give up on a test ban, despite reports from his secretary of state that an agreement was unlikely. The attorney general told Bolshakov that the administration's public position of twenty annual inspections notwithstanding, his brother would accept half that number, if the Soviets dressed it up as their offer. "The USA could compromise," Robert Kennedy promised, in explaining how U.S. domestic politics constrained his brother, ". . . if this were in response to a Soviet proposal." The U.S. side wanted the details of these agreements to be determined through official diplomatic channels ahead of time so that they would be ready for the two leaders to sign in Vienna. "The president," emphasized Robert Kennedy, "is not interested in a summit where leaders just exchange views." At Vienna the president wanted "agreements on major issues."

A second agreement was also possible. The attorney general mentioned Laos as another area where U.S. and Soviet interests could converge. "The U.S. delegation on Laos in Geneva," he said, "will do its utmost for the creation of a truly neutral Laos." Laos was a symbol of the Kennedy administration's new approach to the developing world. In general, Robert Kennedy explained, Washington planned to reform U.S. aid programs, even borrowing "good ideas from Soviet aid programs."

Cuba was not completely absent from Robert Kennedy's mind. It came up in the context of his description of his own personal role in redesigning U.S. policy toward the Third World. Latin America, Kennedy offered, was to be his own main area of focus. Kennedy, however, refused to discuss Fidel Castro. "Cuba is a dead issue," was all Robert Kennedy would say.

Robert Kennedy left no doubt that the White House was looking for a back channel to the Kremlin. Asking Bolshakov to consult with his "friends" and to report back on their reaction, the attorney general promised to clarify the president's point of view. Kennedy suggested another meeting, when the initial reactions of both sides were clear, "in an unofficial setting, face-to-face." Afterward Bolshakov left to make his report. The Kremlin was about to get the best look inside the thinking of the Kennedy administration that any spy service could hope for.

### Mutual Suspicions

The White House was understandably wary of Georgi Bolshakov at this stage. Despite Frank Holeman's success with Gvozdev in 1959, the American journalist had not provided conclusive evidence that this new Russian had similar high-level contacts. Robert Kennedy had told Bolshakov that the United States was sending positive feelers about the substance of a summit to the Kremlin through Mahomedali Chagla, the Indian ambassador in the United States.

Moscow was equally suspicious of Robert Kennedy in the spring of 1961. The KGB had a sizable file on the president's brother that stretched back to the trip he had made to the Soviet Union in 1955. That visit had produced a wealth of negative stories about the younger Kennedy, with the effect that, in the halls of the Kremlin, he was considered a greater anti-Soviet than his brother.

Supreme Court Associate Justice William O. Douglas had invited the young Kennedy to accompany him to the USSR as a favor to his old friend Joseph Kennedy. Both Douglas and Kennedy had once served as the chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission. Robert Kennedy was working for Senator Joseph McCarthy at the time and like his boss had a visceral dislike for the Soviets and their system. "He went into the Soviet Union totally prejudiced; Communism was bad; everything was bad," Douglas's wife, Mercedes, recalled.<sup>33</sup> Joseph McCarthy for his own reasons opposed Robert's



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going; but Kennedy’s father was “very anxious” that he travel to Russia with Douglas. Mercedes, who thought that anybody who worked for McCarthy was “pretty terrible,” also opposed letting Robert come along. But her husband would have none of it: “Well, anything that Joe [Joseph P. Kennedy] wants I must do.”

The KGB shared Mercedes Douglas’s opinion of the Robert Kennedy who visited Russia in 1955. Six years later, as the Soviet government tried to put the new Kennedy team into perspective, the younger Kennedy brother was branded as a potential troublemaker because of the 1955 trip. It was, the KGB noted, strong evidence of his “negative opinion of the Soviet Union.”<sup>34</sup>

“Kennedy was rude and unduly familiar with the Soviet people that he met,” the KGB recorded for the Kremlin. Robert Kennedy “mocked all Soviets,” constantly expressed anti-Soviet views, and, the KGB noted sternly and without any sense of irony, had the audacity to tell his Russian interpreter that in the USSR there was “no freedom of speech, that the system did not permit any criticism of the Soviet government, and that Soviet Jews were persecuted.” It was the conclusion of the KGB that Robert Kennedy had gone out of his way “to expose only the negative facts in the USSR.”<sup>35</sup> “In the course of his visit, he photographed only the very bad things: (crumbling, clay factories, children who were poorly dressed, drunk Soviet officers, old buildings, lines at the market, fights, and the like).”<sup>36</sup>

In short, the KGB thought Robert Kennedy a provocateur. “In meetings with Soviet representatives,” it was reported, “Kennedy posed tendentious questions and attempted to discover secret information.” In Soviet Central Asia, Kennedy startled the chief of the Kazakh militia by telling him that he “was interested in the techniques of tapping telephone conversations, secret censorship of mail, Soviet intelligence activities abroad, the system of repression, including the means of punishing captured foreign spies.” As if this had not been enough for the Kazakh militiaman, and Kennedy’s KGB escorts, the American asked how many people were actually in Soviet jails and, of those, how many were in forced labor camps.<sup>37</sup>

Theodore Sorensen met both John and Robert Kennedy in 1953 and later commented that Robert was then “militant, aggressive, intolerant, opinionated, somewhat shallow in his convictions . . . more like his father than his brother.”<sup>38</sup> The list of adjectives used by the KGB in its portrait of Kennedy was roughly the same. Furthermore, Soviet intelligence noted for Khrushchev a flaw in his character. “He has a weakness for women,” the service reported to the Kremlin. In 1955 the young married man had asked his Intourist guide to send a “woman of loose morals” to his hotel room.<sup>39</sup> Years later, Robert Kennedy acknowledged that he had not been at his best in the USSR. After hearing the “catalogue of horrors” that his friend Theodore Sorensen had used to describe him in his early thirties, Robert wrote, “Teddy old pal—Perhaps we could keep down the number of adjectives and adverbs describing me in 1955 and use a few more in 1967. O.K.—Bob.”<sup>40</sup>

### Moscow Responds

Bolshakov reported the substance of his conversation to his chief at the embassy, who passed it on to Moscow. Bolshakov's report confused the Soviet government, which had assumed that summit preparations would be handled by Thompson and Gromyko. Kennedy had signaled that he was interested in a summit but wanted to reserve judgment on whether to return to the original schedule. His excuse was that events in Laos or at the negotiating table in Geneva might make it politically impossible for him to meet with Khrushchev. The report from the GRU, despite coming from the despised Robert Kennedy, at the very least confirmed that John Kennedy was serious about resuming preparations for a meeting.

Khrushchev jumped on these signals from Washington that Kennedy wanted to revive the June summit. In a May 12 letter to Kennedy, he wrote that "the international atmosphere has recently become somewhat heated in connection with the well-known events relating to Cuba" and that he thought it a good time for a general exchange of views.<sup>41</sup>

Khrushchev's letter, agreeing to a meeting in Vienna, arrived in Washington via Ambassador Menshikov on May 16. The news was good, but Kennedy had hoped for more. Either Bolshakov was not what Holeman and the attorney general thought he was, or Khrushchev did not consider the American president's approach interesting enough to explore before the summit. In either case, the president felt he had to continue to try to open a dialogue before the summit if there was to be any chance of a major breakthrough. Barely concealing his disappointment at Khrushchev's letter, Kennedy told Menshikov, who delivered it, "[I]f we cannot accomplish anything concrete on a nuclear test ban, it would be doubtful that we could make progress on disarmament."<sup>42</sup> Kennedy did not repeat to the Soviet ambassador the concession that he had already suggested to the Soviets regarding the number of on-site inspections; he left that to Robert's contact. Despite the disappointing letter from Khrushchev and the lack of word from Bolshakov, the White House decided to confirm, in background material to the U.S. media, that a summit was on and to work through the Soviet Foreign Ministry to arrange the details.<sup>43</sup>

Not for the first time, Khrushchev revealed himself as being unlike any politician or statesman John Kennedy had ever met or studied. The Kremlin did not doubt that Bolshakov had met with Robert Kennedy and that the "first brother" had accurately conveyed the president's ideas. However, Kennedy assumed Khrushchev would respond to this serious initiative with one of his own. Evidently this assumption sprang from a view of U.S.-Soviet relations as being, in part, the victim of misunderstandings and bad timing. As a senator, John Kennedy had criticized Eisenhower for approving a U-2 flight just before the scheduled Paris summit. With the Bay of Pigs behind him, John Kennedy did not want anything else to come in the way of a constructive improvement

in superpower relations. His minor concessions were designed with that in mind.

But Khrushchev was not interested in altering his established positions to arrive at a common ground with the new U.S. president. After receiving the GRU's report on the first Kennedy-Bolshakov meeting, Khrushchev ordered the Defense Ministry to cooperate with the Foreign Ministry on a suitable response. Lacking specific guidelines from above—in other words, without any protective insurance, lest their suggestions be considered “adventurist”—the ministries produced boilerplate responses.

In the Soviet system all important decisions had to be confirmed by a resolution of the Presidium. The draft of the statement for Bolshakov to use, which was completed by the ministries on May 16, went to the Presidium on May 18. Khrushchev was traveling in Central Asia, but a courier system, and of course the telephone, kept the rest of the Presidium in constant touch with him. In Moscow, Mikhail Suslov, a member of the Presidium, and Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, not a member, were primarily responsible for preparing for the upcoming summit.<sup>44</sup>

The Kremlin's response reveals Khrushchev's thinking at the start of a new American administration. Bolshakov's instructions are preserved in both the archives of the GRU and the Presidential Archive, and the authors have been able to compare the two versions. This anodyne rendition of Soviet positions in 1961 should lay to rest the long-held suspicion that Khrushchev used Bolshakov to mislead Kennedy into rushing into a summit in Vienna. The Kremlin's response left little room for optimism.

The Soviet leadership declined to send a message from Khrushchev. Instead, Bolshakov was instructed to tell Robert Kennedy that “since his previous meeting with R. Kennedy, he, Bolshakov, has had a chance to consider and consult with friends the questions raised by Kennedy and would now like to give him his [i.e., Bolshakov's] opinion, with the same candidness, on some of the issues broached by him.”<sup>45</sup> This was the gray formulation that Khrushchev wanted.

“Bolshakov's opinions” were of course those of the Soviet Foreign and Defense Ministries. The first point the GRU officer made was that the Soviets attached great importance to the improvement of U.S.-Soviet relations. Despite the ideological differences between these countries, there was no question that in matters of government-to-government relations there were really no insuperable barriers, because the United States and the USSR could conduct their relations in a good-hearted fashion and could decide to resolve existing disagreements through negotiation.

Had the conversation ended there, Robert Kennedy might have wondered whether Moscow was really on the line. But Bolshakov was allowed to say more. He was to add that it was unclear in the USSR what had made Robert Kennedy think that the Soviets underestimated either the new administration or his brother. Moscow, which evidently interpreted “underestimate” to mean

"have a negative opinion of," instructed Bolshakov to say, "Kennedy's inauguration was greeted with the hope that our relations could return to what they had been in the time of Franklin Roosevelt." Bolshakov was also to remind Kennedy that Khrushchev had said as much on a number of occasions. More important, Bolshakov was to make explicit the connection between these expectations and the Soviet decision to accept President Kennedy's offer for a summit.

From this point on, Bolshakov gave Robert Kennedy a taste of what Khrushchev would soon tell his brother in person:

It is impossible to let go by Robert Kennedy's remark that the events in Cuba and in Laos "somewhat diminished the president's drive to normalize relations with the Soviet Union." Of course, it is impossible to deny that the international situation has recently heated up owing to the well-known events in Cuba, and also partly those in Laos, but the Soviet Union bears no responsibility at all for this.<sup>46</sup>

But what of the White House's sweeteners for a successful conference? The Soviet leadership ignored them. Moreover, it twisted Kennedy's request that the Kremlin make the first move and offer concessions into a U.S. demand for unilateral concessions. "The Soviet Union did not seek any kind of advantage, indeed seeks nothing at all other than peaceful coexistence. Such cooperation, of course, does not mean one-sided concessions from the side of the Soviet Union." Khrushchev instructed Bolshakov to aver, "If anyone in the USA has the illusion that the U.S.-Soviet relationship could be built on the damaged interests of the USSR or seeks from the Soviet Union one-sided concessions, then such a policy, of course, will quickly meet failure."

The Soviets welcomed U.S. interest in resolving the three sticking points in the negotiations over a test ban: the number of inspections, the composition of the inspection teams, and the direction over these groups. But Moscow found nothing in what the new president was saying to suggest that an agreement was any closer at hand. Instead, Bolshakov was instructed to remind Robert Kennedy of other obstacles to a test ban agreement. Moscow wanted the executive council that would oversee the treaty itself to have identical representation from each of the three worlds—the West, the Soviet bloc, and the neutral or Third World. The Soviets also wanted a moratorium on underground testing below a certain detectable megatonnage. The Soviet objective, as Bolshakov explained to Kennedy, was to ban all nuclear tests forever.

The only real source of hope was what Bolshakov had to say about Laos. Considering this a problem that Kennedy had inherited from his predecessor, the Soviets welcomed his call for a neutral Laos and suggested that the two leaderships build on "the coincidence of the viewpoints of our governments." The Soviets indicated that an agreement in principle at Vienna to remove Laos from the superpower contest would accelerate the talks in Geneva on

Laos, where the Soviets contended Secretary of State Rusk had been playing the role of spoiler. They added that the successful solution of the Laotian tangle would signal the start of an improvement in the superpower relationship.

But the Kennedys were not to be allowed to think the Soviets were going to give them any other gifts. Following instructions, Bolshakov was to criticize Kennedy's policy toward Berlin. Here, the United States had to understand, there were "serious disagreements" that could undermine all the good that might be achieved in Laos. "We only want, with the cooperation of the United States," said Bolshakov, "to formalize . . . the existing state of affairs." The Soviets hoped that "the ruling circles of the Western powers would show political courage and accept the Soviet position on the German question, accept the necessity of signing a peace treaty with Germany and of deciding the matter of West Berlin." Bolshakov was told to end this with a threat: "Otherwise there will be nothing left for the USSR to do except together with other affected states sign a peace treaty with the GDR, with all the attendant consequences for West Berlin."

Finally, the Soviets raised the issue of Castro and Cuba. Robert Kennedy had expressly told Bolshakov that this was a matter the president did not wish to bring up in Vienna. Nevertheless, the Soviet government wanted to assure itself that the Bay of Pigs would not be repeated. "We don't understand what Robert Kennedy had in mind when he said that Cuba was a dead issue. If by that he meant that the United States will henceforth desist from aggressive actions and from interfering in the internal affairs of Cuba, then, without question, the Soviet Union welcomes this decision." As far as the Kremlin was concerned, only the United States could decide whether there would be peace in the Caribbean.

The Soviets noted that the Cuban government wished to normalize relations with Washington. In light of Robert Kennedy's comments, perhaps there would be a meeting of the minds between the Cubans and the United States. The Soviet regime told Bolshakov,

Emphasize that the normalization of U.S. relations with the government of Fidel Castro, a sober estimate of the existing situation in Cuba, without a doubt, would only raise the worldwide prestige of the USA and the Kennedy administration, promote the recovery of the international situation, and certainly would create additional opportunities for improving U.S.-Soviet relations.<sup>47</sup>

Bolshakov was not given any leeway. In the Soviet system Moscow sought minute control over not just the themes raised by its representatives but even the exact manner in which they were formulated. Only the leadership could devise variations on positions, let alone establish them. "If R. Kennedy asks other questions, which have not been foreseen in these instructions," the

Kremlin dictated on May 18, "then Comrade Bolshakov, instead of giving a substantive answer, must reserve the right to consider these matters and discuss them with R. Kennedy later."

This disappointing news from Bolshakov reached the president via Robert on May 19 or 20. Despite the blandness and concealed contempt of the Soviet response, the president felt he had to try harder to seek some agreements in Vienna. He decided to ignore this first failure and look instead for additional ways to convince Khrushchev of the possibility of finding common ground. The president pressed his own team to rework his test ban proposal so that common ground might be found. At a meeting of the National Security Council on May 19, he sought a position that would be consistent with U.S. national interests as well as one that would be acceptable to the Soviets. Earlier in the month he had convened his top advisers on the test ban to discuss how to respond to the Soviet demand for a triumvirate. John McCloy, one of the strongest proponents of a test ban treaty in the administration, argued that if the United States wanted an agreement, it would probably have to reconsider its opposition to the troika concept. McCloy cited Khrushchev's talk with the American columnist Walter Lippmann, where the Soviet leader explained how events in the Congo had soured him on the secretary-general of the United Nations, Dag Hammarskjöld. McCloy was sympathetic to these Soviet concerns. He felt that the United States would have objected to the UN in 1945 if the Senate had known how powerful the secretary-general would become.<sup>48</sup>

While reconsidering his negotiating position on the test ban, Kennedy considered another idea for a possible area of agreement with the Soviets. He had asked his science adviser, Jerome Wiesner, to draft a report listing ways in which the Americans and the Soviets could cooperate in space research and exploration. Wiesner brought together a team from the State Department, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and the Department of Defense to discuss how to keep the Cold War out of outer space. Despite the reluctance of the State Department's representative, the group concluded on May 12 that Washington might want to suggest cooperating in or at least coordinating its manned lunar efforts with the Soviets. Initially, Kennedy deemed this an excellent idea. Perhaps this was something else he could offer to Khrushchev.<sup>49</sup>

John Kennedy, by all accounts, just had not thought much about space exploration until the Soviets surprised the world on April 12 by putting the first man into space, Yuri Gagarin. Sometime before the 1960 election, MIT's Charles "Doc" Draper took him and Robert out to dinner at Boston's Locke-Ober. Draper, a pioneer in designing inertial guidance systems for missiles, wanted to excite the brothers' interest in the space program. He later recalled that the Kennedys "could not be convinced that all rockets were not a waste of money, and space navigation even worse."<sup>50</sup> But the Kremlin's success in April 1961 forced Kennedy to pay attention to the role of space exploration in the

Cold War. A month later Alan B. Shepard, an American, became the second man rocketed into space. But despite attempts to equate Shepard's achievement with Yuri Gagarin's, the American space program lagged more than a month behind the Soviet program. Gagarin had orbited the earth, spending two hours in space. Shepard's mission had taken only seventeen minutes and consisted of surviving a launch and then immediately coming back to earth. It would take nine more months for another American, John Glenn, to match Gagarin's achievement.

In early May 1961 a joint committee of representatives from the Defense Department and NASA submitted a report recommending that Kennedy announce that the United States would put a man on the moon by 1967. Flying in the face of most of the scientific and military advice that Kennedy and Eisenhower had received about the feasibility and trade-offs of a program of manned lunar exploration, the report suggested manned flight would be seen as a major coup in the Cold War.

Kennedy was not impressed. Worried about the cost, estimated at more than eight billion dollars, he reserved his options. Moreover, he was concerned about the effect such a challenge to the Soviets might have on his upcoming summit with Khrushchev. "It is no secret that Kennedy would have preferred to cooperate with the Soviets on space exploration," recalls Theodore Sorensen.<sup>51</sup> As of May 17, the day the White House decided to go ahead with the Vienna summit, Kennedy had not decided whether to announce the moon mission. Instead, he instructed Secretary of State Rusk and his brother to suggest joint exploration of space to Khrushchev. Kennedy understood that the psychological realm was the principal battleground of the Cold War. He hesitated using atmospheric nuclear tests to bring the Soviets to heel. Similarly, he did not want to undermine any possibility of success by challenging them to a potentially impractical race to put a man on the moon.

Rusk raised the issue of a joint space program with the Soviet foreign minister on May 20. Gromyko, who was in the United States on a visit to the UN General Assembly, displayed a lack of interest in the secretary of state's proposal. Gromyko warned Rusk not to try to use U.S. priorities to dictate the pace of negotiations: "The Soviet government does not intend to take any step that is directed against its security or would inflict damage on its vital interests."<sup>52</sup>

Again a Kennedy initiative to improve relations left the Kremlin cold. As far as Moscow was concerned, cooperation in space belonged in the category of harmful steps. "The Soviet position," Gromyko explained, "depended above all . . . [on] the position that the United States, together with all Western powers, takes on disarmament." By disarmament, Gromyko said, he meant the "elimination of all military machines, including nuclear, rocket weapons, and also all U.S. military bases on the Soviet border." Rusk explained that Americans considered general and complete disarmament a noble goal but impossible to achieve without a better international environment. Initiatives like the



president's—suggesting cooperation in outer space—were a way of laying the foundations for greater trust, the first step in achieving better relations. Gromyko, who was known to Western observers as Mr. Nyet, refused to budge. "Without the implementation of these measures, all cooperation in the field of rocket research and any exchange of information about rocket technology and the state of such things in the USSR is inconceivable."<sup>53</sup>

These initial setbacks notwithstanding, the Kennedys decided to send another high-level message with the space proposal and some new thoughts on the test ban to Khrushchev. Time was running short. It was Sunday, and President Kennedy was scheduled to leave Washington at the end of the week. Another meeting between Robert Kennedy and Georgi Bolshakov was therefore arranged for May 21.

"Improving U.S.-Soviet relations is job no. 1 for the U.S. government," began Robert Kennedy at his meeting with Bolshakov. The president wanted his brother to impress on the Soviet representative how hard he was working to create the bases for agreements in Vienna. Robert was to offer the president's additional thoughts on a nuclear test ban and a possible agreement on space cooperation.<sup>54</sup> "My brother is prepared to accept the troika proposal," Kennedy revealed to Bolshakov, "but no veto." Accepting the concept of a troika was merely a symbolic concession. John Kennedy did not much care about the composition of the administrative council for the treaty, so long as the West and the Soviet bloc had the same number of votes and the West was assured of a certain number of on-site inspections per year in order to follow up on suspicious seismic information. A troika would be possible, but unanimity must not be required to trigger an inspection. Perhaps Kennedy thought Khrushchev would accept the form of a troika without the substance of a troika, if it meant getting a deal.

Besides revealing the president's wish that a space agreement be concluded in Vienna, Robert stressed that his brother understood some of Khrushchev's frustration about the situation in Central Europe. He knew why Khrushchev worried about "German revanchism." But Kennedy's policy on Berlin was unchanged. Robert Kennedy assured Bolshakov that his brother was upbeat about the summit. He was informed on everything the Soviet leadership had transmitted through the GRU representative. Kennedy was pleased that Khrushchev wanted to press ahead with neutralizing Laos on the Cold War chessboard. The president's only request was that Cuba not be brought up at Vienna. He just did not want to talk about it.

As of May 23 President Kennedy was downbeat. In fact, he was beginning to worry about this summit. None of the recommendations he had made to the Soviets seemed to be having any effect. It was not only that the summit was less than two weeks away that raised concern, but Kennedy had a major address to give before a joint session of Congress in a few days and he did not know what tone to employ. Should he be conciliatory to the Soviets in advance of Vienna? Originally conceived in mid-April as a boost to flagging Eu-

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ropean spirits after the Bay of Pigs disaster, the first draft of the speech focused on the Kennedy administration's efforts to strengthen NATO. By mid-May that speech had been supplanted by one stressing the themes of self-sacrifice, challenge, and national survival. Kennedy was thinking of announcing a domestic and foreign crusade to shore up the forces of freedom and democracy. But shouldn't he give the Kremlin a second chance, Kennedy wondered, before giving this speech?

### **Khrushchev Has His Own Ideas**

Khrushchev returned to Moscow on May 20 and decided that he had to send his own personal message to the American president. He was not interested in finding a new channel. Tommy Thompson, whom he had known now for five years, was good enough. Khrushchev's office invited the U.S. ambassador and his wife to sit in the chairman's box at the performance of an American ice skating revue on May 23. Khrushchev was known not to like ice shows. He wanted to talk to Thompson.

Khrushchev and Thompson discussed a wide range of matters, but the Soviet leader intended above all to warn the U.S. government that he did not like Kennedy's agenda for the meeting. Berlin, which Khrushchev termed a "running sore," and not the test ban was what weighed most heavily on his mind. Disarmament, he said, was "impossible as long as the Berlin problem existed." Khrushchev expressed frustration at not being able to convince the West of his loss of patience over the anomalous situation in the heart of Europe. It made no sense, he argued, for there to be an Allied occupation zone in the center of East Germany. West Berlin was an unnecessary reminder of a war that had ended sixteen years before. Moreover, in the Cold War, it was a center of subversion and Allied military power. Once again, as he had been doing periodically since November 1958, Khrushchev warned that if the West refused to grapple with this problem diplomatically, the Soviet Union would sign a separate peace treaty with East Germany and authorize the East Germans to cut Allied access to West Berlin. When Thompson reminded Khrushchev that the West would meet such an eventuality with force, Khrushchev replied enigmatically, "They would not touch our troops in Berlin, but they might have to tighten their belts."

The tone of Khrushchev's message surprised Kennedy. "Tighten their belts"? John Kennedy, who received this cable on the morning of May 24, had no idea what Khrushchev meant. He called his brother at the Department of Justice to ask him to arrange one more meeting with Bolshakov to find out what was going on. "The president has just read the first half of our ambassador's dispatch, and he considers the conversation very harsh," explained Robert Kennedy to Bolshakov in his office a few hours later. "He is especially concerned by the statement on West Berlin, where Khrushchev suggested to the Americans to tighten their belts."<sup>55</sup>

This was the second time in two days that the attorney general had spoken to Bolshakov. He had called the TASS bureau on May 23 to press Bolshakov to do all he could to hurry the Soviet foreign policy process along, so that the White House would have pre-summit responses to the president on cooperating in space and on the troika suggestion. Robert Kennedy told Bolshakov that his brother was losing his patience. He said that the president felt he had to express his disappointment over recent Soviet behavior at a special joint session of Congress the following day. Kennedy said that the Soviets had to understand that his brother would not back down on issues that affected vital U.S. interests. Nevertheless, he cautioned Bolshakov that the language his brother felt he had to use did not indicate any lessening of commitment to a constructive meeting with Khrushchev.

In light of Khrushchev's actions and the disappointing results of working through Bolshakov, John Kennedy was more convinced than ever that the Soviet Union underestimated his willingness to defend U.S. international responsibilities. Kennedy's May 25 speech was quickly redrafted, the language toughened to signal his resolve to Khrushchev, and the entire package given the title "Special Message on Urgent National Needs." Following Khrushchev's rebuff of the offer of cooperation in space on May 20, Kennedy had decided to announce the goal of placing a man on the moon by the end of the decade.

With the summit only days away, President Kennedy's nightmare seemed to be on the verge of realization. He had wanted a successful summit, not another foreign policy failure. Kennedy had been in office only four months and had nothing but the Bay of Pigs and Laos to show for himself in foreign policy. Was Khrushchev planning to use Vienna to lecture Kennedy on Berlin, a problem Kennedy knew could not be solved in a few days, if at all?

#### Presidium Meeting of May 26

On the eve of Khrushchev's departure for Vienna, the Presidium met to discuss summit strategy. In preparation for this discussion, Andrei Gromyko and the Foreign Ministry had prepared a memorandum on what issues the Soviet side should raise, what points Kennedy would most like to discuss, and possible Soviet responses to them.

The Foreign Ministry concluded that the Soviet Union would want to discuss five different matters with Kennedy: (a) general and complete disarmament; (b) the improvement of the climate of international relations; (c) a German peace treaty, including the question of West Berlin; (d) Laos; and (e) a normalization of U.S.-Soviet relations.<sup>56</sup>

The Foreign Ministry suggested some possible agreements that might arise from the meeting. Khrushchev, it argued, should seek "an agreement of principles that would provide a basis for further negotiations on disarmament." Beyond that, it suggested offering a list of ways the superpowers could reduce international tensions. From an American perspective, it was all old hat.<sup>57</sup>

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1. To end war propaganda.
2. A pledge not to be the first to use nuclear weapons in a conflict.
3. The creation of nuclear free zones in various regions of the world.
4. Measures against nuclear proliferation.
5. A NATO-Warsaw Pact nonaggression pact.
6. Full removal of all foreign troops from the Germanys and a moratorium on their reintroduction.
7. Reductions in military forces in Europe, leading to the complete withdrawal of them from areas outside their national territory.
8. Reductions in military budgets.<sup>58</sup>

Given that there was nothing novel in these suggestions, the Soviets anticipated receiving a different wish list from Kennedy. "The Americans could propose steps to create a climate of trust, for example—the cessation of the production of nuclear materials for military purposes, the establishment of controls on ballistic and intercontinental rockets, and measures to prevent a first strike." The Soviets felt the Americans were more interested in controlling the arms race than in ending it altogether.

Bolshakov's meetings with Robert Kennedy had demonstrated the White House's eagerness to achieve a test ban accord. The Soviet Foreign Ministry mentioned U.S. concerns without suggesting any particular response. This silence betrayed the fact that Moscow was not really interested in any compromises on this issue. Similarly, Gromyko's team raised the ill-fated U.S. offer to cooperate in space without proposing any new Soviet response. The Foreign Ministry concluded its proposed instructions with a list of four "other questions" that might be raised but that were not considered priority items. Curiously in this group of four, Cuba was only the third item. Gromyko, at least, saw no advantage in Khrushchev's discussing Castro with Kennedy.<sup>59</sup>

Khrushchev approved the Foreign Ministry's proposals as written. He did not want any new Soviet initiatives or compromises. This was the time to be tough. He was optimistic that if he bullied Kennedy he could achieve movement along the lines he had been pursuing since the late 1950s. He did not greatly respect the young U.S. president. What impressed him was how needy the president seemed to be. Kennedy's efforts to signal the possibility of agreements had backfired—or at least had not reduced Soviet concerns.

Whereas the Presidium accepted the list of instructions, not all of Khrushchev's colleagues agreed with him on how to treat the American president. According to Anatoly Dobrynin, who would later be his country's ambassador to the United States and was then chief of the American department of the Central Committee, Anastas Mikoyan spoke up at the May 26 meeting in favor of a more diplomatic approach: perhaps, he proposed, Kennedy should be dealt with carefully, his offers treated seriously.

Khrushchev would have none of this questioning of his sense of timing. He exploded, displaying that harsh temper and foul language that interpreters

worked hard to soften in meetings with foreigners. He rejected the "cautious approach." Kennedy was vulnerable to pressure. If the Soviet Union pushed hard enough, this man would yield—on all of the important issues, like the future of Berlin.<sup>60</sup> Khrushchev's confidence in his strategy did not stem from any special intelligence about Kennedy. However, in the course of preparing to meet him, he did receive information that largely confirmed that the young president was eager to accommodate Soviet concerns within the limits set by basic U.S. interests.

Before the Presidium meeting, Khrushchev received the account of a private meeting between Ambassador Menshikov in Washington and the U.S. permanent representative to the United Nations, Adlai Stevenson. Stevenson had turned the leadership of the Democratic Party over to Kennedy in 1960 but remained highly influential among its liberal wing. On May 18, 1961, Stevenson had invited Menshikov to breakfast. He said that this summit should have happened sooner. "Just between us," Stevenson told the Soviet, "Kennedy has a lot of questionable and even dangerous advisers, to whom he sometimes gives in." Stevenson presented Kennedy as an impressionable man whose views about the Soviets would be changed for the better once he met Khrushchev. Stevenson did not expect any decisions on the great issues to emerge from the summit, but he thought an exchange of views between the leaders of the superpowers useful. Stevenson did say that if there was one area where something substantive might happen, it was in the area of a test ban treaty.<sup>61</sup>

Khrushchev was not surprised to learn that Kennedy had dangerous advisers. He knew that the inheritors of the views of John Foster Dulles lurked throughout Washington. It did not matter which political party was in power. There were influential Americans who believed in what the Soviets called the "position of power" or "peace through strength" approach, which Khrushchev identified with using military threats to deny Soviet rights and even to attempt to roll back Soviet postwar gains. Khrushchev blamed Harry Truman, a Democrat, for magnifying Joseph Stalin's paranoia and ensuring that the Allied partnership collapsed following World War II.

The raw reports that filtered through to Khrushchev reinforced the impression that the Vienna summit presented a great opportunity to both sides. An especially important source of information about the president's objectives came from a group of seventeen distinguished Americans who by coincidence were meeting with their Soviet counterparts in the Crimea in the week before the summit. Under the leadership of Norman Cousins, the editor of the *Saturday Review*, and Philip E. Mosely, of the Council on Foreign Relations, the group included the singer Marian Anderson and Erwin Griswold, of the Harvard Law School.

In a conversation with a Soviet representative on May 24, Norman Cousins warned that Kennedy's advisers were sharply split between those who hoped for an accommodation with Russia and those who thought this impossible.

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For that reason, Cousins advised, Vienna could mark a defining moment for the Kennedy presidency. "The course of the negotiations with Khrushchev will determine where Kennedy leans—in the direction of the Pentagon or in the direction of advisers of the type of [Chester] Bowles."

Cousins was explicit about the threat posed by the right wing of the Kennedy team. He had an explanation, congenial to Khrushchev, for the three most important events to affect the superpower relationship in the last year. "[T]he U-2 incident, the defeats in Cuba and Laos have brought the public opinion in the United States to the view that these events were not accidental but premeditative acts of provocation."<sup>62</sup>

Cousins blamed the CIA in particular for working against an improvement of relations. He described CIA analyses and actions as very often the results of the "recommendations of Trotskyite elements, and also of those who having split with the Communist Party of the U.S. now advocate the theory of the inevitability of war." In the last few years, Cousins added, these elements had become more widespread and influential in the CIA, explaining above all the Bay of Pigs mistake. According to Cousins, Kennedy had been inclined to stop the project when he came to office. But when the White House received Khrushchev's truculent letter, it set off Kennedy's right-wing advisers, who used it to say that the Bay of Pigs operation was a test of will in the Cold War struggle. A Kennedy decision to back off Cuba would be perceived as "a manifestation of U.S. weakness in response to Russian pressure."<sup>63</sup>

The KGB had its own informants at the Crimean conference. They corroborated the view of Kennedy as a man caught between warring sets of advisers. One KGB agent reported on a conversation with Robert Bowie, the former chief of the Policy Planning Staff of Dulles's State Department, Paul Doty, a Harvard professor of chemistry, and Shepard Stone, of the Ford Foundation, who discussed the mood in Washington. The three had visited with McGeorge Bundy, Kennedy's national security adviser, and his assistant Walt Rostow before leaving for the Soviet Union. Bundy and Rostow had told them that Kennedy considered the Vienna summit "an opportunity to probe the position of the head of the Soviet regime on fundamental issues." Echoing what Adlai Stevenson had said privately to Ambassador Menshikov, Bowie and the other American experts noted that Kennedy felt it important to hear Khrushchev explain Soviet policy in his own terms. Following the Bay of Pigs disaster, Kennedy "did not trust the conclusions of his own advisers." He wanted to give the Soviets the opportunity to explain what they were up to in Berlin and in Laos and to explore why there had not been further progress on a nuclear test ban. Beyond this, the summit was good domestic politics for Kennedy. In forwarding this report on the group headed by Bowie, the KGB chief, Shelepin, noted for the Foreign Ministry that the U.S. president feared that he had lost the confidence of the American people. The summit was a way to prove "he was capable of establishing personal contact with N. S. Khrushchev."<sup>64</sup>

Would Kennedy be the captive of his hawkish advisers? Khrushchev no doubt wondered as he made his way to Vienna. Everything Khrushchev received, from open as well as confidential sources, supported the view that Kennedy wanted better relations. After all, the U.S. president had used his brother to extend what turned out to be unacceptable concessions, though concessions they were. But what the Soviet leader could not know until he met Kennedy was the extent to which, like Eisenhower, Kennedy was under the thumb of the so-called militarists around him.

### Kennedy Prepares

In Washington, John Kennedy tried one final time to establish a personal connection to Khrushchev. The Kennedy brothers spent the last weekend before the summit at Hyannis Port, where the family had gathered to celebrate the president's forty-fourth birthday. Robert Kennedy called Georgi Bolshakov from the Kennedy compound on May 29. "The president would like to know whether he and the Chairman could meet privately, with only their interpreters present." A recent message from the U.S. embassy in Moscow offered a narrow band of hope. Thompson suggested that Khrushchev might be more accommodating if met alone. Khrushchev had actually prefaced his frosty remarks at the ice show by saying that he would be able to speak more freely with the president when the two men would not be in front of assistants.<sup>65</sup> With this in mind, the president authorized his brother to feel out the Soviets on organizing a one-on-one meeting in Vienna, with only interpreters present.

Robert Kennedy stressed the White House's need for a quick reply. The president wanted to hear from Bolshakov before he left for Paris on May 30. Bolshakov cabled this back to Moscow. The GRU officer stressed the Kennedy brothers' sense that their appeals were not being appreciated: "The White House wants to know whether Comrade Khrushchev has received this message."<sup>66</sup> Rumors were swirling in Washington that Vienna was going to be a failure. A good friend and colleague of Kennedy's from the Senate, Mike Mansfield, advised that the president be prepared to walk out of the meetings if they were "degenerating into mere-propaganda exchanges."<sup>67</sup> The rumors mirrored concern among many in the Kennedy inner circle. Kennedy turned to McGeorge Bundy on May 29 to nail down what the pundits were saying about Berlin. There was a spectrum of opinion, Bundy replied, from that of Walter Lippmann and Tommy Thompson on the left of the debate to that of Dean Acheson and Dean Rusk on the right: "You will see that the differences between the Achesonians and Lippmann do not turn on the issue of standing fast to defend our access to Berlin. They turn rather on whether there is any legitimate Soviet interest to which we can give some reassurance."<sup>68</sup>

Like the Kennedys, Khrushchev had also sought familiar surroundings to gather his strength and focus his mind before the summit. He was in Kiev when Bolshakov's dispatch reached the GRU in Moscow. Khrushchev had not



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seen fit to respond to Kennedy's second batch of questions, and he played the reluctant suitor again. It did not much matter whether he met Kennedy alone or with the entire Central Committee. Khrushchev did not intend to alter his message. But he would agree to some one-on-one meetings when he reached Vienna.

Khrushchev boarded a train in the Ukraine for the journey to Vienna, via Poland and Bratislava, Czechoslovakia. As he crossed the Czech border, Khrushchev flipped through more last-minute reports on his American adversary. In one the KGB chief in Washington cabled that a "trustworthy person close to Robert Kennedy" wanted the Kremlin to know that John Kennedy was still hopeful that the summit would be productive. President Kennedy would also look favorably upon an invitation from Khrushchev to another summit in Moscow. The KGB official assumed that his informant was probably acting under instructions from Robert Kennedy.<sup>69</sup>

Khrushchev had every reason to engage the U.S. president in meaningful negotiations in Vienna. Kennedy had sent more than just feelers to the Soviets. But he had raised the wrong issues. In Khrushchev's eyes, the test ban served American interests more than Soviet interests because the United States enjoyed a qualitative as well as quantitative advantage in nuclear weapons production. In addition, the inspection regime pushed by the Americans would be an affront to Soviet sovereignty. The fear of American espionage was also a reason not to let Americans come too close to the Soviet space program. Kennedy was about to learn a hard lesson in Soviet summitry.

### Vienna

Kennedy's fears were realized early on. Khrushchev had come to talk about Berlin and to size up the young leader. The initiatives that John Kennedy had proposed through his brother had no effect on the Soviet leader. In their first day of talks, Khrushchev dismissed them. First, he said that he would not discuss the nuclear test ban in isolation from the larger question of the complete dismantling of the arsenals of the United States and the USSR. And second, he brushed aside discussion of any joint space projects. Like the test ban, Khrushchev argued, such cooperation was also impossible without disarmament.<sup>70</sup>

The first day of the summit found Castro figuratively lurking in the background. Kennedy complained about Khrushchev's new doctrine of support for "sacred wars" and thus provided Khrushchev with an opening to harangue the president on U.S. support for colonial and reactionary regimes. Khrushchev criticized U.S. tendencies to blame the emergence of nationalist movements on outside forces, rather than appreciating the reasons why peoples seek to overthrow their oppressors. The segue to Castro was a natural one. "Castro is not a communist," said Khrushchev, "but you can make him one." Indeed, Khrushchev was betraying a confidence to John Kennedy. Despite all of

Castro's protestations to the contrary, the Kremlin did not think him much of a communist. The Soviet leader knew, of course, that the situation in Cuba was more complicated, that Castro had declared himself to be a communist more than five months before the Bay of Pigs invasion and that, even before this, Moscow had had very influential friends in the Cuban leader's inner circle. Nevertheless, Khrushchev effectively played on the ineptness of U.S. policy toward the Cuban revolution through the disastrous Bay of Pigs. "[W]hen the U.S. put pressure on Fidel Castro and applied sanctions on him," Khrushchev recalled, "we came to his assistance, in the form of trade and technical support. . . . Under the influence of this aid he may turn Communist." Khrushchev said nothing about Soviet bloc military support in 1959.<sup>71</sup>

There would be no serious discussion of the nuclear test ban. Instead, Kennedy learned that Khrushchev would discuss nothing seriously until he had his way on Berlin. Although he did not wish to talk about Berlin, Kennedy had one concession to give. He took Khrushchev aside after lunch and tried to get him to reveal his bottom line in these negotiations. Kennedy hinted that the United States could accept a separate Soviet-East German peace treaty, so long as the West retained the right of access to West Berlin and to leave its troops there. Khrushchev's concession was that the United States could leave troops in West Berlin, so long as the Soviets could have troops there too. The discussion was getting nowhere. Kennedy could not believe that the Soviet leader would so willingly endanger U.S.-Soviet relations to get his way on Berlin. Did he not understand the strength of America's commitment to that occupied city? "If you want war," Khrushchev said, "that is your problem."

At the morning meeting on the second day, Kennedy complained to Khrushchev that the summit was not what he had expected or asked for. The Soviet leader was threatening him over Berlin without giving a thought to ways of reducing tension. Kennedy said he had not come to Vienna "to find out not only that a peace treaty would be signed but also that we would be denied our position in West Berlin and our access to that city." "I came here," he said, "in the hope that relations between our two countries could be improved."<sup>72</sup> Deaf to Kennedy's remonstrations, Khrushchev warned that regardless of Washington's opposition, the Kremlin would sign a peace treaty with East Germany in December. As the day wore on, Kennedy lost any hope of reaching a compromise on this or any other issue, save perhaps on Laotian neutrality, with Khrushchev. As he left the Soviet leader after this first and, as it turned out, last face-to-face meeting, Kennedy remarked, "It will be a cold winter."

The Vienna summit deeply disappointed John Kennedy. He had done everything possible, he thought, to improve the climate between the superpowers. He had gone against most of his advisers in offering a new deal on nuclear tests, he had accepted a draw in Laos, he had admitted that the Soviet Union

had reason to fear a rearmed Germany, and he had even hinted at a new status for Berlin. Yet no water could be squeezed from the Russian stone. One of the few men around John Kennedy who understood the depth of his disappointment was his brother. Robert had tried through the gregarious GRU man, Bolshakov, to develop a confidential link to Khrushchev. But for all of the talking, not much had changed as a result of Vienna. Perhaps there was an agreement on Laos; but even this depended on Khrushchev's keeping his word. There was also no reason to expect Soviet caution elsewhere in the Third World. Robert Kennedy later recalled Vienna as a decisive moment in his brother's political education. "Vienna was very revealing: This was the first time the President had ever really come across somebody with whom he couldn't exchange ideas in a meaningful way and feel there was some point to it."<sup>73</sup> As Robert concluded, "it was a shock to him."<sup>74</sup>