



**Nuclear Proliferation
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Egypt and the Cuban Missile Crisis

By Hassan Elbahtimy and James G. Hershberg
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Egypt and the Cuban Missile Crisis

Hassan Elbahtimy and James G. Hershberg

Abstract

This NPIHP *Working Paper* features essays written by Hassan Elbahtimy and James G. Hershberg that examine the role of Egypt in the politics and diplomacy of the October 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. Benefiting from Elbahtimy's deep expertise in Egyptian nuclear history and Hershberg's long-standing interest and numerous publications on the Cuban Missile Crisis, the two papers seek to address unanswered questions relating to how Egypt and its government led by President Gamal Abdel Nasser perceived and reacted to the crisis, particularly at the United Nations, in the context of the Cold War and the advent of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). The papers draw on a range of primary sources from Egypt, the United States, the United Nations, the Soviet Union, and elsewhere, materials which provide new insights and information on Cairo's experience of the crisis.

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Preface

In January 2020, the American University in Cairo, King's College London, and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars organized a conference in Cairo on "Nuclear Policy in the Middle East: Diplomatic History and Future Prospects." The conference gathered academics, researchers, and practitioners (including many retired and serving Egyptian diplomats) to discuss nuclear politics and history in the region and in Egypt. The two papers presented in this NPIHP *Working Paper* examine the role of Egypt in the politics and diplomacy of the October 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis.¹ These papers developed from their authors' work for the Cairo conference, discussions between them, and their earlier research on aspects of the missile crisis and Egyptian foreign policy. James Hershberg has a long-standing interest in the crisis and published extensively on various aspects of its history.² Hassan Elbahtimy had assessed Egypt's understanding of nuclear vulnerability during the crisis and wrote a chapter on the topic for a book edited by Benoit Pelopidas.³ The two papers published here develop insights from this earlier research and seek to address additional questions on how Egypt and its government led by President Gamal Abdel Nasser perceived and reacted to the crisis, particularly at the United Nations, in the context of the Cold War and the advent of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

The complementary papers both draw on sources from Egypt, the US, UN, Soviet Union, and elsewhere, sources which provide new insights and information on Cairo's experience of the crisis. While we made every effort to bring a wide variety of original research and sources to this topic, we still hope to be able to draw on more sources in the future, particularly from Egyptian Foreign Ministry archives currently not open for consultation. Such evidence could valuably enhance, and perhaps more fully portray, the picture the two papers offer.

¹ Egypt was then formally known as the United Arab Republic (UAR), in a (short-lived) collaboration with Syria

² See, e.g., James G. Hershberg "The Cuban Missile Crisis," in O.A. Westad and M.P. Leffler, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, vol. 2 (Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 65-87, and idem, "The United States, Brazil, and the Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962," pts. 1-2, *Journal of Cold War Studies* 6:2 (Spring 2004): 3-20 and 6:3 (Summer 2004): 5-67.

³ Hassan Elbahtimy, "Egypt and the Cuban Crisis: understanding nuclear vulnerability in the context of non-alignment," in Benoit Pelopidas, ed., *Global Nuclear Vulnerability: 1962 as an Inaugural Crisis* (Johns Hopkins University Press, forthcoming). Elbahtimy is currently working on a book addressing Nasser's nuclear policy.

The papers fit within a growing literature that seeks to open Cold War history to new narratives. Traditionally, the confrontation between the two biggest ideological and military adversaries, the US and USSR, has dominated the period's diplomatic history. Conversely, the experiences, actions, and influence of non-aligned powers, many newly independent, are often overlooked or marginalized. Similarly, the history of the missile crisis has focused on how the conflict was experienced in Washington and Moscow, the two poles of the Cold War, and to a lesser extent Havana. Studies have paid far less attention to the role of the decolonized and non-aligned states. Our new contributions, in other words, surf the "third wave" of missile crisis historiography – with the first centering on US actions and sources, the second delving into the communist side (i.e., mostly Soviet and Cuban) – and explore the event's global dimensions, particularly "Third World" and neutralist as opposed to East-West.⁴

Our papers seek to contribute to the history of the crisis through augmenting a still fairly fresh global perspective beyond the superpowers and their respective blocs. In our examinations, a number of themes arise. As Elbahtimy's paper demonstrates, Cairo's position was articulated through the language of global non-alignment and expressed through the tools of multilateral diplomacy in the UN. The crisis occurred one year after the inauguration of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) at the September 1961 Belgrade conference hosted by Yugoslavia's Tito, at which Nasser was a leading voice. In 1962, Cairo was presented with the challenge of how to position itself in the crisis drawing on non-aligned principles while supporting Cuba's right to self-determination. The result was an attempt to walk a thin line between US and Soviet positions while trying to divide the blame. Relying on US and Soviet reports, Hershberg's paper shows how Cairo's stand irritated Washington, particularly when its UN representative openly denounced the American blockade imposed on Cuba. At the same time, in recounting the US-UAR political dialogue in Cairo, New York, and Washington – as well as the correspondence between Kennedy and Nasser – Hershberg probes signs of Egyptian ambivalence at Cuba's handling of the crisis, even while Cairo carefully hedged its public position between Washington and Moscow, trying to preserve decent relations with both sides.

⁴ See James G. Hershberg, "The Global Cuban Missile Crisis--Surfing the Third Wave of Missile Crisis Scholarship," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, issue 17/18 (Fall 2012), pp. 7-10.

Both papers exemplify and illuminate how the decolonization process transformed politics at the UN and influenced multilateral global diplomacy at critical Cold War junctures. The UN had become a platform that the US and the USSR could not ignore but also one where they increasingly had to share influence with a growing number of independent-minded actors. Cairo, then occupying one of six non-permanent seats on the then 11-member Security Council, canvassed the views of many of the neutral and recently decolonized states to push for de-escalation and greater UN involvement in the crisis. The transformed face of the UN meant that new coalitions emerged that pushed the organization to intervene and presented a draft resolution on the crisis competing with the resolutions presented by the US and the Soviet Union.

Interestingly, both papers see evidence that behind Cairo's public support for Cuba's self-determination, some Egyptian officials privately criticized Havana's conduct. As seen from Cairo, Havana allowed the deployment of Soviet nuclear capable missiles on the island and relied too heavily on the Soviet Union in the management of the crisis, in the process straying away from the principles of non-alignment. The intriguing topic of relations between Cairo and Havana, and in particular relations between Nasser and senior Cuban revolutionaries such as Ernesto "Che" Guevara (who repeatedly visited Egypt) and Fidel Castro, merits further investigation when significant Egyptian and Cuban archives and sources become more accessible.

We hope that the two papers demonstrate how Cairo perceived and reacted to the crisis, and in the process contribute to an understanding of the broader politics of the crisis including the role of non-aligned states and the UN.

Hassan Elbahtimy and James Hershberg
18 November 2020

Egypt and the Cuban Missile Crisis: Non-aligned Diplomacy in the Face of Global Crisis

Hassan Elbahtimy

In autumn 1962, governments around the world followed the unfolding of the crisis in the Caribbean. The crisis had pitted Cuba, the USSR, and the US against one another, but soon evolved to engulf the whole world in fear. The US instituted a self-styled “quarantine” on Cuba after discovery of Soviet missile bases there. Cuba and the USSR both objected to US measures, describing them as illegal while refusing to change course. For many states around the world, the crisis was more than just a superpower confrontation. It raised questions about sovereignty, global governance, and the imprudent danger of nuclear brinkmanship.

The crisis has been the focus of a vast and still growing body of literature, yet our understanding of the global dimensions and implications of the crisis remain limited. This Working Paper explores how the Egyptian government perceived and reacted to the crisis as it evolved in the Caribbean in 1962. In doing so, it contributes to a growing body of literature that seeks to open up the examination of the crisis to new and global perspectives.¹ This new literature adds to the now familiar narratives that has presented the crisis through the prism of the US, Soviet Union, and/or Cuba as the direct protagonists.

In examining Cairo’s perceptions and reactions to the crisis, this paper discusses how Egypt used the United Nations as a platform, particularly its membership in the Security

¹ On Brazil, see J.G. Hershberg, “Soviet-Brazilian Relations and the Cuban Missile Crisis,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 22, no. 1 (2020): 175-209. On France, see Benoît Pelopidas, “The unbearable lightness of luck: Three sources of overconfidence in the manageability of nuclear crises,” *European Journal of International Security* 2, no. 2 (2017): 240. On China, see Enrico Fardella, “Mao Zedong and the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis,” *Cold War History* 15, no. 1 (2015): 73-88. On Turkey, see Süleyman Seydi, “Turkish–American Relations and the Cuban Missile Crisis, 1957–63,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 46, no. 3 (2010): 433-455. On Canada, see Asa McKercher, “A ‘Half-hearted Response’?: Canada and the Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962,” *The International History Review* 33, no. 2 (2011): 335-352. On the UK, see Peter Catterall, “At the End of the Day: Macmillan’s Account of the Cuban Missile Crisis,” *International Relations* 26, no. 3 (2012): 267-289. On Latin America, see Renata Keller, “The Latin American Missile Crisis,” *Diplomatic History* 39, no. 2 (2015): 195-222. On Australia, see Laura Stanley and Phillip Deery, “The Menzies Government, the American Alliance and the Cuban Missile Crisis,” *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 59, no. 2 (2013): 178-195.

Council, to air its views and advocate for global nuclear restraint. This included mobilizing the Afro-Asian bloc, submitting a draft Security Council resolution on the crisis, and backing the UN Secretary General in his mediation efforts. In Egypt, the events were seen as a serious, and potentially catastrophic, international crisis. It triggered an internal debate on nuclear issues and significantly increased domestic interest in global nuclear politics. But above all, in Cairo the “Cuban Crisis” (as Egyptians then referred to it) was a manifestation of what the country’s ruling elites found problematic with the international landscape of the 1960s: global alliance politics gone out of control and the growing salience of nuclear weapons.

This study primarily relies on Egyptian and Arabic primary sources, many of which have not been previously used in studying the crisis or on Egypt’s foreign policy. This includes the archival collection of Nasser’s documents maintained by the Library of Alexandria, which provide valuable references to Egyptian policy on Cuba. Private archival collections, records of the Arab Socialist Union meetings, and memoirs of Egyptian officials and policy advisors who experienced the crisis also provide valuable insights to the inner dynamics of Egypt’s position.

Records of Egyptian contributions to the Security Council were heavily consulted. These documents provide a detailed account of Egypt’s proactive multilateral diplomacy at a time when it held a seat in the Security Council. The archives of Egypt’s two main official dailies *Al-ahram* and *Al-akbar* provide a window into the public discourse in Egypt on the crisis. They also provide interesting and revealing insights on elite views and commentaries related to nuclear politics and deterrence. Both the Egyptian National Archives and the British Library in London contain comprehensive archives relating to how the October events were reported in government-controlled press. This study also relied on interviews with Nasser’s chief of staff and an Egyptian diplomat who was part of Egypt’s delegation to the UN at the time of the crisis.



Cartoon by Salah Jahin in *Al-ahram*, 29 October 1962

'Khrushchev avoids war and Kennedy averts war' 'Kennedy and Khrushchev to one another: shame on you! You scared me!'

Cairo, Non-alignment, and the Cuban Revolution

To understand Egypt's position in the Cuban crisis of 1962, a broader understanding of how Cairo situated itself on the international scene is crucial. Cairo at the time was a prominent advocate for both decolonization and non-alignment between the Soviet Union and the United States. Cairo therefore rejected military alliances functioning within the communist East or the capitalist West. Instead, Egypt sought to chart an independent course for itself in the Cold War and advocated for others to follow the same approach. Along with newly decolonized states, it was an active contributor to the Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung in 1955 and a few years later became a founding member of Non-Aligned Movement in 1961. Regionally, Cairo fiercely pushed back against any extension of Cold-War-style defense pacts in the Middle East and actively opposed the establishment of the Baghdad Pact. Non-alignment as a foreign policy orientation carried a nuclear dimension too. Egypt had no foreign nuclear forces on its territory, nor was it under the formal protection of an American or Soviet nuclear guarantee.

Since a new anti-colonial regime under Castro's leadership came to power in Cuba in 1959, Cairo and Havana started to move closer to one another. Egypt's foreign policy towards Cuba can be understood as a function of its relationship with the US and the Soviet Union, but what is frequently overlooked is that this policy was a product of Cairo's experience of, and later advocacy for, decolonization. Cairo invested in good relations with the new Cuban regime under the leadership of Fidel Castro. In many cases, parallels were seen and explicitly highlighted between Egypt's and Cuba's respective struggles for decolonization. The Cuban Revolution was therefore seen as part of a global, historic wave of national liberation movements reversing the injustices inflicted by decades of colonization and control of European and Western powers on vast swaths of the world. Particularly after the Suez crisis of 1956, Cairo had increased its involvement and supported many of these national liberation movements around the world and particularly in Africa and the Middle East.

It is hardly surprising then that Cairo was ready to open its arms for the new Cuban regime. Che Guevara visited Cairo in 1959 soon after the new regime had established itself on the Caribbean island. The following year, Nasser met with Castro twice in 1960.² The warming of relations also meant that Cairo was able to provide some modest and symbolic assistance to Havana with the aim of supporting the new regime and in defiance of US efforts to isolate it internationally.³ Nasser also lent the new regime his support openly and frequently drew connections between Egypt's own struggle for independence against colonial and dominating powers and Cuba's, highlighting the importance of solidarity between Third-World powers. In a speech celebrating the eighth anniversary of the Egyptian revolution, Nasser expressed his support and recognition for Cuba by saying:

we support the struggle of Fidel Castro because we, brothers, have faced hard times during which we were exposed to threats and pressure. We found support from free people everywhere. For this reason, we believe that we ought to support the cause of freedom in every part of the world.⁴

² 'Friendly meeting between President Gamal Abdel Nasser and Castro,' Records of the Nasser's speeches, 28 September 1960. Bibliotheca Alexandrina Archival Database. (source consulted in Arabic)

³ 'Gamal Abdel Nasser interview with representatives of Columbia Channel 25/04/1960,' records of Nasser's interviews, 25 April 1960. Bibliotheca Alexandrina Archival Database. (source consulted in Arabic)

⁴ 'President's Nasser's speech in sport festival and military parade on the occasion of revolution celebrations,' Records of the Nasser's speeches, 27 July 1960. Bibliotheca Alexandrina Archival Database. (source consulted in Arabic) also in Yitzhak Oron Ed, *Middle East Record Volume 1, 1960* (The Moshe Dayan Center, n.d.), 542.

Against this background of solidarity and support for Cuba, US efforts at subversion were openly criticized, even when Nasser's relationship with Kennedy was warming up. In 1961, Nasser quickly and harshly denounced US attempts to invade the Caribbean island during the Bay of Pigs operation. Following the attacks, Nasser sent a private message to Castro through the Egyptian ambassador in Havana expressing Egypt's support and drawing parallels with Egypt's own fights during the Suez Crisis of 1956. Nasser described the invasion as "a crime against world peace" and told Castro, "I want you and the Cuban people to know that the friends of freedom in the world are not going to be mere spectators as this crime against the peaceful Cuban people unfolds."⁵

This also coincided with the growing institutionalization of non-alignment globally in the form of the creation of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) that had its inaugural conference in 1961 in Belgrade. The movement provided an umbrella for states around the world, the vast majority of them newly decolonized, to assert different positions on world affairs than those advocated by the US or the Soviet Union. It was through NAM and other similar channels that Cairo projected its voice in support of Cuba and anti-colonialism more broadly and sought to build international coalitions with like-minded countries.

Records of Nasser's speeches show how these platforms were used for that purpose and specifically to denounce efforts to subvert the new Cuban regime. For example, in his speech to the first non-aligned conference, Nasser denounced the US Bay of Pigs operation as "rash and stupid" and used the platform to declare Cairo's support for the "struggle of the Cuban people."⁶ Also in reaction to the Bay of Pigs operation, Nasser and President Tito of Yugoslavia, both strong advocates of non-alignment, issued a joint memorandum denouncing US aggression and describing it as an "an assault on world peace," "an attack on Cuba's independence," and a "violation of principles of the United Nations."⁷ The failed Bay of Pigs

⁵ 'Nasser's letter to Castro,' 18 April 1961, Huda Abdel Nasser personal archival collection.

⁶ 'Speech by President Gamal Abdel Nasser in the Non-aligned Conference in Belgrade, Yugoslavia,' 1 September 1961, Records of Nasser's speeches, Bibliotheca Alexandrina Archival Database. (source consulted in Arabic)

⁷ 'Common memorandum by President Nasser and Tito on the assault on Cuba,' Huda Abdel Nasser private archival collection, 19 April 1961 (source consulted in Arabic)

operation provided the prism through which Cairo perceived Havana's vulnerability when the US quarantine was announced in 1962.

Cairo's Experience of the Cuban Crisis of 1962

As the crisis was picking up pace in the Caribbean, Cairo was heavily engaged with foreign policy priorities elsewhere. Only a month earlier, Egypt had started its active, and later costly, engagement in Yemeni affairs. Cairo supported a group of Yemeni officers in removing the conservative Imamate dynasty from power to establish a republic inspired by Egypt's own free officers movement in 1952.⁸ With time, Egypt became heavily involved in the Yemeni civil war that followed between the traditional leadership and the republican officers – picking the side of the republicans. By October 1962, around 20,000 Egyptian troops were reported to have been deployed in Yemen in what later came to be known as “Nasser's Vietnam” due to the great loss in blood and treasure suffered by Cairo.⁹

But the military involvement in Yemen was not the only major issue on Cairo's diplomatic radar. In the fall of 1962, China and India went to war over a border dispute. The conflict risked a deep fissure in the anti-colonial camp and caused significant alarm in Cairo. As the situation in the Caribbean heated up, Nasser was also engaged in efforts to mediate between the Chinese and Indian leadership to de-escalate and resolve the conflict.¹⁰

Preoccupied with Yemen and the Sino-Indian conflict on the international stage, Cairo did not foresee an imminent escalation in Cuba. Egypt had no access to information on the intentions of the Soviet Union to introduce the missiles, nor did Cairo have any privileged access to the U2 photographs available to the Americans before the blockade.¹¹ Egypt's early perception of the events had placed it in the context of repeated US efforts to subvert the

⁸Jesse Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble: How Intervention in Yemen Caused the Six-Day War and the Decline of Egyptian Power* (Princeton University Press, 2013), 49–61.

⁹By October 1962, around 20,000 Egyptian troops were reported to have been deployed in Yemen. References for Egypt's military involvement in Yemen. Warren Bass, *Support Any Friend: Kennedy's Middle East and the Making of the U.S.-Israel Alliance* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 162.

¹⁰'Nehru receive letter from Nasser proposing joint non-aligned effort in the crisis between China and India,' *Al-ahram*, 24 October 1962. 'Cairo stands with peace on all fronts' *Al-ahram*, 26 October 1962. (in Arabic) 'Cairo in continued contact with New Delhi and Beijing to prevent total war,' *Al-ahram*, 27 October 1962 (in Arabic) Yitzhak Shichor, *The Middle East in China's Foreign Policy, 1949-1977* (Cambridge University Press, 1979), 101–102.

¹¹ Interview Samy Sharaf, Nasser's Chief of Staff – 14 April 2014

Castro regime in Cuba. As a fellow Third World country, Egyptian sympathies were with Cuba.¹² As events in the Caribbean kicked off, Cairo was commemorating the sixth anniversary of the Suez Crisis. This timing coincidence made the connection between Cuba's struggle and its own prominent in Egyptian perceptions. Cuba's defiance in the face of US subversive efforts symbolized the struggle many post-colonial countries experienced to achieve independence.

On the 22nd of October 1962, Nasser received a private letter from Kennedy informing him of the Soviet efforts to introduce missiles in Cuba and of the US decision to impose a quarantine on the island. In making the case for US action, Kennedy emphasized that the offensive Soviet ballistic build-up in Cuba was beyond "any doubt" and stressed how recent actions by the Soviet Union were in flagrant contradiction with earlier commitments by Khrushchev and Gromyko that the USSR will only provide defensive weapons to Cuba.¹³ Absent from Kennedy's letter was any reference to Cuba's role. It focused almost entirely on the Soviet Union and its leadership as the main culprits.

With the Bay of Pigs in recent memory, Egypt's default position was to think that the US measures were a new attempt to compromise the Cuban regime and aimed at re-instating US control over the Caribbean Island.¹⁴ Cairo's acknowledgement of the Cuban regime's vulnerability in the face of what was perceived as determined efforts by its mighty neighbor to undermine its government would continued to overshadow Egypt's early attitude toward the situation in the Caribbean.

Only later with the escalation of the crisis and US-Soviet standoff did the alarming nuclear dimension of the crisis gain salience in Cairo and the risk of nuclear war become clear. This was no longer strictly a US-Cuban affair where the Cuban island was subjected to the risk of a ground invasion or subversive action aimed at destabilising Castro's government. By the 24th of October, the events were described in the Egyptian government press as a "crisis" and

¹² Ibid

¹³ Letter published verbatim in Muhammad Hasanayn Heikal, *'Abd al-Nasir wa-al-'alam* ([Bayrut]: Dar al-Naharlil-Nashr, 1972). (Source consulted in Arabic)

¹⁴ 'The danger of American invasion hovers around Cuba', *Al-ahram* 23 October 1962 (In Arabic). Heikal, 'Cuba: what happened' *Al-ahram*, 24 October 1962 (in Arabic) 'How Cairo followed developments in Cuba minute by minute' *Al-ahram* 26 October 1962 (in Arabic). Interview Samy Sharaf, Nasser's Chief of Staff – 14 April 2014.

“the worst the world faced since the second world war.”¹⁵ The risk of a nuclear war started to assume the center stage.¹⁶

The newly formed “Presidential Council,” the highest political body in Egypt at the time, discussed the issue in at least two meetings on the 24th of October and 1st of November.¹⁷ After the first meeting, a statement was released calling for negotiations between the US, USSR and Cuba to resolve the crisis peacefully. The statement also made public Cairo’s position based on a dual rejection of the measures to establish a quarantine on Cuba and of the establishment of foreign military bases. This would remain Cairo’s position throughout the crisis.¹⁸

The Egyptian Foreign Ministry sprang into action to follow and assess the events and feed the Egyptian mission in New York with instructions from Cairo. Undersecretary Hafez Ismail arranged a crisis group of seven departments, meeting every hour, to examine and analyze the latest information coming from Egyptian embassies abroad and news cables.¹⁹ A report in *Al-ahram* describes “tens of diplomats that have not left their offices” in the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs since the very start of the crisis.

Even religious authorities in Egypt accorded the matter some attention. On the 24th of October, the Grand Imam of Al-azhar, one the biggest and oldest institutions in the Muslim world, issued a statement calling on all nations to stand against nuclear war. Al-azhar’s statement referred to the self-defeating nature of nuclear war and its global consequences. For Al-azhar, nuclear war would benefit “neither its winners nor its losers” but would impact “the whole of mankind.”²⁰ The Grand Imam also said that non-aligned states could play a proactive role in order to prevent such a war.

Coverage of the crisis dominated Egypt’s biggest two print dailies. Themes emphasizing the dangers inherent in nuclear weapons already figured in Egyptian press but significantly

¹⁵ ‘The situation between the US and Cuba triggers the worst crisis the world faced since world war two,’ *Al-ahram*, 24th October 1962 (in Arabic)

¹⁶ The headlines of *Al-ahram* on the 24th of October read in bold: ‘Danger of Nuclear War’ (source in Arabic)

¹⁷ According to statements by Executive Council member Ali Sabri published in *Al-akhbar* and *Al-ahram* on the 25th of October and 2nd of November.

¹⁸ 25/10 *Al-ahram*: ‘Executive Council examines the international situation.’ The statement also mentioned that during the meeting the Council was in contact with the Egyptian representative in the UN who was instructed to coordinate a common position with countries from the Afro-Asian bloc and the non-aligned states.

¹⁹ ‘How Cairo followed developments in Cuba minute by minute’ *Al-ahram* 26 October 1962 (source in Arabic)

²⁰ ‘Al-azhar calls on nations to stand against nuclear war’, 26 October, *Al-ahram* – in Arabic.

expanded during the crisis. Only a day before the Cuban crisis publicly erupted, *Al-ahram*, Egypt's government-controlled and widest distributed daily, reported on its front page how the US was close to wiping North Carolina off the map when two nuclear weapons were dropped on the state by accident.²¹

As the USSR showed early signs that it might challenge the US-imposed quarantine, *Al-ahram's* headlines announced the advent of "the danger of atomic war" and a "world rolling down an abyss of hell" in a crisis unseen since the Second World War.²² The paper even started publishing a serialized version of "Fail Safe," an American novel that vividly described how the world can step into a nuclear war by accident.²³ The danger was described as unprecedented in its seriousness and global in nature. Quotes from politicians and intellectuals expressed a doomsday scenario. "In a week, we will all die," a quote from the world intellectual Bertrand Russell was placed on the front page. The pope was quoted as warning of war that would exterminate humankind.²⁴

Non-aligned Diplomacy in Action

In 1961, Egypt joined the Security Council as an elected non-permanent member of the most consequential body of the UN.²⁵ This was a reflection of Cairo's growing international clout; particularly within the Non-Aligned Movement which was formally launched in the same year. As the Cuban crisis escalated in 1962, Cairo focused on the Security Council as its main vehicle to engage with the crisis and the venue where Egypt put into action its support for non-alignment principles and anti-nuclear positions. By the 23rd of October, Egypt had fully mobilized its diplomats and foreign service in support of its UN mission. Ambassador Mahmoud Riad, Cairo's representative in the UN and later foreign minister, held a direct link with the

²¹ 'Hydrogen bomb accidentally dropped over Carolina,' 22 October 1962, *Al-ahram* archives. (source consulted in Arabic)

²² 'Danger of nuclear war,' 24 October 1961, *Al-ahram* archives (source consulted in Arabic)

²³ 'Fail Safe: *Al-ahram* publishes the book the world is talking about with fear and concern' 2 November 1962, *Al-ahram* (in Arabic)

²⁴ 'Pope warns of nuclear war that would exterminate mankind,' 24 October 1962, *Al-ahram* archives, p.2.

²⁵ The security council then was formed of only 11 members. 6 of these members were non-permanent members.

government in Cairo which fed him instructions on how to position Egypt in the debates taking place in the Security Council.²⁶

The first meeting of the 11 members of the Security Council on the crisis took place on the 23rd of October 1962. Records of the Security Council debates reflect how the key protagonists folded into the traditional cold war camps. The US, supported by its Western allies, accused the Soviet Union of secretly building “launching bases and the installation of long range ballistic missiles capable of carrying thermonuclear warheads to most of North and South America” and stressing their “offensive” nature.²⁷ More controversially, it laid out the rationale for its imposition of a quarantine on Cuba. Cuba, on the other hand, supported by the USSR and the Eastern bloc, focused on the illegality of the US actions under international law. Cuba described US measures as “blockade unilaterally decreed” and an “act of war.”²⁸ The Soviet representative described US actions as “undisguised piracy” and a violation of the UN charter.²⁹

Reflecting these divergent views, two radically different draft resolutions, presented by the US and by the USSR, were tabled for the Council’s membership to consider and vote on. To many states on the Security Council and in the UN more broadly, their position was dictated by their respective places in the Cold War divide. Western powers and allied governments like the UK, France, Ireland, Chile, Venezuela, and the Republic of China expressed support for the US draft, while Romania, the only other communist regime on the Council, supported the Soviet draft.³⁰

For Egypt, buoyed by the recently established non-aligned platform, the dominance of the East versus West shadow over international diplomacy had to be challenged. Recently decolonized Afro-Asian countries should be able to chart their own foreign and domestic policy. They should deflect pressure from both the East and the West to automatically align with their

²⁶Urgent instructions sent to Mahmoud Riad, 24 October 1961, *Al-ahram* archives.

²⁷ Security Council, ‘Official Records of the 1022nd Meeting,’ 23 October 1962, UN Doc: S/PV.1022

²⁸ Ibid p.22

²⁹ Ibid p.26

³⁰ Yearbook of the United Nations 1962, Office of Public Relations of the UN, New York p. 107. China’s Security Council seat was held by the anti-communist Republic of China. Between 24-26 October, the Acting Secretary General received several letters from Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Mongolia denouncing what they called a ‘naval blockade’ and asked UN to take action to stop US aggressiveness. See: Yearbook of the United Nations 1962, Office of Public Relations of the UN, New York p. 108

respective positions. Using its membership in the Security Council, Egypt sought ways to bypass the pressure of East-West antagonism on the wider UN membership.

The following days showed Egypt's proactive role in leveraging the non-aligned and decolonized states into an independent position. These efforts centered on giving the UN, as the embodiment of global will, a prominent place. After the first day of Security Council debate, Egypt coordinated a meeting of 50 such states to drive greater and more proactive UN involvement in resolving the crisis.³¹ Egypt with Ghana and Cyprus formed a troika that represented the group and met with the Acting Secretary General of the UN U Thant to press on him the will of a significant section of the international community for the UN to play a mediatory role in the conflict. In addition to driving an international caucus in support of a UN role, Egypt, together with Ghana, drafted and presented a third resolution to the Council carrying some proposals to help the start of negotiations between the US and the USSR.

Egypt's diplomatic position in the UN was, in large part, built on two principles that started to play an increasingly visible role in Egyptian foreign policy at the time. The first was active advocacy of the non-alignment of newly independent states. Alongside other leading non-aligned voices, this advocacy was meant to produce a loose umbrella under which a diverse set of countries could deflect pressure from the US and the Soviet Union to blindly affiliate with their positions and protect the sovereignty of the smaller and newly independent states. The second was a growing inclination toward an anti-nuclear stance that had been in development during the preceding years and took form in Egypt's support of Irish proposals in 1961 for an international instrument addressing the spread of nuclear weapons.

On the ground, this transpired into a position that used the UN and the Security Council membership to advocate de-escalation while denouncing nuclear brinkmanship. A position that openly emphasized the virtues of non-allegiance while using it as a rallying point for the newly independent states that were filling the ranks of the UN. This was done in parallel with stressing

³¹ According to Riad, the meeting lasted for three hours on the night of the 23rd of October followed by another meeting next day morning. 'The non-aligned trying with all its efforts to save peace before critical moment is reached,' *Al-ahram* newspaper, 25 October 1962 (source consulted in Arabic). Egyptian representative to the UN Mahmoud Riad in: Security Council, 'Official Records of the 1024th Meeting,' 24 October 1962, UN Doc: S/PV.1024. Security Council Official record PV 1024 p.10

support for Cuba's sovereignty and highlighting the dangers of reliance on nuclear weapons and the need for concerted international effort to contain the spread of nuclear weapons.

Records of Egypt's statements to the Security Council reflected that position in detail. These interventions also show a deliberate effort from Cairo to distance itself from American and Soviet positions, reflecting a desire not to be identified with any of the competing Cold War camps. In contradiction to the US position, Egypt's representative Riad emphasized the importance that states desist from intervening in the internal affairs of other states, that each state had the freedom to choose its own political system and to be able to defend its political and territorial integrity.³² Egypt described the US quarantine as illegal under international law, but interestingly opted to phrase this opposition in a controlled and restrained manner. Additionally, the Egyptian Ambassador used "quarantine," the term adopted by the US, rather than "blockade" as used by Cuba and the USSR, which had more serious legal connotations.³³

On the face of it, and in the middle of a polarizing crisis, this position brought the Egyptian position too close to the Cuban and Soviet narrative that stressed Havana's right to fend off American efforts to subvert its new regime. For balance, the Egyptian Ambassador mentioned Egypt's firm opposition to the establishment of foreign military bases, conceding to the US narrative that placement of Soviet missiles on Cuban territory was a destabilizing act and detrimental to regional and global security. Egypt also came out with a strong and vocal anti-nuclear position that it shared with the Security Council. The Egyptian ambassador Riad said that he received direct instructions from his government to reaffirm Egypt's opposition in principle to the spread of nuclear weapons.³⁴

Egyptian Ambassador Mahmoud Riad said "I'm confident that the Council is well aware that the peoples of the world are anxiously watching the present dangerous situation."³⁵ In doing that, he was emphasizing the international dimension of the crisis and the responsibility of the collective security organization, the UN, to play a role: "The flow of the reaction of the

³² Ibid - These were core non-aligned positions developed since the first Afro-Asian conference in Bandung in 1955 and later refined in the 1961 non-aligned Belgrade Conference.

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Security Council, 'Official Records of the 1024th Meeting,' 24 October 1962, UN Doc: S/PV.1024. Security Council Official record PV 1024 p.12

³⁵ Ibid

peoples of the world demonstrates beyond doubt the extent to which world public opinion is closely watching our deliberations.” According to Riad, it was the duty of the Security Council to “bring an immediate end” to the situation through an “objective” and “constructive” approach and “in a spirit of realism and conciliation.”³⁶

With this position in mind and with the non-aligned in the UN mobilized, Egypt, Ghana and Cyprus met with the Acting Secretary General (ASG) U Thant to seek ways to push for a greater UN mediatory role. To back a more proactive approach by the UN, Egypt and Ghana propelled their own draft for a Security Council resolution that sought to provide a mandate for a larger UN role. In the draft, they requested that the ASG “promptly confer” with the parties directly concerned on “immediate steps” to remove the “threat to world peace.”³⁷ With the intention of giving some time for mediation, the draft asked all parties to freeze the situation and desist from any action that might aggravate the situation or hamper mediation efforts.

This was a direct attempt by the smaller powers to find a way out of the crisis through a coordinated multilateral approach using the United Nations. Ghana’s representative to the UN described the draft as the “peace resolution” and asked Council members to support it.³⁸ In the same vein, the Egyptian Ambassador said, “Ghana and the United Arab Republic, as non-aligned countries, feel it imperative to ask the Security Council to act urgently and resolutely to save international peace. Our only desire is to bring the parties concerned together in an effort to avoid a further deterioration of the situation.”³⁹

At least initially, these proposals received mixed reactions. The diplomatic cover and the mandate the resolution would provide for the ASG to play a mediatory role in the crisis was not universally welcomed. The US and some of the Western countries were not comfortable that the resolution did not address the dismantlement of the missiles in Cuba. Equally, the Soviet Union would have wanted to see a denunciation of the unilaterally imposed quarantine. The ASG, who was not yet confirmed in his position, was initially perceived to be reluctant and

³⁶ Ibid p. 24

³⁷ Security Council, ‘Ghana and the United Arab Republic: Joint Draft Resolution,’ 24 October 1962, UN Doc: S/5190

³⁸ Ghana’s representative Mr Quaison-Sackey in Security Council, ‘Official Records of the 1024th Meeting,’ 24 October 1962, UN Doc: S/PV.1024 p. 20

³⁹ Security Council, ‘Official Records of the 1024th Meeting,’ 24 October 1962, UN Doc: S/PV.1024. Security Council Official record PV 1024 p.12

“non-committal” towards engaging in a risky mediation effort in a highly charged atmosphere.⁴⁰ Through tabling the resolution, the non-aligned sought to directly urge the ASG to play such a role.

However, these diplomatic actions seem to have yielded some results in getting the UN to step in. Following the appeal, U Thant told the Security Council that “at the request of a large number of member states,” he had sent identical messages to President Kennedy and Chairman Khrushchev urging them to adhere to two or three weeks of reciprocal and “voluntary suspension” of all arms shipments to Cuba, as well as halting the quarantine measures, such as ship-searching.⁴¹ The aim for such suspension was to give time for the parties involved to discuss an enduring resolution of the crisis.

The next day the Council was informed of the encouraging, if not conclusive, replies by the US and the Soviet Union. The Egyptian representative was among the delegations that welcomed the responses and called for direct negotiations between the two powers with the assistance of the ASG.⁴² The following day, the ASG followed up with letters to Khrushchev and Kennedy asking the first to keep Soviet ships away from the quarantine area and the second to avoid direct confrontation with Soviet ships, with the aim of minimizing the possibility of an incident that could escalate into war.⁴³ In separate letters received on the 25th and 26th of October, both powers accepted the ASG proposals and in so doing the crisis looked like it was on its way toward containment. Egyptian mission in the UN was vocal in its support for negotiations under the UN Umbrella.

In Cairo, Egypt’s biggest daily dedicated considerable coverage to ASG efforts to mediate, including publishing the complete record of letters exchanged between Kennedy, Khrushchev, and U Thant.⁴⁴ These were celebrated as a consequence of non-aligned mediation diplomacy. In reality however, direct back channels between the US and the Soviet Union

⁴⁰Gioe, Scott, and Andrew, *An International History of the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 82.

⁴¹ Yearbook of the United Nations 1962, Office of Public Relations of the UN, New York p. 107-110

⁴²Security Council, ‘Official Records of the 1025th Meeting,’ 24 October 1962, Security Council Official record UN Doc: S/PV.1025. p.14

⁴³ Yearbook of the United Nations 1962, Office of Public Relations of the UN, New York p. 107-110

⁴⁴ ‘Complete record of letters exchanged between Khrushchev, Kennedy and U-Thant,’ 29 October 1961, *Al-ahram* archives. Source consulted in Arabic

governments played the key role in bringing about an agreement to de-escalate the crisis. By 28 October, the parameters of a compromise were reached that involved the removal of the Soviet missiles from Cuba and a secret promise by Kennedy to remove the Jupiter missiles from Turkey.⁴⁵ Egypt continued to be involved in the resolution process and the former Egyptian representative to the UN, Omar Loutfi, accompanied the ASG on his trip to Cuba 30-31 October.⁴⁶ The UN was also involved in efforts to verify the dismantlement and the removal of the missiles, including efforts to get Cuba to agree on some form of international verification.

The End of the Crisis

Despite differences between Cuba, the US, and the Soviet Union over verifying the removal of the Soviet missiles, by early November the worst of the crisis was over. Against the background of Cold War antagonism, de-escalation was not universally welcomed. Voices at the margins of each alliance were pushing to establish deterrence credibility. On the other hand, China used the crisis to accuse the Kremlin of capitulation.⁴⁷ In this landscape, Egypt, along with the non-aligned states, sided with de-escalation. Cairo supported the resolution of the crisis. Nasser exchanged correspondences with Kennedy and Khrushchev in support of the outcome. When it came to Cuba, a more complicated picture started to emerge in Cairo about Havana's conduct during the crisis and its non-aligned credentials.

Nasser's messages to Kennedy and Khrushchev praised their restraint, but also highlighted the importance of the role played by the UN and the Acting Secretary General. To Kennedy, Nasser wrote, "we deeply appreciate the fact that the American measures, irrespective of our opinion thereon, were carried out in a way devoid of aggressive incitement."⁴⁸ Nasser also wrote: "we value your response to the call of Assistant Secretary General of the UN U-Thant and the cooperation of the US delegation to the UN with him." Nasser's letter ended by highlighting that the US "with all its might and prestige" can

⁴⁵Melvyn P Leffler and Westad, *The Cambridge History of the Cold War. Volume II*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 80–83.

⁴⁶Louis Kriesberg and Stuart J. Thorson, *Timing the De-Escalation of International Conflicts* (Syracuse University Press, 1991), 79. And 'U Thant arrives today to Cuba,' 30 October 1962, *Al-ahram* (source consulted in Arabic)

⁴⁷ Egyptian press picked up on Chinese dissatisfaction. See 'Chinese press print an abridged version of Khrushchev's decision and Albania's radio ignores it' *Al-ahram* 30 October. Source consulted in Arabic.

⁴⁸Letter reproduced verbatim in: Heikal, "*Abd al-Nasir wa-al-'alam* (source consulted in Arabic).

“consolidate peace like no other can.”⁴⁹ The letter left a positive impact in the White House and Kennedy’s advisors wanted to show it to Kennedy as an “obvious note of congratulations on [his] handling of [the] Cuban crisis.”⁵⁰

Nasser also hit a positive note in the letter he wrote to Khrushchev on the 6th of November. He mentioned Egypt’s appreciation of the “wise and prudent” positions the USSR and Khrushchev personally had shown during the crisis.⁵¹ Three decisions in particular were deemed worthy of praise by Nasser: the diversion of Soviet ships to avoid confrontation with the US-imposed quarantine, the positive response to U Thant’s mediation efforts and ultimately the decision to remove the missiles from Cuba. Nasser ended by telling Khrushchev that “true courage is to perform one’s duties. We believe that your courage in dealing with this crisis shows a great sense of duty toward humankind.”⁵²

Cuba’s behavior during the crisis however was seen under less favorable light compared to Nasser’s praise of Kennedy and Khrushchev. As the crisis was receding, Nasser’s close adviser Heikal wrote an editorial reflecting some unusual criticism in Cairo directed at Cuba’s handling of the crisis.⁵³ Cuba was criticized for allowing the Soviet Union to completely run the show on its behalf during the crisis, rather than acting in an independent and non-aligned way. Heikal compared the Cuban experience of 1962 and the Egyptian experience in 1956 during the Suez crisis. While in 1956, Nasser challenged the British, French, and Israeli invaders, during the Cuban crisis it was Khrushchev who responded to Kennedy’s letters, and it was the Soviet leader who made the commitment to dismantle the missile bases, not the Cuban leadership. In other words, Havana gave away too much to Moscow. Such criticism shows that underneath the sympathy and public support to Cuba, lurked a skepticism in its ability to chart a truly independent and non-aligned course like the one Cairo was advocating at the time.

The influence that the Cuban missile crisis had on enforcing Nasser’s position on neutrality is noteworthy. The crisis demonstrated the little leverage smaller countries can

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Brubeck memo to Bundy, Nov. 13, 1962, NSF, Box 169, UAR, Nasser Correspondence, JFKL quoted in: Bass, *Support Any Friend*, 110.

⁵¹ ‘President’s Nasser Message to Khrushchev,’ 6 November 1962, *Al-ahram* (source consulted in Arabic)

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ Heikal, ‘The difference between Suez and Cuba,’ 02 November 1962, *Al-ahram* (source consulted in Arabic)

ultimately have once their quest for nuclear protection evolves into a great power nuclear game. One of the lessons Nasser took away from the crisis was that a Cuba-like situation was something to be avoided. He adamantly rejected being part of a nuclear alliance. Increasingly, Nasser's fear of entrapment into a global nuclear confrontation exceeded any benefits that might accrue from hosting nuclear forces in Egypt. When proposals were made that Egypt should consider hosting Soviet nuclear forces to counter Israeli nuclear potential, Nasser would fiercely reject the idea, citing the events in the Caribbean in 1962. Egypt's policy against hosting foreign nuclear forces remained a solid component of Nasser's approach to the nuclear question.⁵⁴

Conclusion

Despite being thousands of miles away, Cairo's diplomacy was pulled into the Cuban crisis primarily through its presence on the Security Council as well as its prominent role among the non-aligned and decolonized states in the United Nations. The ambition to carve an independent and non-aligned course is instrumental to understanding Cairo's approach to the crisis and its diplomacy in the United Nations. Behind Cairo's proactive role in the Security Council was a sense that Egypt and other neutral and decolonized states are entitled to play an active international role. Their new status as independent states and full members of the United Nations and its bodies presented a window to challenge the bipolar structure and represent their own interests. Egypt was also keen to present the non-aligned states as a constructive and independent actor on the world stage in the face of the skeptical views by the greater powers.

However little influence it had on shaping the course of events in the Caribbean, Cairo aspired for a proactive role through the UN and groups of like-minded states. Using its membership in the Security Council and its clout among the newly independent states, Cairo was at the heart of efforts by a group of heterogeneous, neutral and mostly Afro-Asian states to press for de-escalation and a bigger role for the United Nations in resolving the crisis. Egypt was part of a UN troika that pressed U Thant to use his offices for mediation. Egypt, with Ghana,

⁵⁴Samy Sharaf, Nasser's Chief of Staff, Personal Interview. 4 June 2011.

submitted a draft Security Council resolution to shake the duopoly by the East and the West in addressing the crisis and in support for proactive UN mediation.

Egypt's perceptions of the crisis were built on an entrenched foreign policy identity/orientation around neutrality, which Nasser championed since his assumption of power in Egypt. Establishing foreign missile or military bases was one aspect of the Cold War that Nasser was vehemently opposed to. What happened in Cuba showed how an added nuclear dimension can make these bases a source of serious international confrontation and tension. Heated competition between the US and the USSR to gain global influence can come at the expense of smaller states seeking an independent foreign policy.

In a sense, the crisis reinforced both Egypt's Cold War neutrality and its emerging anti-nuclear sentiments that were starting to take shape at the time. The crisis demonstrated the dangers of being entangled in alliances that can ultimately turn to great power confrontations chipping away the sovereignty and independence of smaller states. In a way, the crisis was a practical demonstration of the dangerous risks associated with global nuclear confrontations and perhaps fed into Nasser's own fears of entrapment in such conflicts if he veered off the non-aligned course. It is likely that the crisis entrenched Nasser's reluctance to join nuclear alliances.

Cairo and the Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962

James G. Hershberg

In October 1962, as the Cuban Missile Crisis riveted the world – and as Asia nervously watched Sino-Indian border clashes threaten war between the continent's (and globe's) two most populous countries – Egypt, then known as the United Arab Republic, was diverted by yet another crisis: in Yemen, to which Cairo was rushing troops (with secret Soviet help) to boost a new "free officers" regime that had just overthrown a religious monarchy and faced opposition from royalist tribes backed by neighboring Saudi Arabia. *Nasser's Gamble*, as the intervention's leading scholar aptly calls it, undertaken with Khrushchev's avid and "remarkably fast" support even as Operation Anadyr covertly transported nuclear arms to Cuba, launched a costly and ultimately unsuccessful five-year involvement that some have likened to Egypt's Vietnam.¹

Cairo's connection to the Cuban Missile Crisis has received scant attention in the written record (at least in English), hampered by the lack of access to the most important pertinent Egyptian archives, the collections of the foreign ministry and of President Nasser and the Presidential Council. Hassan Elbahtimy's essay, featured above, delves deeply into the attitudes of Egyptian policymakers and elites, especially regarding nonalignment and nuclear weapons, as well as Cairo's UN diplomacy.² By contrast, the present paper, in the spirit of going beyond the

The author thanks, in connection with this paper and associated conference, Hassan Elbahtimy, Christian F. Ostermann, Malcolm Byrne, Kian Byrne, and Leila Afzal, as well as Ryan Musto, Guy Laron, and Sergey Radchenko.

¹ Jesse Ferris, "Soviet Support for Egypt's Intervention in Yemen, 1962-1963," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 10:4 (Fall 2008), pp. 5-36; Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble: How Intervention in Yemen Caused the Six-Day War and the Decline of Egyptian Power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013, 2015). Using a diverse array of Russian, Egyptian, and other sources, Ferris shows that, contrary to the "traditional, and not illogical," view that Moscow single-mindedly focused on the clandestine deployment to Cuba, Khrushchev reacted speedily in late September and early October by sending transport planes, pilots, and other aid to Egypt to defend the new Yemeni regime. "Far from 'restrained' or 'distracted' by the mounting crisis over Cuba, as conventional accounts have it," Ferris writes, "Khrushchev's reaction to the revolution in Yemen was swift, vigorous, and complementary to his aggressive policy in the Caribbean." Ferris, "Soviet Support," p. 21; Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble*, p. 85. As the missile crisis erupted, Khrushchev discussed the Yemen situation with Romanian visitors, explaining Soviet military help for the "progressive" Yemenis via Egypt. Although not really socialist, Nasser represented an "intermediate step" in that direction "which will be removed in time," the Soviet leader explained, and could be presently supported in order to inflict a blow against "the forces of imperialism." Romanian record of Khrushchev-Romanian talks, Moscow, 23 October 1962, *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 17/18 (Fall 2012), pp. 517-18 (hereafter *CWIHPB*), accessible at <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115793>.

² Elbahtimy's contribution is part of a broader book manuscript, tentatively titled *Nasser, Egypt and the Arrival of the Nuclear Age, 1955-1970* (Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming).

parties immediately involved in the superpower confrontation to examine the "global Cuban missile crisis,"³ probes the UAR's involvement in the event's international diplomacy primarily through declassified US government documents (i.e., State Department records from the National Archives and White House materials from the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library), supplemented by archival materials from Russia, Brazil, Cuba, and elsewhere, published by the Wilson Center's Cold War International History Project – but does not use Egyptian or Arabic-language materials.⁴ It is hoped that the two inquiries may, therefore, be complementary and mutually informative.

Despite its urgent military entanglement closer to home in Yemen, the UAR could hardly avoid reacting to and participating in the diplomacy of the Cuban crisis, which, after all, raised the prospect of an apocalyptic thermonuclear conflagration. Since helping to oust King Farouk a decade earlier, the charismatic President Gamal Abdel Nasser had boosted Egypt's stature as a major international and not merely regional actor. In the Arab world, his electrifying rhetoric had promoted unity, opposition to Israel, and anti-imperialism (highlighted by his defiance of England and France by nationalizing the Suez Canal in 1956), although his pan-Arab aspirations had suffered a blow when, in September 1961, Syria withdrew from the "United Arab Republic" he had created as a first step toward a broader Arab entity. Within Africa, Nasser had ardently backed anti-colonial movements and leaders, from Patrice Lumumba in the former Belgian Congo to Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana, and belonged to the radical "Casablanca Group" forged in 1961 by Morocco, the UAR, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, the Provisional Government of Algeria (still battling France for independence), and Libya. In another gesture of militant anti-imperialism, Cairo in 1957 headquartered the new Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization (AAPSO). At the same time, along with Yugoslavia's Tito, India's Nehru, and Indonesia's Sukarno, Nasser was a pillar of the emerging "neutralist" or "nonaligned" group. He participated actively in the Afro-Asian gathering in Bandung (1955) and Non-Aligned Movement heads of state founding summit in Belgrade (1961), and hosted several NAM meetings. In accord with Nasser's signature on

³ See "The Global Cuban Missile Crisis at 50," special issue of the *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, no. 17/18 (fall 2012), co-edited by James G. Hershberg and Christian F. Ostermann.

⁴ The author hopes to refine the account in the present version of this paper in the future after conducting further research at the JFKL (not just online) and receiving additional State Department documents requested through Mandatory Declassification Review (MDR).

Belgrade's final declaration, the UAR backed nuclear disarmament, opposed foreign military bases, supported East-West negotiations on such contentious issues as Berlin, and tried to carefully navigate a path between both superpower blocs while remaining reasonably friendly with both Washington/Kennedy and Moscow/Khrushchev.⁵

All these considerations, as well as domestic politics, the ongoing Arab-Israeli standoff, and other factors, could influence Nasser's and Egypt's handling of the missile crisis – but what made Cairo's diplomacy especially pertinent was the coincidence that, in 1962, the UAR held one of the six non-permanent seats on the United Nations Security Council, a scene of continuous and intense negotiating and maneuvering related to the superpower confrontation.⁶ In New York City, the UAR was represented by its new UN ambassador, Mahmoud Riad, Cairo's ex-envoy in Damascus, later foreign minister (1964-72) and Arab League Secretary-General (1972-79).⁷

Prior to the crisis, Egypt's attitude toward Cuba was generally friendly but had grown a bit strained. Nasser, reported his confidant, Mohamed Heikal, had initial "suspicions" toward the Cuban revolutionaries but soon overcame them.⁸ In mid-1959, he had welcomed Ernesto "Che" Guevara to Egypt and compared notes on land reform and revolution. Defense minister Raul Castro visited the following year, but a dispute ensued when the Egyptians pressured him to tone down a speech. A few months later, in September 1960, during the UN General Assembly in New York City, Nasser met Fidel Castro, who expressed admiration for his defiant

⁵ Despite its ostensibly nonaligned status, Egypt was widely seen as tilting towards Moscow, given Khrushchev's eager courtship and substantial Soviet military and economic support, including funding for the expensive Aswan Dam after Washington dropped out of the bidding. On Soviet-Egyptian relations, see, e.g., Mohamed Heikal, *The Sphinx and the Commissar: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Influence in the Middle East* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978). On the other hand, Nasser had appreciated Eisenhower's refusal to support the British-French-Israeli Suez adventure in 1956, and JFK had made a concerted effort to lure Nasser (along with other African nationalists) into closer relations. See Philip E. Muehlenbeck, *Betting on the Africans: John F. Kennedy's Courting of African Nationalist Leaders* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), chap. 6.

⁶ Besides the UAR, the other five non-permanent UNSC members in 1962 were: Chile, Ghana, Ireland, Romania, and Venezuela; in 1966 the non-permanent UNSC membership was raised from six to ten.

⁷ Another important UAR figure present at the UN during these events was undersecretary Omar Loutfi, a key Thant aide, who accompanied the acting secretary-general on his October 30-31 visit to Havana and at key meetings in New York on the crisis. Presumably Loutfi reported in some form to Cairo, but details are not known. A career diplomat, he was later Egypt's ambassador to Sweden and the People's Republic of China, among other positions.

⁸ Mohamed Heikal, *Nasser: The Cairo Documents* (New English Library, 1972; citations from Mentor paperback, 1973), p. 307.

stand over Suez.⁹ Conferring at the same Hotel Theresa in Harlem where the Cuban had famously bear-hugged Khrushchev, the Egyptian invited Castro to join the "neutrals" in their incipient movement to form a buffer between the rival superpower blocs.¹⁰ Cuba did, in fact, join NAM from the start, the only Latin American nation to do so, fully participating in a June 1961 preparatory meeting in Cairo and the foundational Belgrade summit three months later (a few other Latin American countries such as Brazil also came, but only as observers).¹¹ At the same time, however, Havana's delegation (led by President Osvaldo Dorticós) annoyed some relative moderates, including Tito, Nehru, and presumably Nasser, by staking out militant anti-US stands, raising questions about how authentically nonaligned Cuba (and by implication NAM) really was.

Diplomatically, Cairo supported Havana, and Heikal sensed "a mutual and growing admiration" between Castro and Nasser.¹²

Nasser strongly opposed the April 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion, joining Tito to denounce "the foreign intervention."¹³ When Kennedy wrote him (at State Department suggestion), condemning Cuban oppression, stressing that US armed forces had not intervened, and defending the invasion as "freedom-loving citizens taking up arms to rid their homeland of tyranny and oppression," and "Small groups of Cuban patriots, determined at all costs to restore the political independence of their motherland ... risk[ing] their lives against overwhelming odds," Nasser replied with a lengthy rejoinder urging Kennedy to seek reconciliation with Castro, whom the Egyptian insisted had indicated (when they met) a sincere readiness for "cordial relations" with the United States. While frankly referring to an "American intervention in Cuban events," contrary to the thrust of JFK's letter, Nasser nevertheless praised

⁹ Heikal, *Nasser*, pp. 303-306.

¹⁰ Max Frankel, "Nasser Asks Cuba to Join Neutrals," *New York Times*, 26 September 1960, p. 1; Foster Hailey, "Nasser Confers with 4 Leaders," *New York Times*, 26 September 1960, p. 16.

¹¹ James G. Hershberg, "'High-spirited Confusion': Brazil, the 1961 Belgrade Non-Aligned Conference, and the Limits of an 'Independent' Foreign Policy during the High Cold War," *Cold War History* 7, no. 3 (August 2007), pp. 373-88.

¹² Heikal, *Nasser*, p. 306.

¹³ Jay Walz, "Nasser and Tito Vow Aid to Cuba," *New York Times*, 20 April 1961, p. 13

his "moral courage" for admitting responsibility and refraining from ordering a direct US military strike that could have endangered world peace.¹⁴

In March 1962, at the Security Council, the UAR, along with Ghana and the Soviet bloc, had supported a Cuban resolution aimed at blocking actions passed by the recent Organization of American States (OAS) foreign ministers' meeting in Punta del Este, Uruguay.¹⁵ Yet, earlier that month the UAR ambassador in Washington, Mostafa Kamel, had suggested a less enthusiastic Egyptian attitude toward Cuba's pro-Soviet and pro-communist inclination (Castro had openly declared his fealty to Marxism-Leninism a few months earlier). Speaking "in strictest confidence," Kamel revealed to a State Department official that "the UAR had sent a circular to its diplomatic representatives instructing them to exert all possible influence on their Cuban colleagues to urge that Cuba renounce its affiliations with the Communist Bloc and become a non-aligned nation." The envoy added that the UAR believed Castro's regime "might soon fall and give way to a neutralist government." His American listener was, to put it mildly, skeptical, and with "due respect," seriously doubted the NAM nations' capacity to influence Cuban events, especially when "based on an unsound premise."¹⁶

In the months leading up to the crisis, Washington discerned hints of strains between Cairo and Havana. In late August 1962, an Egyptian journalist told a US diplomat that bilateral relations were "more than cool," citing the UAR government's decision to block reporters (including himself) from visiting Cuba.¹⁷ In early October, at the UN, Havana had vainly hoped that the UAR and other NAM and "Casablanca Group" countries would push through

¹⁴ Acting Secretary (Bohlen) to President, "Subject: Suggested Letter to President Nasser on Cuba," 27 April 1961, and Kennedy to Nasser, 3 May 1961, both United Arab Republic: Subject: Nasser correspondence, 1961: 20 January-30 April (JFKNSF-169-003); and Nasser to Kennedy, 18 May 1961, and L.D. Battle, Executive Secretary (Melvin L. Manful) to McGeorge Bundy, "Subject: President Nasser's Reply to the President's May 3 Letter on Cuba," 24 May 1961, both United Arab Republic: Subject: Nasser correspondence, 1961: May-July (JFKNSF-169-004); all box 169, NSF, JFKL; also Heikal, *Nasser*, pp. 176-79.

¹⁵ *The Yearbook of the United Nations*, 1962 Part 1: The United Nations. Section 1: Political and Security questions. Chapter 8: Questions relating to the Americas, p. 103 (accessed on-line).

¹⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, UAR Ambassador Mostafa Kamel and State Department Near East official John R. Barrow, 1 March 1962, Central Decimal Files (CDF), 1960-63, 637.86b/3-162, box 1330, Record Group (RG) 59, National Archives (NA), College Park, MD.

¹⁷ Amembassy Cairo (Strong), Airgram A-162, "Subject: Comments on Cuban Embassy in Cairo and UAR-Cuban Relations," 24 August 1962, CDF, 1960-63, 637.86b, RG 59, NA, released to author through MDR, 12/27/19.

resolutions condemning US threats against Cuba, supporting the principle of non-intervention, and calling for Washington-Havana negotiations.¹⁸

The Crisis

Like dozens of other world leaders, Nasser first learned of the crisis through an ostensibly personal letter from JFK, its delivery by the US embassy timed to coincide with Kennedy's televised speech announcing the discovery of the missiles on Monday, October 22, at 7 p.m. (Washington time), a copy of which was also conveyed, translated into the local language. The version of the letter sent to Cairo (and sixteen other countries) concerned "the dangerous developments in Cuba and the action I have authorized," conveying the detection of "offensive Soviet nuclear missile bases" and the US demand to eliminate them, the request for an urgent UNSC meeting, and the imposition of an "immediate nuclear quarantine" of Cuba (which would actually begin on Wednesday morning, October 24). "I have told Mr. Khrushchev I hope we can resume the path of peaceful negotiations," Kennedy wrote.¹⁹

Due to the time difference, Kennedy spoke after midnight Cairo time, so serious deliberations there could not begin until the next day. To sweeten his prospective encounter with Nasser, to convey Kennedy's letter and speech, the State Department instructed U.S. Ambassador to Egypt John S. Badeau to relay positive news on a different topic of considerable concern to Egypt's leader. When Badeau approached Nasser on Cuba, he was to reiterate, based on a recent U.S. scientists' visit to Israel's nuclear reactor at Dimona, the U.S. assurance, originally given in June 1961, that the facility was, as the Israelis insisted, "intended for peaceful purposes only."²⁰ Nasser, however, was busy, and did not personally receive Badeau, who may

¹⁸ Telegrams from Polish Embassy, Havana (Jeleń), 14, 28 September 1962, *CWIHPB* 17/18 (Fall 2012), p. 475, 477, accessible at <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115751> and <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115753>; on Cuba's pre-crisis UN position, see esp. President Dorticòs' 8 October 1962 speech to the General Assembly.

¹⁹ State Department telegram (deptel) 448 to Amembassy Cairo et al., 6:03 am, 22 October 1962, United Arab Republic: Subject: Nasser Correspondence, November-December 1962, box 169, National Security Files (NSF), John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, MA (JFKL). This version of JFK's letter was sent to Bangkok, Canberra, Manila, Taipei, Seoul, Djakarta, Wellington, Phnom Penh, Saigon, Tokyo, Karachi, Tehran, Ankara, Athens, Cairo, Dublin, Accra, and Lagos. See also Heikal, *Nasser*, p. 186.

²⁰ State Department to Amembassy Cairo, deptel 451, 8:35 pm, 22 October 1962, United Arab Republic: General, 9/62-12/62, box 168, NSF, JFKL.

have instead delivered copies of JFK's letter and/or speech through Prime Minister Ali Sabri.²¹ Besides being intensely involved in the Yemen affair, Nasser was also vying to mediate the Sino-Indian border conflict, writing Zhou Enlai and Nehru to urge a cease-fire and negotiations, and did not immediately respond, directly or indirectly, to JFK's letter. On Tuesday, October 23, Washington concentrated its diplomacy on securing an endorsement of its imminent blockade ("quarantine") from the OAS, but also anticipated the action soon moving to the UN Security Council. After canvassing UNSC members, the US UN delegation headed by Ambassador Adlai E. Stevenson reported that, while the UK, France, and (Nationalist) China "can be counted on [for] complete support," along with Chile, Venezuela, and (for the most part) Ireland, the UAR was "so far non-committal, stating doubt as to possibility of worthwhile discussion on such short notice." (Ghana's stand could not be determined.)²²

Meanwhile, Riad consulted Alex Quaison-Sackey, Nkrumah's ambassador, and other African representatives on how to respond to the crisis.²³ Speaking to Valerian Zorin, the Soviet delegate, Riad "made much" of an unofficial draft Security Council resolution calling both for the removal of the US blockade and a halt to "arms stockpiling" in Cuba – an idea the USSR diplomat disdained for seeming to favor Washington's aims (even though it did not require the dismantling of missile sites already on the island). Zorin also reported that neutral states were drafting a resolution calling on interested parties to cease actions that could "directly or indirectly aggravate the situation," and on UN Acting Secretary-General U Thant to take immediate steps to alleviate the confrontation.²⁴

On Tuesday evening in New York, Egypt coordinated a group of about fifty countries, including nonaligned states, many but not all of whom had participated at Belgrade, for a meeting that lasted three hours, with consultations extending into Wednesday morning, Riad

²¹ Badeau met with Sabri on October 22: see State Department deptel 492 to Amembassy Cairo, 12:01 am, 8 November 1962, United Arab Republic: General, 9/62-12/62, box 168, NSF, JFKL.

²² USUN New York (Stevenson), tel. 1428, midnight, 23 October 1962, CDF, 1960-63, 330/10-2362, box 528, RG 59, NA.

²³ A US diplomat at the UN overheard Quaison-Sackey taking a phone call from "Mahmoud" early Tuesday and arranging the 3 pm meeting; the Ghanaian confirmed he had spoken with the UAR ambassador. US Embassy, Accra (Mahoney), unnumbered tel., 25 October 1962, CDF, 1960-63, 611.3722/10-2562, box 1227, RG 59, NA.

²⁴ Zorin telegram, 23 October 1962, *CWHPB* 8/9 (Winter 1996/97), pp. 284-85, accessible at <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111917>.

later told the Security Council; the meeting's sense was to push Thant's efforts to contain the crisis.²⁵ By late Tuesday night, US diplomats had gotten their hands on a proposed resolution resulting from these meetings, "drafted by UAR and Algeria and possibly Ghana," stating:

The Security Council

Having considered the recent serious developments in the Caribbean,

Noting with grave concern the threat to international peace and security,

Having listened to the parties directly concerned,

1. Calls upon the parties concerned to refrain from any action which may directly or indirectly further aggravate the situation and to take the necessary steps to bring the situation in the Caribbean back to the state of affairs existing prior to 22 October 1962.
2. Requests the Acting Secretary General to promptly confer with the parties directly concerned on the immediate steps to take to remove the existing threat to world peace,
3. Calls upon the parties concerned to comply forthwith with this resolution and provide every assistance to the Acting Secretary General in performing this task,
4. Requests the Acting Secretary General to report to the Council on the implementation of paragraph 2 of this resolution.²⁶

This may have been the proposal, submitted by Afghanistan and supported by Iraq, that Baghdad's delegate "interpreted as requiring immediate lifting of quarantine" – and that Cyprus delegate Zenon Rossides, who chaired the Tuesday evening meeting, reported that he had rebuffed "with help of Nigeria and others."²⁷ A slightly softer version would move forward on Wednesday.

²⁵ See Elbahtimy, "Egypt and the Cuban Missile Crisis," p. 10 n38, quoting Riad's UNSC remarks, 24 October 1962. Cyprus UN Ambassador Rossides, who said he chaired the Tuesday night meeting, told Stevenson deputy Charles Yost that participants went "beyond 'Belgrade countries'" and specifically mentioned "five Latin Americans but did not specify" and "confirmed presence Austria, Sweden, Afghanistan and Iraq; also mentioned Nigeria." US UN New York (Stevenson), tel. 1448, 9 pm, 24 October 1962, DNSA.

²⁶ US UN Mission, New York (Stevenson), tel. 1435, midnight, 23 October 1962, DNSA.

²⁷ US UN New York (Stevenson), tel. 1448, 9 pm, 24 October 1962, DNSA.

On Wednesday evening, October 24, Cairo time, as the US blockade went into effect, UAR leaders considered the Cuban events and moved to take more assertive action. For four hours, beginning at 6:15 pm, Nasser presided over a Presidential Council meeting at the Al-Qubbah (Koubbeh) Palace in north Cairo held to discuss, in the words of state-run press reports the next day, "the international situation resulting from the blockade against Cuba," i.e., not "resulting" from the Soviet nuclear missile deployment. As Prime Minister Ali Sabri announced on the Council's behalf afterwards, the UAR sought to resolve the crisis through negotiations involving the United States, USSR, and Cuba, promoted by the United Nations, and its UN delegate (Riad) had been instructed to "act in concert with the Afro-Asian bloc, the neutral states, and the Casablanca powers to secure such a settlement." Most importantly – the headline news for Americans²⁸ – the statement, echoed the next day by all Egyptian media, explicitly criticized the US blockade. At the same time, it "equally" opposed foreign military bases and demanded their liquidation, "wherever they may be," implicitly referring both to the US Guantanamo Bay naval base and to the Soviet missile installations in Cuba. Sabri repeated Cairo's support for the principle of disarmament, including the idea that states that did not produce nuclear weapons should not be supplied with them – a notion that could be read as rapping the Soviet nuclear deployment to Cuba, supporting the creation of nuclear weapon free zones (NWFZs), or both.²⁹

During their Wednesday evening meeting, the Egyptian leaders consulted by telephone with Riad in New York, where it was lunchtime. They conveyed guidance and heard a briefing on the ambassador's contacts with Thant and fellow diplomats in anticipation of an emergency Security Council meeting set to re-convene around 5 p.m.³⁰ At the Egyptian foreign ministry, meanwhile, deputy foreign minister Hafez Ismail organized a round-the-clock crisis group to monitor developments and coordinate communications with various diplomatic outposts.³¹ At

²⁸ "Blockade of Cuba Is Opposed by U.A.R.," *New York Times*, 25 October 1962, p. 22.

²⁹ "Council Takes Stand on Cuban Issue," Cairo Domestic Service in Arabic 2100 GMT 24 October 1962, FBIS Daily Report, 25 October 1962 (FBIS-FRB-62-209), p. B1; US Embassy, Cairo (Badeau), tel. 678, 25 October 1962, CDF, 1960-63, 611.3722, box 1227, RG 59, NA. (Besides the Cuban crisis, the meeting also discussed events in Yemen and the Sino-Indian border dispute, including Zhou's and Nehru's replies to Nasser's offer of mediation.)

³⁰ Sabri's statement indicated that the latest telephone contact occurred at 8 pm, Cairo time (1 pm in New York).

³¹ "How Cairo followed developments in Cuba minute by minute," *Al-ahram*, 26 October 1962, in Elbahtimy, "Egypt and the Cuban Missile Crisis," p. 7.

the UN, with various countries' representatives "stirring around looking for a way out of an extremely dangerous situation" and several mediation efforts in the air, US diplomats heard that the "UAR (together with Algeria) was floating a draft 'restrain yourselves and talk' resolution."³²

Riad was actually collaborating most closely with Quaison-Sackey, his colleague from Ghana, who also sat on the Security Council. Ghana's ambassador had a strong interest in Cuba and impressed colleagues as capable and energetic. A frequent visitor to Cuba, in early October he had approached Adlai Stevenson to inform him of a feeler, received from Havana's foreign minister Raul Roa in August, as to whether Ghana (or perhaps Canada) might act as a "go between in attempt re-establish better [US-Cuban] relations." Explaining the overture, Quaison-Sackey said Roa and Fidel Castro were "most concerned about [the] degree to which Russians and Chinese had penetrated Cuba and [were] striving for control." Although Roa had allegedly thought this effort might be countered by improved ties with Washington, Quaison-Sackey acknowledged that "perhaps...things had gone too far" with the recent Soviet military build-up in Cuba and new US shipping embargo. Stevenson politely deflected the idea, stressing that the conflict was not bilateral but between Cuba and the entire hemisphere (a common US refrain).³³

Meeting Quaison-Sackey on October 23, as the crisis erupted, the US ambassador to Ghana, William P. Mahoney Jr., asked his view on Cuba, after mentioning that, in a recent conversation, Nkrumah "had called Mr. Castro a fool after I had outlined to him manner in which Castro had bankrupted his country and sold out to Russians." Quaison-Sackey, who doubled as Ghana's ambassador to Havana, had mixed views. He thought Washington had "mismanaged its relations with Cuba and [was] also partially responsible for forcing Castro [to] seek all-out Soviet help," and called Castro "not a Communist but a Marxist, although he was surrounded by Communists who were forcing his hand." At the same time, he felt Cuba under Castro was "going down-hill to point where people were hungry" and, since a Soviet-Cuban military pact in August, was now essentially "a Soviet armed camp." Questioning the legality of

³² Harlan Cleveland to Rusk/Ball, "Subject: Cuba in the Security Council," 24 October 1962, U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1961-1963*, Vols. X/XI/XII, microfiche supplement, doc. 384.

³³ New York (Stevenson), tel. 1101, 5 October 1962, CDF, 1960-63, 737.00, box 1625, RG 59, NA.

JFK's "quarantine" and critical of nuclear missile deployments to Cuba and Turkey, Quaison-Sackey considered both sides in the dispute to be "rascals." Despite disagreeing, Mahoney was taken with Quaison-Sackey, calling him "quite a formidable person...bright, articulate, and self-assured, almost to point of arrogance... also quite candid and has well-ordered mind."³⁴

When the UN Security Council met Wednesday evening, Riad and Quaison-Sackey, speaking near the debate's end, gave strikingly similar presentations.³⁵ Both stressed fealty to principles established by the UN Charter and the Bandung and Belgrade conferences, of non-intervention and self-determination, and endorsed Cuba's right to choose its own form of government and take necessary measures to defend its territory and political system (of course, all remembered the Bay of Pigs, which both Cairo and Accra had blasted). Reflecting his instructions from Cairo, Riad (per a UN paraphrase) "declared that the imposition of a quarantine in the Caribbean was not only contrary to international law and the accepted norms of freedom of navigation but would lead to a heightening of world tensions and threatened international peace and security."³⁶ Both Riad and Quaison-Sackey noted that this action had been taken without the approval of the Security Council, "which had primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security," and expressed skepticism about the "allegedly offensive character" of the weaponry installed in Cuba – with the Ghanaian, quoting Nkrumah, alluding to allegedly false intelligence regarding Cuba that had led Washington astray before.³⁷ In his own speech, which clearly reflected the Presidential Council determination, Riad

³⁴ U.S. Embassy, Accra (Mahoney), unnumbered tel., 25 October 1962, CDF, 1960-63, 611.3722/10-2562, box 1227, RG 59, NA. Mahoney was unhappy with Quaison-Sackey's October 24 UNSC speech on the Cuban matter, however. See below. Quaison-Sackey later briefly became Ghana's foreign minister shortly before Nkrumah's overthrow in early 1966.

³⁵ For the texts of their speeches, see UN Security Council Official Records, 1024th Meeting, 24 October 1962, pp. 10-14, 14-20, accessible at https://digitallibrary.un.org/search?ln=en&rm=&ln=en&sf=&so=d&rg=50&c=United+Nations+Digital+Library+System&of=hb&fti=0&fct__1=Meeting+Records&fti=0&p=Security+Council+1962, attachment S_PV-1024-EN.

³⁶ *The Yearbook of the United Nations*, 1962 Part 1: The United Nations. Section 1: Political and Security questions. Chapter 8: Questions relating to the Americas, p. 106 (accessed on-line).

³⁷ Quaison-Sackey, repeatedly emphasizing the importance of seeing "proof" of the US claims that the Soviets had provided "offensive" weapons to Cuba, quoted Nkrumah as saying: "The President of the United States has been informed that there are rocket bases in Cuba. We have no means of knowing whether that is the case or not. We do know, however, that intelligence reports on Cuba have misled the Government of the United States before now and have caused serious damage." Quaison-Sackey remarks, UNSC 1024th meeting, 24 October 1962 (cited above), p. 18; see also telegram from Soviet UN delegate V.A. Zorin, 25 October 1962, *CW/HPB* 8/9 (Winter 1996/97), pp. 285-86, accessible at <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110989>. The American ambassador to

also supported a "neutral, socialist Cuba," implicitly accepting the US view that the island should not be turned into a Soviet military base.³⁸ Riad also proclaimed that the UAR, as a "loyal" UN member, believed all countries "should refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State" and that "member States should settle their disputes by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security are not endangered" – statements that inspired a complaint that the UAR might apply these principles in its dealings with Israel, which it had refused to recognize or negotiate with.³⁹

Besides their speeches, the UAR and Ghana representatives, serving as, Quaison-Sackey later recalled, the nonaligned states' "unofficial spokesmen,"⁴⁰ co-sponsored a resolution to promote negotiations, calling on UN Acting Secretary-General Thant to promptly and actively enter the crisis diplomacy and intervene between the superpowers. That morning, Riad, Quaison-Sackey, and Cyprus' Rossides, who that month chaired the UN's Asian-African group, effectively representing NAM nations, had seen Thant to explain the resolution and urge him to move briskly to promote a resolution to the dispute.⁴¹ The UAR/Ghana draft resolution, resembling but slightly (and importantly) differing from the earlier version quoted above, read in full:

The Security Council,

Ghana later "strongly" protested Quaison-Sackey's questioning of the US claim in his October 24 UNSC speech directly to Nkrumah five days later, saying "his posture makes Ghana look slightly ridiculous in the light of events occurring a few days thereafter, including the Khrushchev admission." Nkrumah purportedly agreed and said he had reprimanded Quaison-Sackey "for the extremity of these remarks." U.S. Embassy, Accra (Mahoney), Airgram A-278, "Call on President Nkrumah: Cuban Situation and deliver President Kennedy's Letter of Oct. 27, 1962," 1 November 1962, CDF, 1960-63, 611.3722, box 1229, RG 59, NA.

³⁸ A fellow UAR diplomat underlined this aspect of Riad's speech to a US colleague. NY (Stevenson), tel. 1455, midnight, 25 October 1962, CDF, 1960-63, 611.3722/10-2562, box 1227, RG 59, NA. The state-run Cairo daily *Akhbar* on October 25, citing "informed [UAR] circles," listed a "proclamation of [Cuba's] neutrality" as the first element of the UAR government's position on the crisis. US Embassy, Cairo (Badeau), tel. 678, 25 October 1962, 611.3722, CDF, 1960-63, box 1227, RG 59, NA. Riad later told Stevenson he had asked the Soviet delegate Zorin whether Moscow could accept Cuba's neutralization, "such as he had suggested in his Security Council speech," but received no concrete reply. New York (Stevenson), tel. 1501, 8 pm, 27 October 1962, CDF, 1960-63, 611.3722/10-2762, box 1228, RG 59, NA.

³⁹ See, e.g., "Consistency," letter from Abe Shefferman, *Washington Post*, 15 November 1962, p. A28.

⁴⁰ Alex Quaison-Sackey, *Africa Unbound: Reflections of an African Statesman* (New York: Praeger, 1963), p. 117.

⁴¹ Louis B. Fleming (*Los Angeles Times*), "U.N. Neutrals Seek 'Freeze' In Caribbean," *Washington Post*, 25 October 1962, p. A1; US UN, New York (Stevenson), tel. 1448, 9 pm, 24 October 1962, DNSA.

Having considered the recent serious developments in the Caribbean,

Noting with grave concern the threat to international peace and security,

Having listened to the parties directly concerned,

1. Requests the Acting Secretary-General to promptly confer with the parties directly concerned on the immediate steps to be taken to remove the existing threat to world peace, and to normalize the situation in the Caribbean;
2. Calls upon the parties concerned to comply forthwith with this resolution and provide every assistance to the acting Secretary-General in performing this task;
3. Requests the Acting Secretary-General to report to the council on the implementation of paragraph 1 of this resolution;
4. Calls upon the parties concerned to refrain meanwhile from any action which may directly or indirectly further aggravate the situation.⁴²

The proposed resolution triggered some urgent diplomacy, and, fittingly for a measure advanced by two NAM stalwarts, dissatisfied both Moscow and Washington. Already irked by Riad's speech, with its disapproval of the blockade, US officials were ambivalent about interjecting U Thant into US-Soviet diplomacy, fearing a distraction from the exchanges between Kennedy and Khrushchev. The Americans wanted to avoid any protracted diplomacy that might delay a prompt resolution to the crisis. A Soviet agreement not to ship additional weapons to Cuba for two to three weeks in exchange for a suspension of the "quarantine" while negotiations proceeded, as the UN secretary-general was proposing, "at the request of a large number of member states," in messages to Kennedy and Khrushchev,⁴³ failed to address the overriding problem of the missile sites already installed or being constructed on the island –

⁴² "New U.N. Draft Resolution," *New York Times*, 25 October 1962, p. 23; USUN NY (Stevenson), tel. 1450, 24 October 1962, CDF, 1960-63, 330/10-2462, box 528, RG 59, NA

⁴³ On the Acting UN Secretary-General's efforts, see, e.g., A. Walter Dorn and Robert Pauk, "Unsung Mediator: U Thant and the Cuban Missile Crisis," *Diplomatic History* 33:2 (April 2009) and A. Walter Dorn and Robert Pauk, "50 Years ago: The Cuban Missile Crisis and its underappreciated hero," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Nov.-Dec. 2012 (on line: 11 Oct 2012). On Soviet frustration at US quibbles over Thant's proposal, which Moscow accepted, see, e.g., Zorin's report of his meeting with Thant on Friday evening, Telegram from Soviet UN Mission, New York, 26 October 1962, *CW/HPB* 8/9 (Winter 1996/97), pp. 289-90, accessible at <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110991>.

and Washington worried that if diplomacy dragged on, more missiles could be made operational.

The Soviets also had qualms. Moscow's UN delegate, Valerian Zorin, told Thant his proposal was "incorrect and wrong-headed" for putting the "provocative" US actions, such as its illegal blockade, on the same level as the "normal" and "lawful" measures Cuba was taking for its own self-defense. The Soviets had a comparable problem with the UAR/Ghana resolution. Repeatedly Wednesday, Zorin reported, Soviet diplomats met with Riad, Quaison-Sackey, and other delegates from "neutral" African and Asian countries to urge them to include in their Security Council resolution a clear demand that the United States "lift its naval blockade and cease its other provocative actions against Cuba."⁴⁴ In fact, as noted above, the initial version of the resolution, obtained by US diplomats late Tuesday night, effectively opposed the blockade, calling on the parties "to take the necessary steps to bring the situation in the Caribbean back to the state of affairs existing prior to 22 October 1962."⁴⁵ Yet, as introduced Wednesday night, the proposed resolution did not do so – at least not explicitly, merely mandating Thant to confer with both sides regarding "immediate steps to be taken to remove the existing threat to world peace," and urging both sides "to refrain from any action which may directly or indirectly further aggravate the situation."⁴⁶

Moscow's mixed feelings about the UAR/Ghana resolution reached Washington's ears. Probing for a clue of how Washington viewed the proposal that Wednesday evening, a Zorin aide, Roland Timerbaev (who specialized in nuclear issues), speaking to a US diplomat, "said Soviet Union would have to vote against it because it would have effect of tacitly approving US blockade." When a US official followed up with an Egyptian UN representative, Mohamed Hassan El-Zayyat "confirmed that Sov[iet]s had informed UAR they would veto res[olution], giving same reasons as Timerbaev had given to us." However, Zayyat personally doubted the Soviets would really cast their veto, "because if they did so, reaction of neutral nations would be strongly against Sov[iet]s and neutrals would then swing to side of West." Speaking to his

⁴⁴ Telegram from Soviet UN delegate V.A. Zorin, 25 October 1962, *CWIHPB* 8/9 (Winter 1996/97), pp. 285-86, accessible at <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110989>.

⁴⁵ See USUN New York (Stevenson), tel. 1435, midnight, 23 October 1962, cited above.

⁴⁶ Text of proposed UAR/Ghana UNSC resolution, cited above.

American colleague, the Egyptian, who later became Cairo's foreign minister and UN ambassador, tried to soften the impact of Riad's Security Council speech earlier that evening. Perhaps lost in his presentation, Zayyat feared, were three main points: "A) UAR called for a 'neutral, socialist Cuba'; in other words, UAR believes US is absolutely correct in resisting establishing Sov[iet] puppet state 90 miles from Florida coast." (Belgrade's deputy UN rep, Miroslav Kreacic, told the Americans that Riad's reference to preserving a "neutral socialist Cuba" was an "important and commonly agreed element among many neutrals including Yugoslav," although Zorin had bitterly resisted strong Yugoslav appeals to consider this idea.) Riad had also stressed two other important elements, Zayyat noted: "B) UAR spoke against introduction of any nuclear weapons into Latin America; this corresponded with strong desire UAR and other neutrals avoid further spread nuclear weapons. C) UAR called for removal of all foreign bases, including Sov[iet] bases in Cuba (he noted he had been very impressed by US pictures of Cuban rocket bases); while realizing liquidation of bases could not be accomplished overnight if rough balance of power to be maintained, UAR considered this to be essential long-range element of settlement."⁴⁷

Soviet documents reveal that Zayyat accurately identified the Soviet quandary over the UAR/Ghana proposal. Reporting to Moscow, Zorin indeed faulted the draft resolution for failing to directly call on Washington to lift its "quarantine" on Cuba, but commented that, despite being "vague" on this point, the speeches by Riad and Quaison-Sackey clearly implied a demand that Kennedy revoke such measures. "Despite the shortcomings of the draft," the Soviet delegate cabled, "it must be noted that, if approved, it would significantly limit the USA's capacity to carry out the blockade and its other aggressions against Cuba." Moreover, he added, the General Assembly was unlikely to approve a more favorable (towards Moscow) step, since a majority of "the Afro-Asian group" supported the UAR/Ghana resolution – exactly the dynamic Zayyat discerned. Not seeing any better prospect on the horizon and loathe to incur non-aligned ire, Zorin pragmatically proposed that, instead of vetoing the resolution, he (and Warsaw Pact ally Romania's delegate, who would emulate the Soviets) should instead, after

⁴⁷ US UN Mission, New York (Stevenson), tel. 1455, midnight (rec'd 1:29 am), 25 October 1962, CDF, 1960-63, 611.3722, box 1227, RG 59, NA. A previously declassified version of this cable redacted all references (both names and nationalities) to the identities of the Soviet, Egyptian, and Yugoslav diplomats. See sanitized copy in DNSA.

mentioning "its shortcomings and weaknesses," abstain if it had the votes to pass – or even vote in favor if it would otherwise fail.⁴⁸ Considering the issue on Thursday, October 25, the Soviet Presidium endorsed Zorin's plan (Anastas Mikoyan, Khrushchev's top associate, even urged supporting the UAR/Ghana proposal rather than abstaining).⁴⁹ The Kremlin still felt ambivalent about the measure. Deputy Foreign Minister Vasili Kuznetsov told Soviet-bloc envoys in Moscow that the UAR/Ghana draft "miss[ed] fundamental issues" and termed it "kind of a band-aid, but one that nevertheless is significant." In contrast to that ambiguous act, Kuznetsov emphasized, the Afro-Asian nations' statements were "good and strong" and the "neutral nations" exerted "strong" pressure on Washington.⁵⁰

Yet, Moscow's own retreat from threatening to veto the UAR/Ghana resolution showed that it, too, was occasionally susceptible to NAM's diplomatic muscle-flexing.

On Thursday, October 25 – as, in Cairo, state-controlled media followed the lead provided by Sabri's statement, indicating "disapproval" of the American position⁵¹ – the State Department, irritated by Riad's speech the previous evening, summoned Nasser's ambassador to Washington, Mostafa Kamel, for a detailed briefing on the US actions in the Cuban crisis.⁵² Rebutting UAR objections lodged in Cairo and (more visibly) New York, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs Phillips Talbot defended JFK's "quarantine" as "fully legal" under the 1947 Rio de Janeiro Treaty, "consistent" with the UN Charter, and not threatening peace, unlike the USSR's covert introduction of nuclear missiles into the hemisphere. Acutely annoyed that some Egyptians (and others, such as Quaison-Sackey) were skeptical of the American claim, Talbot also laid out the evidence to blame Moscow for provoking the crisis by deploying offensive nuclear weaponry to Cuba. The day before, the State

⁴⁸ Telegram from Soviet UN delegate V.A. Zorin, 25 October 1962, *CWIHPB* 8/9 (Winter 1996/97), pp. 285-86.

⁴⁹ Notes of Soviet Presidium, Protocol no. 61, 25 October 1962, *CWIHPB* 17/18 (Fall 2012), p. 308, accessible at <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115136>.

⁵⁰ See Kuznetsov's comments on October 26-27, reported, respectively, by the East German and Polish embassies, in *CWIHPB* 17/18 (Fall 2012), pp. 618, 482-83, accessible at <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115390> and <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115763>.

⁵¹ See esp. US Embassy, Cairo (Badeau), tel. 679, 25 October 1962, CDF, 1960-63, 611.3722, box 1227, RG 59, NA

⁵² The description of the Talbot-Kamel conversation in this and ensuing paragraphs relies on State Department deptel to Amembassies Cairo (#460) and London (#2310), 7 pm, 25 October 1962, CDF, 1960-63, 611.3722, box 1227, RG 59, NA.

Department had already authorized briefings for key Arab and African countries at the UN to view the still-secret US intelligence photos, hoping "to head off neutralist action that could compromise President Kennedy's blockade order."⁵³ Now, a few hours before Stevenson dramatically unveiled U-2 reconnaissance images of the missile sites to the Security Council, he displayed "photographs of Soviet missile sites and bombers" on the island to Kamel. Justifying US conduct, Talbot cited the OAS endorsement of the blockade on Monday and disputed any parallel between the Soviet rockets in Cuba and comparable US medium-range ballistic missiles (MRBMs) sent to defend Western Europe following a 1957 NATO decision taken after "Soviet missile threats during Suez campaign in 1956" (and Sputnik). Washington "sincerely" desired a peaceful resolution to the present crisis, Talbot insisted, but rejected terms that failed to address "the heart of the problem namely, dismantling and withdrawal of all offensive weapons in Cuba, some of which already operational." Merely stopping delivery of additional offensive arms and suspending the quarantine (as Thant had proposed in letters to Kennedy and Khrushchev) was hence unacceptable. Finally, Talbot emphasized that Washington was "not asking UAR or other non-aligned nations [to] see problem our way but we do expect them to act impartially and on basis seeking practical realistic solutions." As if anticipating Khrushchev's offer two days later to swap the Soviet missiles in Cuba for American missiles in Turkey (an idea Walter Lippmann had advanced that very morning in *The Washington Post*), Talbot vowed that "US not repeat not prepared fall into trap of letting USSR take something to which not entitled, then stop and bargain for payment of something else" – as, he argued, China sought to do in relation to its border clashes with India.⁵⁴

Talbot's briefing, apparently the most substantial personal US-UAR official interaction during the crisis, seems to have had its intended effect. Impressed, Kamel "strongly urged" that the US embassy in Cairo give comparable briefings ("show photos and explain situation") to Nasser, Sabri, and other UAR leaders – including foreign minister Mahmoud Fawzi, then transiting London on his way home from New York. Personally, Talbot reported, the UAR

⁵³ Fleming, "U.N. Neutrals Seek 'Freeze' In Caribbean," *Washington Post*, 25 October 1962, p. A1.

⁵⁴ While strongly resisting a Cuba-Turkey missile swap in public statements, Kennedy Administration officials secretly considered the idea in EXCOMM deliberations from the outset of the crisis, and JFK ultimately privately accepted a concealed (and delayed) trade as part of the package to resolve it. See Philip Nash, *The Other Missiles of October* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

ambassador said, "he was entirely 'with us' in this crisis and thought we had acted wisely and well." However, Kamel advised that the "neutrals" could be more helpful if Washington did not press them to "subscribe 100% to US position," and observed that if some Americans did not like Riad's remarks, well, neither did Zorin. According to Talbot, Kamel "insisted UAR sole desire was to resolve situation on basis which would give satisfaction to US." Talbot, who agreed the "neutral" countries might be helpful in verifying the missiles' dismantling and removal, in response to Kamel's suggestion quickly directed the immediate sending (in a diplomatic pouch) of U-2 photographs to the embassy in Cairo to use in briefing UAR leaders. He instructed the London embassy to use photos already on hand to show Fawzi if the foreign minister could be contacted before he left for Cairo (he could not, flying away early Friday morning).⁵⁵

When the Security Council reconvened Thursday afternoon, Riad and Quaison-Sackey again visibly collaborated on a new motion, this one procedural, though with substantive implications. After the famous Stevenson-Zorin colloquy in which the American challenged his Soviet counterpart to admit the presence of the missiles in Cuba (and then exhibited the U-2 photos to support his case), the UAR and Ghana ambassadors, after welcoming the onset of correspondence between the Acting Secretary-General and the two superpower rivals, with Thant receiving at least somewhat favorable replies from Khrushchev and Kennedy, proposed (with Chile's support) that the Security Council adjourn *sine die* to allow the contacts and negotiations to proceed. Hearing no objections to the UAR motion, Zorin, chairing the session, gaveled it to a close – without calling to a vote any of the earlier introduced resolutions, either the US, the Soviet, or the one put forward the night before by the UAR and Ghana.⁵⁶

By this time, another idea to resolve or mitigate the crisis was circulating around the Security Council — with special implications for the UAR and Nasser. In their statements on the crisis, both in Cairo and New York, the UAR, in line with the Belgrade final declaration, had

⁵⁵ US Embassy, London (Bruce), tel. 1692, Noon, 26 October 1962, CDF, 1960-63, 611.3722, box 1228, RG 59, NA.

⁵⁶ Telegram from Soviet UN delegation, New York (Zorin), 25 October 1962, *CWHPB* 5 (Spring 1995), p. 74; *The Yearbook of the United Nations*, 1962 Part 1: The United Nations. Section 1: Political and Security questions. Chapter 8: Questions relating to the Americas, p. 107 (accessed on-line). Earlier that Thursday, after the General Assembly approved Uganda (formerly a British colony) as its 110th member, bringing African-Asian representation to exactly half the body's total, Quaison-Sackey had exulted: "Another bastion of imperialism has fallen. Once again, the voice of Africa in this chamber has been strengthened." Sam Pope Brewer, "Uganda Gets U.N. Warm Salute On Becoming the 110th Member," *New York Times*, October 26, 1962, p. 2.

ardently promoted nuclear disarmament, and in particular called for the elimination of foreign military bases and a ban on the transfer of nuclear weapons to states that did not already possess them. (Speaking to Badeau in Cairo, one Presidential Council member emphasized the UAR's strong opposition to transferring nuclear weapons to non-nuclear powers, saying this had been the "principal point" of Riad's UNSC speech.⁵⁷) Taken together, these positions implied sympathy for the idea of establishing nuclear weapon free zones, an idea that had recently come into vogue with the proposal by Poland's foreign minister, Adam Rapacki, to create a NWFZ in the heart of Europe that would bar such arms from either East or West Germany, in addition to Poland and Czechoslovakia. Though the Rapacki Plan had failed to enter into force, facing determined US opposition, it generated much discussion about whether such atomic weapons-free areas might make sense elsewhere.⁵⁸ In the Western Hemisphere, Brazil, aspiring to a larger role in international affairs, was investigating the idea. When the Cuban crisis ignited, some Brazilian diplomats thought making Latin America (and perhaps Africa) a NWFZ might offer a face-saving method to get the missiles out of Cuba – and even had hopes of gaining Soviet support. The USSR had, after all, backed the Rapacki Plan, signed an accord with the United States and others to make Antarctica nuclear-free⁵⁹, and Brazil's ambassador in Moscow had recently (weeks before the crisis) heard positive words on the subject from a senior Soviet figure, deputy prime minister Frol Kozlov.⁶⁰ On October 24, sensing the "urgent necessity for creative formulas that, avoiding humiliation for both sides, reduce the tension," Brazil's ambassador in Washington, Roberto Campos, suggested organizing a movement at the United Nations of Latin American and African nations to denuclearize their continents, under UN inspection. If Brazil captained this effort, Campos calculated, it could "certainly" count on

⁵⁷ US Embassy, Cairo (Badeau), tel. 688, 2 pm, 29 October 1962, 611.3722, CDF, 1960-63, box 1228, RG 59, NA. The Presidential Council member was UAR Vice President Zakaria Muhya [sic; Muhyi] Al-Din (Zakaria Mohieddin), later prime minister (1965-66).

⁵⁸ On the Rapacki Plan, see esp. Ryan A. Musto, "The Eisenhower Administration and the Origins of Denuclearization: An International History" (Ph.D. dissertation, The George Washington University, 2019), part of his forthcoming international history of NWFZs.

⁵⁹ Ryan A. Musto, "Cold Calculations: The United States and the Creation of Antarctica's Atom-Free Zone," *Diplomatic History* 42, no. 4 (September 2018), pp. 640-68.

⁶⁰ Brazilian Embassy, Washington (Campos), tel. 775, 1 pm, 23 October 1962, MD—Washington—Telgr.-Cartas—Receb.-Exped.—1962 (7 á XII) (Cx 324), Archives, Ministry of External Relations (AMRE), Brasília; *CW/HPB* 17/18 (Fall 2012), p. 238, accessible at <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115292>.

the support of all Latin America and the neutralist world – "with perhaps the exception of the UAR, given the nuclear program of Nasser." If resistance could be overcome, Campos even imagined broadening the denuclearization to the Middle East, encompassing not only Israel, but also the abandonment of NATO (i.e., US) installations in Turkey, "today already considered obsolete."⁶¹

With the missile crisis still dangerous, the Brazilian denuclearization proposal quickly gained support and serious consideration.⁶² At the Excomm, US officials desperate to escape the crisis without war approved cooperating with the Brazilian concept at the UN if it would yield the verified eviction of the Soviet missiles from Cuba – even amidst grumbles from military officials worried about potential restrictions on the stationing or transit of nuclear weapons in such US territories as the Panama Canal zone, the Guantanamo naval base, or Puerto Rico. Even after Khrushchev agreed on October 28 to remove the Soviet missiles from Cuba, the Brazilians persisted in their efforts to secure Security Council endorsement of a Latin American NWFZ. This once-promising effort collapsed in late November and early December, mostly due to opposition from Cuba, which had earlier sounded interested; once Havana backed away, so did the Soviets and their allies, and the Brazilians grudgingly withdrew the proposal. In the midst of these efforts, Campos' apprehension proved prescient. On November 6, an aide to Riad approached a US UN delegation member to explain the UAR's objections to the Brazilian proposal. Ahmed (not further identified), apparently under instructions, stressed that the UAR was both an African and Middle Eastern country, with commitments in both areas, and while Cairo's African concerns and commitments might accommodate an NWFZ, the same could not be said for the Middle East. The UAR would hence be grateful if Washington could press the Brazilians to water down their resolution, perhaps reducing its African aspect to a mere appeal, alluding to a previously passed measure. If the Brazilian resolution remained unacceptable,

⁶¹ Brazilian Embassy, Washington (Campos), tel. 781, 5 pm, 24 October 1962, MD—Washington—Telgr.-Cartas—Receb.-Exped.—1962 (7 á XII), (Cx 324), AMRE; CWIHPB 17/18 (Fall 2012), p. 239, accessible at <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115294>. On Nasser's nuclear ambitions, which remain unclear, see Elbahtimy, *Nasser, Egypt and the Arrival of the Nuclear Age, 1955-1970*.

⁶² On the rise and fall of the Brazilian denuclearization proposal, see James G. Hershberg, "The United States, Brazil, and the Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962 (Part 2)," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 6, no. 3 (Summer 2004), pp. 5-67, esp. pp. 20-22, 24-26, 32-33, 52, 54-58.

Ahmed suggested (it is not clear how seriously) that the UAR might move to amend extending the proposed NWFZ to cover Europe and Asia, thereby discomfiting the United States.⁶³ It's not clear whether the UAR delegation spoke directly to the Brazilians or left it to the Americans to convey their objections, but a few days later, Afonso Arinos, Brazil's UN ambassador, cabled bluntly: "The United Arab Republic alleged that Israel is on the path to fabricate nuclear arms and for this [reason] it [the UAR] could not assume new commitments."⁶⁴ At the time, Israel's position on nuclear weapons remained equivocal. It was, of course, secretly developing nuclear weapons, with French help, at its Dimona research station in the southern Negev desert, and Nasser and Kennedy were conducting an intense secret dialogue about Israeli nuclear work at Dimona, the existence of which was publicly revealed in late 1960, with Washington trying to reassure Cairo that Dimona's aim was nuclear power, for "peaceful purposes only," not arms.⁶⁵ (Nasser, in turn, had angrily denounced Israel's atomic ambitions, vowing that if the Jewish State got nuclear weapons Egypt would, too, "at any price" – he had already started a small-scale nuclear research project in the mid-'50s with Soviet aid – but backed off the issue during Kennedy's term.⁶⁶) Yet, in the mid- 1960s, Israeli Premier Levi Eshkol also repeatedly raised the idea of a nuclear weapons free zone in the Middle East⁶⁷ – an idea not really inconsistent with Nasser's own reassurances, in his private dialogue with JFK (through his mediator John McCloy) and LBJ, that he did not intend to develop nuclear weapons.⁶⁸ In any event, the UAR opposition (or at best abstention⁶⁹), together with France's desire to test its nuclear weapons in the Algerian desert, helped impel the Brazilians to drop Africa from their proposal, which was restricted to a Latin American NWFZ. Though the Brazilian plan failed in late 1962, it

⁶³ USUN New York (Stevenson), tel. 1663, 6 pm, 7 November 1962, DNSA.

⁶⁴ Brazilian Delegation, UN General Assembly, New York (Arinos), tel. 140, 9 November 1962, "O.N.U.—TELEGRAMAS—RECEB.-EXPED.—1962—CX 365 [CONF]," AMRE.

⁶⁵ See Hassan Elbahtimy, "Diplomacy under the nuclear shadow: Kennedy, Nasser, and Dimona," paper prepared for this conference (and his forthcoming *Nasser, Egypt and the Arrival of the Nuclear Age, 1955-1970*). On Israel's nuclear program the standard work remains Avner Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb* (Columbia University Press, 1999).

⁶⁶ Elbahtimy, "Diplomacy under the nuclear shadow."

⁶⁷ Guy Laron, *The Six-Day War: The Breaking of the Middle East* (Yale University Press, 2017), p. 90.

⁶⁸ Elbahtimy, "Diplomacy under the nuclear shadow."

⁶⁹ Brazil's UN ambassador later reported that "Burma, Ethiopia and the United Arab Republic [Egypt], before very favorable to the draft, [now] seem inclined to abstention." Brazilian Delegation, UN General Assembly, New York (Arinos), tel. 206, 5 pm, 5 December 1962, "ANEXO Secreto—600.(24h)—SITUAÇÃO POLITICA—CUBA—Novembro à dezembro de 1962/," AMRE.

foreshadowed the ensuing negotiation of a regional accord aimed at making Latin America atom-free in the Treaty of Tlatelolco five years later. In the Middle East, Israel raced ahead, secretly completing, it now appears, an operable atomic bomb by the time of the June 1967 Middle East war.⁷⁰ In 1968, Nasser's Egypt, unlike Israel, and contrary to the implications of his own earlier rhetoric, signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, officially forswearing nuclear weapons.⁷¹

As the Cuban missile crisis climaxed, Egyptians learned about events through a combination of wire service reports relayed by local and international media, and commentary and headlines (and political cartoons, as Elbahtimy shows⁷²) reflecting the state policy laid out by Ali Sabri following Wednesday evening's Presidential Council meeting, with its opposition to the US "quarantine" and demand for the liquidation of foreign military bases. Edging aside reports on the Sino-Indian and Yemeni events, the Cuban crisis inspired widespread fears of nuclear war, which diminished somewhat after the Soviets opted not to challenge the blockade. Monitoring media, US Information Service embassy officials discerned a "comparatively mild" tone to reports that by the weekend grew "perceptibly more anti-American"⁷³ – and collected more favorable views of US actions from consulates in Alexandria and Port Said.⁷⁴ After the crisis ended, the Cairo embassy concluded that, despite the "mildly critical UAR editorial line," the Egyptian media carried all crucial news items and "our position should be clear to intelligent reader."⁷⁵ Still, some Egyptian commentators issued sharply anti-Washington or pro-Havana (or

⁷⁰ Avner Cohen, "The 1967 Six-Day War: New Israeli Perspective, 50 Years Later," at <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/the-1967-six-day-war>, and idem, "Israel's Secret Plan to Nuke the Egyptian Desert," *Politico Magazine*, 5 June 2017, at <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/06/05/israels-secret-plan-to-nuke-the-egyptian-desert-215228>

⁷¹ Anwar Sadat's Egypt ratified the NNPT in February 1981.

⁷² Elbahtimy, "Egypt and the Cuban Missile Crisis," p. 3, reproduces a 27 October 1962 *Al-akhbar* cartoon criticizing JFK's hypocrisy in objecting to Khrushchev's missile deployment in Cuba when comparable US rockets were aimed at the USSR from multiple bases; and a more even-handed 29 October 1962 *Al-ahram* cartoon suggesting that both Kennedy and Khrushchev had scared each other.

⁷³ See US Embassy, Cairo (Halsema), tel. 682, 26 October 1962 ("comparatively m[i]ld"); tel. 685, 27 October 1962 ("perceptibly"); and tel. 686, 28 October 1962, all CDF, 1960-63, 611.3722, box 1228, RG 59, NA.

⁷⁴ Amcongen, Alexandria (Robert Prohme, Consul), Airgram A-82, "Alexandria Reaction to U.S. Naval Quarantine of Cuba," 26 October 1962, and Amconsulate, Port Said (Frank J. Walters, Consul), Port Said, Airgram A-48, "Local Reaction to U.S. Cuban Policy," 30 October 1962, both CDF, 1960-63, 611.3722, box 1228, RG 59, NA.

⁷⁵ U.S. Embassy, Cairo (Badeau), tel. 703, 3 pm (rec'd 10:53 am), 3 November 1962, Cuba: Cables, November 1962:3-4, box 169, NSF, JFKL (JFKNSF-042-001-p0045). This summary noted that distribution of the U-2

pro-Moscow) views. A UAR trade union group issued a joint declaration with a visiting Yugoslav delegation wholeheartedly supporting the "brave Cuban people fighting to preserve freedom and independence" and "condemn[ing the] American blockade of Cuba as open interference in Cuban internal affairs and as [a] danger to peace in the world."⁷⁶ On October 25, a chief Nasser spokesman, Mohammed Heikal, charged that JFK had ordered the blockade to influence the upcoming Congressional elections (a view a US diplomat scorned as "fatuous").⁷⁷

Nasser himself, however, laid low while the crisis developed. Other than presiding over the Presidential Council on Wednesday evening, he did not appear to play any visible role in trying to influence public opinion or international diplomacy. Despite his well-known talents as a fiery speaker, able to whip up public opinion, he did not make any pronouncements at the height of the crisis. As the outcome remained unclear, he held off on replying to JFK's October 22 letter, and no available evidence suggests he met either US or Soviet officials.⁷⁸ Of course, due to the lack of access to Egyptian archives one cannot be sure whether or not Nasser communicated or maneuvered internationally behind-the-scenes (e.g., coordinating with Nkrumah regarding UAR/Ghana UN diplomacy). There is no outward sign that he tried to organize or move other non-aligned or other countries to influence events – unlike Tito, for instance, who (like the UAR, through Riad) supported U Thant's mediation, but also (unlike Nasser, so far as is known) directly wrote NAM leaders to encourage further efforts.⁷⁹

photographs "quickly dispelled" "initial suspicion [that] missiles not actually offensive" and commented that "Perhaps most successful Soviet gambit was to equate Soviet Cuban bases with NATO base in Turkey."

⁷⁶ The joint statement was carried in the Yugoslav press on October 26: U.S. Embassy, Belgrade (Kennan), tel. 596, 7 pm, 26 October 1962, Folder 71-4-16-26: Cuba-State Department Cables, Section 1, 24 April 1961-26 October 1962, Robert F. Kennedy papers, Attorney General papers (hereafter RFK/AG), JFKL (RFKAG-202-002-p0032).

⁷⁷ Heikal, later (after his death in 1970) Nasser's best-known English-language chronicler, was quoted as spreading this allegation in Prohme, "Alexandria Reaction to U.S. Naval Quarantine of Cuba," 26 October 1962, cited above (the original source was not given); Prohme made the "fatuous" comment. On Heikal's commentary during and after the crisis, see Elbahtimy, "Egypt and the Cuban Missile Crisis," esp. pp. 7-8, 14.

⁷⁸ Although Badeau later recalled seeing Nasser, on average, more than once a month (43 times during his 36-month term) – Badeau OHI, 25 February 1969, JFKL, p. 15 – US documents do not indicate that Nasser saw him or any other US diplomats during the Cuban crisis; nor has any evidence surfaced that he met the Soviets, whether Ambassador Vladimir Yerofeyev or members of a Soviet military delegation in Cairo at the time to support the UAR intervention in Yemen. I thank Guy Laron for checking the important collection of Russian foreign ministry archive (AVPRF) documents on Soviet-UAR/Egypt bilateral relations: *Blizhnevospchnyi Konflikt, 1957-1967: Iz Documentov Arkhiv Vneshnei Politiki Federatsi* (Moscow, 2003). Nor does Ferris mention any Nasser meetings with the Soviets during the crisis in his work on Soviet-UAR relations concerning Yemen cited above.

⁷⁹ AP report (Belgrade), "Tito Urges U.N. Truce," *Washington Post*, 27 October 1962, p. A7. See Tito's October 26 letter to Brazil's president, João Goulart, *CWIHPB* 17/18 (Fall 2012), pp. 200-201, accessible at

Instead, the most active UAR diplomacy during the crisis, so far as is known, centered on the United Nations. Gathering gossip, pushing Thant's mediation efforts, Riad emerged as "a leader of the peace efforts of the non-aligned U.N. members,"⁸⁰ and actively circulated among the delegations, declassified US documents show (of course, Riad's own telegrams would provide far more detail). On Friday afternoon, October 26 word reached Washington that the UAR ambassador, together with colleagues from Jordan and Ceylon (later Sri Lanka), heard Castro's rep, Mario Garcia-Inchaustegui, state (while apparently referring to a telegram) that Cuba would be willing to remove the missile bases in return for a UN guarantee against a US-backed invasion.⁸¹ On October 27 – arguably the most perilous day in human history – Riad met separately with Stevenson, Zorin, Thant, and the Cubans. Late that Saturday afternoon, after seeing the Soviet delegate and Burmese statesman, but before meeting the Cubans in the evening, he called on the US UN ambassador and relayed the substance of his exchange with Zorin. The USSR diplomat had appealed to the "neutrals" for support to resolve the crisis, arguing that Moscow had accepted the terms of Thant's appeal while Washington had rejected them or attached conditions; but he had evaded Riad's queries as to whether Castro might be willing to stop construction on the missile sites, or whether Cuba's neutralization, as he had advocated in his speech, might be possible. A bit ruefully, Riad told Stevenson that, especially since the Soviets had introduced Turkey into the negotiations (in Khrushchev's letter to JFK that day), the neutrals felt they were not in a position to push substantive proposals on the superpowers, only to urge both to resolve the matter peacefully. In that context, Riad asked Stevenson – prophetically, given how the crisis would be resolved in the ensuing hours – whether the United States "would be ready to guarantee Cuba from invasion if Cubans or Sovs dismantle bases." Stevenson thought (accurately) a solution along these lines could be rapidly

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115245>. In Havana that Friday, Belgrade's ambassador informed Cuban President Dorticós of Tito's initiative to gather (NAM) heads of state to seek a resolution to the crisis: Yugoslav Embassy, Havana (Vidaković), tel. 229, 26 October 1962 (rec'd Belgrade 12:30 am, 27 October), foreign ministry archives, Belgrade, *CWIHPB* 17/18 (Fall 2012), p. 598, accessible at <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115462>, and Brazilian Embassy, Havana (Bastian Pinto), tel. 347, 6 pm, 26 October 1962, AMRE, *CWIHPB* 17/18 (Fall 2012), pp. 244-45, accessible at <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115303>.

⁸⁰ Louis B. Fleming (*Los Angeles Times*), "Castro Bid Is Accepted By Thant," *Washington Post*, 29 October 1962, p. A1.

⁸¹ New York (Stevenson), tel. 1482, 6 pm, 26 October 1962, CDF, 1960-63, 737.56361, box 1631, RG 59, NA.

arranged, so long as the missiles already in Cuba were rendered inoperable and construction ceased on other installations, since the peril to the hemisphere mounted daily. The UAR ambassador promised to urge the Cubans, when he saw them in the coming hours, to stop missile construction, though he was "less explicit" about the "inoperability" question. Riad had another suggestion for Stevenson: "to save Cuban face," observers who might be soon sent to Cuba to monitor rendering missiles inoperable and a halt in constructing them "might also be described as intended to ensure Cuba against invasion during this interim period" (of negotiations); Stevenson thought this could be worked out.⁸² It could be useful to know, if Egyptian archives opened, whether Riad, after seeing JFK's rep, in fact saw the Cubans that Saturday night and if so what took place between them.

The Aftermath

Of course, the next morning, New York and Washington time (mid/late afternoon in Cairo and Moscow), the crisis' acute phase abruptly ended when Radio Moscow announced Khrushchev's agreement to remove the missiles from Cuba. While Egyptians were glad to avoid a devastating war – "Alexandria citizens," the US consul reported, "both official and unofficial, heaved sighs of relief . . . but in true Middle East fashion, immediately asked: 'What will the Soviets demand in return for this concession?'"⁸³ – Cairo newspapers, still influenced by the official line's generally pro-Soviet/anti-American tilt, ran commentaries that "commend Khrushchev for his 'heroism' in 'backing down' on the rocket issue," the US embassy reported.⁸⁴ In the next few days, Western resentment toward the UAR and Riad for their statements during the crisis surfaced at the UN. When it was rumored, on October 29, that Riad – who would succeed Zorin as UNSC president on November 1 – might request the body reconvene to consider the new situation regarding Cuba, Ireland's delegate insisted that the initiative's

⁸² New York (Stevenson), tel. 1501, 8 pm (rec'd 9:03 pm), 27 October 1962, 611.3722/10-2762, CDF, 1960-63, box 1228, RG 59, NA. Zorin also reported to Moscow that he had met with Riad that Saturday, as part of his efforts to appeal to "exert pressure" on Thant and UN delegates from the "neutral countries" to back Soviet proposals and, in turn, pressure the United States. Telegram from Soviet UN delegate V. Zorin, 27 October 1962, *CWIIHPB* 8/9 (Winter 1996/97), p. 292, accessible at <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111003>.

⁸³ Amcongeng Alexandria (Consul Prohme), Airgram A-90, "Alexandria's Reaction to Cuban, Yemen Developments," 1 November 1962, CDF, 1960-63, 611.3722, box 1229, RG 59, NA.

⁸⁴ US Embassy, Cairo (Halsema), tel. 890, 29 October 1962, 71-4-16-26: Cuba - State Department Cables, Section 2, October 1962: 27-30 (1 of 2 folders), RFK/AG, JFKL (RFKAG-202-003-p0116).

author "must not be UAR or Ghana," since "both, and Ghana especially, had shown that rather than being uncommitted they were entirely committed and therefore neither should sponsor such [a] res[olution]." ⁸⁵ Two days later, when the idea arose of sending to Cuba observers from "neutral" nations to verify the removal of missiles ("offensive weapons"), the State Department directed Stevenson that "we would wish to exclude UAR and Ghana citizens in light of distinctly 'unneutral' statements made by their Delegates in Security Council meetings on Cuba." ⁸⁶

In Cairo, observing Khrushchev's climb-down and Kennedy's apparent triumph, Egyptian authorities appeared to subtly recalibrate their attitude. On October 31, after a Presidential Council meeting, Ali Sabri declared that the UAR "appreciated efforts by all parties concerned to ease tension in this area which had threatened outbreak of world war" – a statement, US officials sensed, that "reflects tendency of UAR statements and press treatment to swing back to non-aligned position on Cuba." ⁸⁷ Most important, now that the outcome appeared clear, Nasser felt it safe to send personal communications regarding the crisis to both Kennedy and Khrushchev. Finally responding to JFK's October 22 letter at the outset of the crisis, Nasser essentially wrote that events had rendered moot any differences the two might have had about "the nature of the bases which existed in Cuba and roused your suspicion" as well as "the American measures based thereon" (obviously alluding to Cairo's objection to the blockade). Nasser wanted to look to the future, but could not resist recording "a few observations" about recent events: 1) He appreciated JFK's response to, and US cooperation with, U Thant, since the UAR believed a UN framework represented "the best guarantee of a sound solution to problems"; 2) "we deeply appreciate the fact that the American measures - irrespective of our opinion thereon - were carried out in a way devoid of aggressive provocation" (or "incitement," in Heikal's translation); and 3) he praised JFK's pledge not to invade Cuba militarily, "a genuine

⁸⁵ New York (Stevenson), tel. 1540, 9 pm, 29 October 1962, 611.3722, CDF, 1960-63, box 1228, RG 59, NA. When Boland attempted to preempt Riad on October 30 by calling for the Council to reconvene as soon as Thant returned from Havana to hear his report and possibly authorize a method to inspect the dismantling/removal of the Soviet missiles, the UAR delegate firmly objected (Quaison-Sackey as well, though "somewhat evasively"), saying that "the first priority is resolving the matter of guarantees for Cuban security," Zorin reported. See Zorin telegram, 30 October 1962, *CIWHPB* 8/9 (Winter 1996/97), p. 302.

⁸⁶ State Department (Rusk) to US/UN, 31 October 1962, deptel. 1147, "Subject: Cuba: New York Negotiations," *FRUS, 1961-1963*, vol. XI, doc. 125.

⁸⁷ US Embassy, Cairo (Badeau), tel. 694, 1 pm, 1 November 1962, CDF, 1960-63, 611.3722, box 1229, RG 59, NA.

contribution to the easing of tension." Nasser wrapped up his brief (by his standards!) missive with a coda that paid respect to American power:

We confidently declare our belief that the United States, with its might and prestige, can consolidate the peace more than any other nation. In this respect it bears a historic responsibility before all mankind since peace based on justice is a human need that takes precedence over all others, for it not only preserves but dignifies life.⁸⁸

When the letter, which Nasser aide Samy Sharaf delivered privately to the US embassy in Cairo on November 1 and was not released publicly by the UAR government⁸⁹, reached Washington, it was viewed relatively positively. At the White House, powerful NSC staffer Robert W. Komer wrote national security adviser McGeorge Bundy and his deputy, Carl Kaysen, that they should tell President Kennedy that, "however carefully drafted, it is obvious note of congratulations on handling of Cuban crisis." Concretely, "Bob" interpreted the message as meaning that Nasser "hopes we aren't sore at UAR attitude during crisis, which was as good as could be expected"; "wants to continue the dialogue with JFK and has seized this chance to do so"; and was "still anxious about our attitude toward Yemen." Sensing an "opening" to improve bilateral US/UAR and JFK/Nasser relations, Komer urged serious thinking about inviting Nasser to Washington ("a project we ought to revive when things have quieted down"). "All things considered," he enthused, "our Nasser experiment has run along better than expected," alluding to the intent courtship the administration had already undertaken. The NSC aide suggested to "up the ante" by sending Walt W. Rostow on an exploratory trip to Cairo, and if that went well, "we can then give Nasser the JFK treatment here."⁹⁰

Nasser's letter also pleased the State Department, which speculated that its "unusual promptness and friendly tone" was probably motivated by UAR apprehension about negative US reactions – not expressed officially, but informally evident – to both Riad's Security Council

⁸⁸ The original and slightly varying English translations of Nasser's 31 October 1962 letter to JFK are in United Arab Republic: Subject: Nasser Correspondence, November-December 1962, box 169, NSF, JFKL, and US Embassy, Cairo (Badeau), tel. 698, 3 pm (rec'd 9:08 am), 1 November 1962, CDF, 1960-63, 611.3722, box 1226, RG 59, NA; also Heikal, *Nasser*, pp. 186-87.

⁸⁹ US Embassy, Cairo (Badeau), tel. 699, 6 pm, 1 November 1962, CDF, 1960-63, 611.3722, box 1226, RG 59, NA.

⁹⁰ RWK [Robert W. Komer] to McGB/CK [McGeorge Bundy/Carl Kaysen], 1 November 1962, United Arab Republic: Subject: Nasser Correspondence, November-December 1962, box 169, NSF, JFKL.

stand and "slanted" Cairo press comments. An aide to Secretary of State Dean Rusk, in an analysis sent to the White House, underlined Nasser's recognition that Washington had not acted provocatively and especially his final paragraph, which implied that Nasser "fully appreciated the relative strength of the US and weakness of the USSR as demonstrated in the recent crisis." In sum, State saw the letter as Nasser's attempt to "redress any grievance" the United States felt towards Cairo due to the UAR's "equivocal position" during the crisis, and suggested Badeau orally convey JFK's appreciation.⁹¹

In Cairo, meanwhile, the US ambassador finally secured an appointment with Fawzi to elaborate the American view of the crisis and show him the U-2 photographs that had been dispatched to the embassy after Talbot's October 25 conversation with Kamel with the aim of quelling any doubts that the Soviets had deployed offensive weapons in Cuba.⁹² Although UAR officials had conveyed interest in learning the "intelligence basis" of the US assessment⁹³, not until November 1 did Badeau see the UAR's "most seasoned diplomat" – his "old friend," experienced (a carryover from the old Farouk regime), but not especially influential with Nasser or his inner circle.⁹⁴ After Nasser's foreign minister welcomed the briefing since he had been traveling as the crisis sharpened, Badeau immediately handed him copies of the U-2 photographs and stressed that the JFK-Khrushchev deal must be promptly and fully implemented. Agreeing, the Egyptian expressed hope that the crisis' peaceful outcome might spur "a fresh approach to other Soviet-Free world problems," but cautioned that the West (i.e., the Americans) "should not be precipitous in pressing its current advantage or in thinking that they had the Soviets so thoroughly 'on the run' that matters such as disarmament and Berlin could be quickly resolved." Stressing US moderation, Badeau argued that the Kremlin's recent

⁹¹ Memo, (William B. Grant for) William H. Brubeck, Executive Secretary, to McGeorge Bundy, White House, "Subject: President Nasser's Reply to President Kennedy Regarding Cuba," 10 November 1962, United Arab Republic: Subject: Nasser Correspondence, November-December 1962, box 169, NSF, JFKL.

⁹² In Accra, Mahoney had already done so with the UAR's diplomatic collaborator Ghana. On October 29, the US ambassador saw Nkrumah to review Washington's handling of the crisis, reviewing and handing over blown-up U-2 photos while scorning Quaison-Sackey's skeptical UNSC speech. He believed Ghana's leader, "aware that he could get into deep water if he veers too far from a neutral position on Cuba," sounded convinced by the presentation, reinforcing his "fairly moderate stance" on the crisis. U.S. Embassy, Accra (Mahoney), Airgram A-278, "Call on President Nkrumah," 1 November 1962, cited *supra*.

⁹³ US Embassy, Cairo (Badeau), tel. 688, 2 pm, 29 October 1962, 611.3722, CDF, 1960-63, box 1228, RG 59, NA.

⁹⁴ John S. Badeau Oral History Interview (OHI), 25 February 1969, JFKL, p. 15.

"unreliability" in its statements underlined the importance of iron-clad inspection terms in any "disarmament or nuclear testing negotiations" (the latter were then stalemated over precisely that issue⁹⁵); Fawzi agreed, suggesting the UN "inspection role" in Cuba (on which Kennedy and Khrushchev agreed, but Castro angrily rejected) might be a "hopeful beginning" to inspection comity on nuclear matters. The two then discussed Yemen, with Badeau urging the UAR to avoid destabilizing Saudi Arabia (Cairo had vehemently denounced King Faisal) and cooperate with Washington to promote "both stability and more progressive government" on the peninsula.⁹⁶ They agreed to keep talking, and Badeau thought the Cuban crisis might have usefully enhanced Cairo's perception of US determination to protect its interests.⁹⁷

Nasser's October 31 letter led one scholar to note his "restrained" reaction to the Cuban Missile Crisis, adding that "he did not hew to Moscow's party line, let alone Havana's."⁹⁸ Yet, if that letter (combined with the friendly conversation with Fawzi) inspired any US officials to suspect or hope that he had sidled away from his evenhandedness toward the superpowers, they were quickly disabused. On November 5, Soviet media touted (Radio Moscow broadcast and *Pravda* front-paged it) a letter from Nasser to Khrushchev, dated the same day as his missive to Kennedy, praising the Soviet leader for his "reasonable and wise stand with regard to the Caribbean crisis." Nasser praised Khrushchev's decisions to alter the course of Soviet ships headed toward the US blockade; to respond positively to U Thant; and, finally, "to dismantle the rocket bases on whose existence the American side built its position with regard to Cuba, a position which could have led to such results whose effects on mankind Allah alone knows."

⁹⁵ Disagreement over the number of annual inspections blocked agreement on a comprehensive nuclear test ban (CTB) but permitted the signing in August 1963 of a limited or partial test ban treaty (LTBT/PTBT) which allowed continued nuclear testing but only underground.

⁹⁶ US Embassy, Cairo, Airgram A-359, Memorandum of [November 1] Conversation, John S. Badeau and Mahmoud Fawzi, 1:30 pm, 2 November 1962, CDF, 1960-63, 737.00, box 1626, RG 59, NA.

⁹⁷ U.S. Embassy, Cairo (Badeau), tel. 703, 3 pm (rec'd 10:53 am), 3 November 1962, Cuba: Cables, November 1962:3-4, NSF, JFKL (JFKNSF-042-001-p0045). However, Badeau doubted the crisis had sufficiently improved Washington's standing to enable it to compel Arab states and Israel to begin direct negotiations.

⁹⁸ Warren Bass, *Support Any Friend: Kennedy's Middle East and the Making of the U.S.-Israel Alliance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 109-111.

Khrushchev's "courage" in solving this crisis and preserving peace, Nasser effused, "displayed the highest level of a sense of duty to mankind."⁹⁹

When the Cairo press followed up by publishing the full text of Nasser's somewhat flowery letter to Khrushchev, Badeau recommended that the US release his letter written the same day to JFK – otherwise, since Cairo press had only passingly alluded to the Nasser-Kennedy exchange, Egyptians would be left with the "one-sided" impression that their president had only corresponded with the Soviet leader.¹⁰⁰ However, after mulling the matter over for a week, the State Department recommended against publicizing the still-secret Nasser-JFK correspondence, and the White House agreed. Presuming JFK's letter at the crisis' outset had moved Nasser, in accord with his non-aligned policy, to send "counter-balancing" letters to both sides, State found little to object to in his message to Khrushchev, despite its "slightly warmer tone" and "rather cryptic reference" to the US "attitude which might have had consequences whose effect on mankind God alone knows." State would not mind if the UAR divulged the exchange, but since Nasser's letter to Khrushchev had attracted no notice in the United States, eschewed any initiative to release it publicly.¹⁰¹ Conveying its decision on November 21, State told Badeau, "The burden of proof of its non-aligned attitude should rest with the UAR."¹⁰²

⁹⁹ "Nasser Message to Khrushchev," Moscow TASS, 5 November 1962, in FBIS Daily Report, 6 November 1962 (FBIS-FRB-62-217), p. BB6; US Embassy, Moscow (Kohler), tel. 1212, 1 pm, 6 November 1962, 71-4-16-26: Cuba - State Department Cables, Section 3: 1962: 31 October - 19 November, RFK/AG, RFKAG-202-005-p0110.

¹⁰⁰ Nasser to Khrushchev, Cairo domestic service (Arabic), 6 November 1962, FBIS translation in United Arab Republic: Subjects: Nasser correspondence, 1962: November-December, box 169, NSF, JFKL (JFKNSF-169-009-p0018); US Embassy, Cairo (Badeau), tel. 710, 3 pm, 6 November 1962, CDF, 1960-63, 611.3722, box 1226, RG 59, NA.

¹⁰¹ J.T. Rogers for William H. Brubeck, Executive Secretary, to McGeorge Bundy, "Subject: Nasser's Message to Khrushchev on Cuba," 14 November 1962, CDF, 1960-63, 611.37, box 1226, RG 59, NA. Before Bundy met Egypt's deputy foreign minister, Hussein Zulficar Sabri, on November 9, Brubeck advised him to say that JFK "appreciates" Nasser's October 31 letter, but, "In view of the somewhat warmer Nasser's message to Khrushchev," not to speak of it "with undue warmth or effusiveness." William H. Brubeck, memorandum for McGeorge Bundy, "Subject: Your Meeting with UAR Deputy Foreign Minister at 3:30 P.M., November 9, 1962," 8 November 1962, "United Arab Republic: General, 9/62-12/62," box 168, NSF, JFKL.

¹⁰² Department of State to Amembassy, Cairo, Airgram A-103, 21 November 1962, CDF, 1960-63, 611.37, box 1226, RG 59, NA.

Criticizing Castro

By then, though there is no indication Badeau discussed the crisis personally with Nasser, US officials in Washington had two other significant exchanges with UAR figures that seemed to illuminate Cairo's reflections about the crisis and prospective relations with Cuba. On November 8, a State Department official dined with Kamel and UAR official Tewfiq Abdul-Fattah, on his way to Havana to take up residence as Cairo's ambassador. Like his foreign minister, the Egyptian was traveling ("on the high seas") during the crisis, so the American took the opportunity to edify him on why many in the United States negatively viewed the UAR's position during the crisis. Ali Sabri's October 24 statement was "relatively balanced," the US official allowed, but few Americans would seek out its "fine print." By contrast, many more Americans saw or heard Riad's Security Council presentation that evening, which "created a most unfavorable reaction." This was no personal criticism of Riad, the American hastened to add. They were friendly in Damascus when Riad was Cairo's ambassador; perhaps he had been thinking of "the non-aligned audience" at the UN, "while being unmindful that a far larger American audience was listening."

The UAR's well-known hope of somehow luring Cuba "out of the Soviet orbit and into the non-aligned orbit" appeared "totally impossible" in the view of informed Americans and Latin Americans, the American said. "If Mr. Abdul-Fattah could woo Castro and succeed, I would be the first to offer him champagne and caviar," the US official continued, but if this inevitably futile courtship were done "too overtly and blatantly," it might damage Ambassador Kamel's good work given the "extreme sensitivity" of US public opinion:

Somewhat to my surprise, Mr. Abdul-Fattah responded that whereas it had been the UAR's hope that it could make gains with Castro, and whereas the UAR recently felt it had a certain moral obligation to help Cuba as a smaller country, the UAR had learned a lot from the Cuban crisis and realized the futility of its former policy. He implied that the UAR had no further interest in the Castro government, and that his mission in Havana would be a holding operation. (It will be interesting to see whether these words of Mr. Abdul-Fattah's will be borne out after his arrival in Havana).¹⁰³

¹⁰³ State Department memorandum of conversation with UAR Amb. Mostafa Kamel, Tewfiq Abdul-Fattah et al., "Subject: UAR Relations with Cuba; Problems of the Arabian Peninsula," 8 November 1962, 637.86b/11-862, CDF, 1960-63, box 1330, RG 59, NA. Abdul-Fattah was identified as the UAR's minister of social reform "during the union with Syria" (1958-61).

The next day, November 9, Secretary of State Rusk met with Deputy Foreign Minister Hussein Zulficar Sabri – the highest-level US-UAR personal conversation around the time of the missile crisis. After the two discussed the Sino-Indian border conflict, Rusk reviewed the state of play in the negotiations with the Soviets over Cuba, noting continuing disputes over on-site inspections and bombers. His comment that Havana, not Moscow, was proving the prime obstacle to agreement on those issues elicited a surprising reply:

Sabri said that at one time the UAR looked upon Cuba as a country trying to live its own life. Since the Cuban crisis, however, the UAR regarded Cuba simply as part of the Warsaw Pact. He said, he could not tie the hands of his government, but he implied that the UAR was washing its hands of Castro and would simply concentrate on non-aligned efforts to bring about a compromise between the two great power blocs.

Quoting JFK, Rusk insisted that Cuba presented only two non-negotiable problems, Soviet penetration and Cuban intervention elsewhere in the hemisphere to promote subversion, and claimed (disingenuously) there had "never been any question of our interfering with the Cuban's right to develop their own internal structure as they saw fit." Playing to Sabri, he agreed that "even non-alignment" would be better for Havana than the policy it was pursuing. The UAR deputy foreign minister, in turn, elaborated Egyptian scorn for the Cubans. While appreciating Soviet political support in the 1956 Suez crisis, he said, Nasser would never have let Khrushchev "speak on his behalf, as he had spoken on Castro's behalf," by agreeing (without prior notification to or consultation with Fidel) to Kennedy's demand to remove the missiles and assuring JFK they remained "under complete Soviet control" – assurances that would have been "anathema to the UAR." In fact, he added, at the time of the Suez crisis, some Soviet advisers were in Egypt but Nasser pointedly "shipped them all off" to Khartoum, Sudan, for its duration, precisely to avoid any insinuation he was acting under Moscow's influence or control. "Sabri, in short, appeared to be in complete agreement with the thesis that Castro is a Soviet puppet," the American record happily asserts.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ State Department memorandum of conversation, UAR Deputy Foreign Minister Hussein Zulficar Sabri, UAR Amb. Mostafa Kamel, The Secretary [Rusk], et al., "Cuban Crisis (Part 3 of 3)," 2:30 pm, 13 [sic; 9] November 1962, CDF, 1960-63, 737.00/11-1362, box 1626, RG 59, NA; State Department to U.S. embassies Amman, Cairo, Jidda, London, 6:20 pm, 10 November 1962, United Arab Republic: General, 9/62-12/62, box 168, NSF, JFKL.

Five days later, in Cairo, Nasser himself finally expressed personal views on Cuba and the missile crisis beyond his October 31 letters to JFK and Khrushchev – to American ears and recorded in a contemporaneous US record – and in so doing established that Kamel, Abdul-Fattah, and Sabri were not free-lancing when they criticized Havana. At mid-day on November 14, Ambassador Badeau escorted a powerful delegation of US senators (led by majority leader Mike Mansfield and including Richard Russell, Claiborne Pell, Benjamin Smith, and J. Caleb Boggs) to see Nasser at his personal residence in the eastern Cairo suburb of Heliopolis. Asked about the recent crisis, Nasser, in a "relaxed, vocal, and friendly" mood, quickly unloaded on Cuba. Over the past year, he stated, the UAR "had been disturbed over Castro's policies." The Cuban leader, he complained, "was not a true neutral but had allowed himself to be maneuvered into the position of at least a partial Soviet dependency." Nasser said he had warned Havana's ambassador in Cairo that the Soviets could not be trusted in the pinch (i.e., "that Russia would not fight a World War to protect Cuba"), and that recent events had amply borne out that assessment. Echoing Sabri's comments to Rusk, Nasser denied any parallel between the Suez and Cuban crises, since in 1956 "Egypt spoke for herself, whereas in the Cuban affair, it was Moscow that decided Cuban fate." Despite receiving domestic pressure to "conclude a 'special arrangement' with the USSR" – an obvious euphemism for permitting the Soviets to establish a military base and/or deploy nuclear rockets in the UAR – Nasser said he had firmly rejected the idea because it would sacrifice Egypt's independence. "It was," he added, "Castro's failure to follow the same policy that brought him to his present difficulties."¹⁰⁵

According to Heikal's later account, Nasser likened the struggle of Cuba against the United States to "the fight of the sardine against the whale. And his admiration was all for the sardine."¹⁰⁶ However, Nasser's criticism of Castro for allowing Khrushchev to effectively act/speak on his and Cuba's behalf during the crisis, unlike Nasser in 1956, atop Sabri's

¹⁰⁵ Amembassy Cairo (Badeau), Airgram-396, "Subject: Memorandum of conversation with Gemal Abdel Nasser, President of the United Arab Republic," 15 November 1962, CDF, 1960-63, 786b.11/11-1562, copy in DNSA.

¹⁰⁶ Heikal, *Nasser*, p. 307.

comments to Rusk, actually echoed a recent editorial by Heikal¹⁰⁷ – suggesting that Heikal and Sabri were both stating views they knew the president held. Regardless of Nasser's true feelings, he obviously didn't want the Cuban affair to gratuitously encumber his higher priorities in dealing with Washington; while Riad's UNSC remarks accurately reflected Cairo's non-alignment, senior UAR figures, i.e., Kamel, Sabri, and most importantly Nasser in contacts with high-level US officials, sought to dispel or at least mitigate American resentment over Egypt's crisis behavior. US-UAR relations, which had reached a highpoint under JFK earlier in 1962 ("better than they had been in a decade"¹⁰⁸), were already strained at that precise juncture by Yemen, atop recent US arms sales to Israel, and Nasser saw no point in unduly damaging them over Cuba.¹⁰⁹

In any event, after mid-November, Cuba faded rapidly from US-UAR exchanges, as normal priorities resumed their customary configuration in bilateral relations: regional Middle East issues, especially the flare-up in Yemen and perennial Arab-Israel tensions, economic and cultural issues (e.g., US aid and the fate of ancient relics about to be flooded by the Aswan Dam), and JFK's continuing effort to entice Nasser toward a friendlier relationship. Although, despite periodic White House consideration of inviting him (as Komer had urged and Kennedy apparently discussed with his ambassador to Cairo when he briefly returned to Washington in mid-December), Nasser never visited the United States during Kennedy's presidency, much to Badeau's regret.¹¹⁰ As for Cairo's missile crisis diplomacy at the UN, it also quickly dissipated.

¹⁰⁷ See Elbatihmy, "Egypt and the Cuban Missile Crisis," p. 19, quoting Hekal, "The difference between Suez and Cuba," *Al-ahram*, 2 November 1962.

¹⁰⁸ Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945*, 3rd ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), pp. 183-84. Little wrote that bilateral relations peaked in "early 1962," while Komer thought "the summer of 1962 was the apex of US-U.A.R. relations...we had gotten to the point where there was restored a degree of mutual confidence in the bona fides of Egypt as seen from the United States and the United States as seen from Cairo – which was the objective of this exercise after all." Robert W. Komer OHI #2, 16 July 1964, JFKL, p. 8.

¹⁰⁹ The opening of Nasser's papers, both official and personal, could presumably clarify his views. In their absence, another promising source could be Soviet records of Khrushchev's discussions with UAR leaders prior to his ouster in October 1964. According to Heikal, when Khrushchev visited Egypt "in 1965" – *sic*: 1964, when Khrushchev attended ceremonies to mark the Aswan Dam's opening – "he kept going back to it, talking about it, harping on it. It had left a mark on his soul." *Nasser*, p. 187. Heikal briefly quotes Khrushchev's remarks to Nasser, but full *zapis besedy* of these conversations could illuminate both men's views of the missile crisis and its ramifications. So far, unfortunately, they have not been found in Moscow archives, or at least not published.

¹¹⁰ Badeau OHI, 25 February 1969, JFKL, p. 26. Komer recalled repeatedly raising the idea of a Nasser visit with JFK, but "His position invariably was that he thought a Nasser visit would be a good thing but that he had to watch the

The prospect of sending observers from the UAR among other NAM countries to Cuba, raised at the UN by Thant, vanished when Castro vetoed *any* inspections on the island (eventually, the US confirmed the missiles' removal by overflying Soviet ships carrying them, outside Cuban territorial waters).¹¹¹ Riad, despite being viewed during the crisis as a leader of NAM countries' peace efforts at the UN, sharply resisted an attempt to more formally organize such a nonaligned grouping in mid-November. A few days earlier, he had told Cuba's UN envoy that the collection of 45 UN members (including many from NAM) that had urged Thant to mediate the crisis never really acted as a group – "the majority of them feared displeasing the United States; the appeal was aimed toward peace and not solidarity with Cuba" – and had effectively "disintegrated."¹¹² When Cyprus UN ambassador Rossides (also Nicosia's envoy to the United States) tried to call a meeting of NAM members to discuss the Cuban and Sino-Indian crises, a "disturbed" Riad opposed the idea "in no uncertain terms," questioning Rossides' right to organize such a gathering.¹¹³ A group met on November 16, but discussed only the Sino-Indian conflict, not the Cuban situation, and spent much of the time debating "whether group actually a group or not and in any event whether empowered take any decisions." Leaving the closed session, a Ceylonese delegate told the reported, "in evident disgust" that the meeting would produce nothing, "not even a mouse."¹¹⁴ So ended, with Egypt's palpable disinterest, any tangible NAM effort to influence the missile crisis diplomacy. Egypt's relations with revolutionary Cuba, and Nasser's with Castro, never a priority for either party, remained

[domestic political] timing very carefully." Komer said Kennedy at least twice "approved in principle specifically going ahead with the Nasser visit 'at some future date'," but that circumstances always arose to postpone an invitation. Robert W. Komer OHI #2, 16 July 1964, JFKL, pp. 6-7.

¹¹¹ For example, Kuznetsov cabled from New York on October 30 that Thant desired to form an observer team from neutral countries to inspect the missile dismantling/removal, and the Soviet deputy foreign minister voiced support for a group that might include the UAR, Ghana, Ceylon, and Indonesia. See *CWIHPB* 8/9 (Winter 1996/97), p. 303. On November 11, Cuba's UN ambassador recorded that Thant had suggested as neutral observers "Guinea and Ghana from Black Africa, Mexico and Brazil from Latin America, Austria and Sweden from Europe...Indonesia and India for Asia and the UAR [Egypt] from the Arab nations." *CWIHPB* 17/18 (Fall 2012), p. 141, accessible at <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115163>; also USUN, New York (Stevenson), tel. 1755, 3 pm, 13 November 1962, DNSA.

¹¹² See *CWIHPB* 17/18 (Fall 2012), p. 141.

¹¹³ USUN, New York (Stevenson), tel. 1836, 10 pm, 16 November 1962, CDF, 1960-63, 737.00, box 1626, RG 59, NA. Cyprus had been a founding member of NAM, with its president, Archbishop Makarios, attending the September 1961 heads of state summit in Belgrade.

¹¹⁴ USUN, New York (Stevenson), Airgram A-804, "Non-aligned Group Meeting," 16 November 1962, CDF, 1960-63, 737.00, box 1626, RG 59, NA.

outwardly friendly, but perhaps with a bit of added coolness from Cairo's perspective. Intermittent commerce also continued, e.g., in early 1963, a sudden sugar shortage prompted the UAR to seek to purchase the bulk of the needed sweetener from Cuba.¹¹⁵ Cuba remained a full NAM member, attending all meetings (including those in Cairo), but Nasser and Castro never visited each other's country while the two were alive. In early 1965, around the time of his ill-fated venture to rouse Congolese revolutionaries, Lumumba's successors, against the US-backed Mobuto regime, Guevara paid a return trip to Egypt and conversed extensively with Nasser.¹¹⁶ Divulging his clandestine mission to the Congo, which Nasser advised him against, Che seemed troubled by the course of Cuba's revolution, his relationship with Fidel Castro, and his own personal and political direction. Discussing revolution, in Heikal's excerpts (again, we lack full records), Nasser stressed the pragmatic importance of governing effectively and building structures after taking power, while Guevara remained attracted to the romantic, purist challenge of making revolution. When Guevara met his fate in Bolivia on a doomed mission to do that two years later, Nasser felt he had warned him in vain.

With Nikita Khrushchev's Soviet Union, as well, Nasser kept relatively positive relations, which reached a high point when the USSR leader visited Egypt in May 1964, five months before he was ousted, for ceremonies marking the opening of the Aswan Dam constructed with Soviet aid.¹¹⁷ Nasser's attempt to maintain decent relations with Washington also persisted, but he instinctively distrusted Lyndon B. Johnson, and tensions over Yemen and Israel, culminating in 1967, sent bilateral relations downward.

Conclusion

The missile crisis and Cuba, however, appeared to have had relatively little effect on the trajectory of Cairo's relations with either Washington or Moscow. The experience may have slightly enhanced Nasser's appreciation for US might as wielded by JFK as compared to Soviet power handled by Khrushchev, as Komer suspected, but did not change the UAR's basic nonaligned orientation, as Elbahtimy demonstrates. If anything, it confirmed its wisdom in

¹¹⁵ U.S. Embassy, Cairo (Badeau), tel. 1413, 7 March 1963, 71-4-16-26: Cuba - State Department Cables, Section 4, 20 November 1962-4 May 1963, RFK/AG, JFKL (RFKAG-202-006-p0017).

¹¹⁶ Heikal, *Nasser*, pp. 307-15

¹¹⁷ Heikal, *Sphinx and Commissar*, 124-37.

avoiding, or at least minimizing, entanglement with the East-West alliance system, or any foreign military bases or nuclear installations on its soil. Regarding Cuba, there may have been a slight chill in what remained generally friendly and mutually supportive relations. As for Cairo's missile crisis diplomacy, it had a moderate impact, on effective behalf of the NAM, in prodding UN Acting-Secretary General U Thant to actively and speedily intervene to mediate the US-Soviet standoff – Quaison-Sackey claims this UN non-aligned effort had a "decisive role"¹¹⁸ – but the Burmese statesman undoubtedly would've felt obliged to do his utmost in any case. A central mystery remains Nasser's personal role in managing Egypt's response to the crisis: Did he closely supervise Riad's efforts, or even communicate behind-the-scenes with Nkrumah to coordinate UAR-Ghana cooperation? Did he privately send any word to Khrushchev, or the Soviets, during the crisis, prior to his October 31 letter? (We know he did not do so with Kennedy, but he was in the midst of an urgent secret operation with Moscow.) Did he order, or manage, or even know of, the *de facto* campaign by Kamel, Abdul-Fattah, and Sabri after the crisis climaxed, to demean the Cubans in front of senior US officials, in order to sugarcoat the sour taste left by Riad's comments at the UN? Regarding the crisis' nuclear dimension, it would be intriguing to learn whether Brazil's denuclearization proposal triggered any internal Egyptian debate over the broader concept of regional NWFZs – including, possibly, in the Middle East.

For clarification on these and other issues, to more accurately reconstruct Cairo's and Nasser's conduct and positions, scholars must eagerly await the opening of Egyptian diplomatic and governmental archives.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Quaison-Sackey, *Africa Unbound*, p. 117.

¹¹⁹ An excellent early contribution to broader understanding of Cairo's diplomatic efforts would be the release of telegrams during the crisis from the UAR's UN mission (Riad) and ambassadors in Washington (Kamel) and Moscow (Ghaleb).

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