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Advice and Indecision Canada and the Cuban Missile Crisis

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Abstract: The confusion surrounding Canada's response to the Cuban Missile Crisis is well documented. Canadian political leadership hesitated to close ranks with our closest ally in defence of the continent. However, by misinterpreting what could have been done, or blaming the lack of an approved Department of National Defence War Book as the chief culprit for the extended delay, the literature does not adequately account for the confused response. This paper will show that useable measures existed by which the Chiefs of Staff Committee could have raised service readiness levels without appealing to Cabinet. By accounting for the confusion evident at the highest levels of decision-making, the paper illuminates the degree of laziness in strategic thought that characterized the nation's war planning.

With the fiftieth anniversary of the Cuban Missile Crisis recently past, it is fitting to look back at some of the assumptions underpinning the accepted national narrative on Canada's part in those events.[1] That narrative focuses on the lengthy debates in the Canadian Cabinet over raising the alert levels of the Canadian Forces (CF) that delayed action to meet the Soviet threat in October 1962. What scholars have ignored or treated superficially were the Government of Canada approved measures in place at the time to help ready the military and the country to meet rapidly

[1] Much of the material in this paper comes from Brad Gladman and Peter Archambault, *Confronting 'the Essence of Decision': Canada and the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Ottawa: DRDC-CORA TM 2010-250, 2011).

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developing crises without appeal to Cabinet for a declaration of a formal alert.[2] Those measures were not used in this instance. It will thus be suggested that while Prime Minister John G. Diefenbaker bears responsibility for a confused decision-making structure, one characterised by the avoidance and mistrust of military advice, he was as much the victim of that structure as its engineer. The climate of hostility Diefenbaker's attitudes generated created a situation where both political and military leaders were too willing to accept justifications for inaction in the face of what surely was a clear and present danger to North America. In that context, bad military advice precipitated the lengthy and needless Cabinet debate and delay in raising the readiness of the Canadian Forces in lock-step with our ally in continental defence, all of which convinced Washington that Canada was a shaky partner. This perception seems to have endured long after the crisis ended. It contains stark lessons for today's military decision-makers and those providing decision-support.

The background to and course of the 1962 Cuban missile crisis has been adequately covered in the existing historiography.[3] Not

[2] Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971); Graham T. Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 2nd edition (New York: Addison-Wesley Longman, 1999); James M. Minifie, *Open at the Top: Reflections on US–Canada Relations* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1964); John W. Warnock, *Partner to Behemoth: The Military Policy of a Satellite Canada* (Toronto: New Press, 1970); Patrick Nicholson, *Vision and Indecision* (Toronto: Longmans, 1968); Peyton Lyon, "The Cold War: Cuba-October 1962," Canada in *World Affairs, 1961–63* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1968); Peyton Lyon, "Prime Minister Diefenbaker and the Cuban Missile Crisis," in Thomas A. Hockin, ed., *Apex of Power: The Prime Minister and Political Leadership in Canada* (Scarborough: Prentice Hall, 1977); Peter C. Newman, *Renegade in Power: The Diefenbaker Years* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1963); Peter T. Haydon, *The 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis: Canadian Involvement Reconsidered* (Toronto: The Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies, 1993); Jon B. McLin, *Canada's Changing Defense Policy, 1957–1963: The Problems of a Middle Power in Alliance* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1967); Sean M. Maloney, *Learning to Love the Bomb: Canada's Nuclear Weapons during the Cold War* (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2007).

[3] For examples of this voluminous literature, see Elie Abel, *The Missile Crisis* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1966); John M. Young, *When the Russians Blinked: The U.S. Maritime Response to the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Washington: History and Museum Division, U.S. Marine Corps, 1991); Bruce J. Allyn, James G. Blight, and David A. Welch, eds., *Back to the Brink: Proceedings of the Moscow Conference on the Cuban Missile Crisis, January 27–28, 1989* (Cambridge, MA: Center for Science and International Affairs, 1991); Michael R. Beschloss, *The Crisis Years: Kennedy and Khrushchev, 1960–1963* (New York: Edward Burlingame Books, 1991); James Daniel, *Strike in the West: The Complete Story of the Cuban Crisis* (New York: Holt,

surprisingly, much of the narrative focuses on the game of chicken between the two Cold War superpowers. By contrast, the literature on Canada's involvement in the crisis, and more specifically on Prime Minister Diefenbaker's decisions, is surprisingly sparse. Moreover, later accounts, including Diefenbaker's memoirs, seem at odds with other versions of the events, leading to confusion over what influenced the decision to delay approving increased readiness for the Canadian forces. Most accounts attribute Diefenbaker's delay to a lack of appreciation of the nature of the threat; anger at a lack of consultation by the US that blinded Canadian leadership to the threat, or suggest that poor consultation on the part of Washington was a convenient excuse for Canada's behaviour, the only post facto defence available for Diefenbaker who had so badly gauged Canadian public support for the US and its handling of this incident. Most accounts have assumed that the military was not culpable in the confused Canadian response.[4] The present article, however, argues that it was poor military advice that directly led to the lengthy and unnecessary Cabinet debates which followed.

Any narrative of Canada's role in the crisis must begin with intelligence reports that showed the Soviets were installing ballistic missiles in Cuba capable of hitting US and Canadian targets. Those

Rinehart and Winston, 1963); Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971); Edward C. Keefer, Charles S. Sampson and Louis J. Smith. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–1963, vol.9: Cuban Missile Crisis and Aftermath* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1996); Dan Caldwell, *The Cuban Missile Affair and the American Style of Crisis Management* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corp, 1989); Dino A. Brugioni, *Eyeball to Eyeball: The Inside Story of the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: Random House, 1991); Abram Chayes, *The Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974); David Detzer, *The Brink: Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962* (New York: Crowell, 1979); Herbert Samuel Dinerstein, *The Making of a Missile Crisis, October 1962* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1976); Robert A. Divine, ed., *The Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: M. Wiener Publishers, 1988); Peter T. Haydon, *The 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis: Canadian Involvement Reconsidered* (Toronto: Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies, 1993); Roger Hilsman, *The Cuban Missile Crisis: The Struggle Over Policy* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996); William J. Medland, *The Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962: Needless or Necessary* (New York: Praeger, 1988); Anatoli I. Gribkov, *Operation ANADYR: U.S. and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Chicago: Edition Q, 1994); Robert Smith Thompson, *The Missiles of October: The Declassified Story of John F. Kennedy and the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992); Mark J. White, *The Cuban Missile Crisis* (Basingstoke, Hampshire, UK: Macmillan, 1996).

[4] For instance, see Peter T. Haydon, *The 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis: Canadian Involvement Reconsidered.*

reports forced President John Kennedy to establish an American naval quarantine of the island and threaten further action if preparation of the sites continued. Existing accounts argue that tensions between the Kennedy administration and the Diefenbaker government over Canada's failure to cut ties with Communist Cuba and Diefenbaker's belief that the US position on Cuba was unbalanced, caused Kennedy to inform the Canadians only an hour and a half in advance of the blockade announcement.[5] As historian Richard Neustadt has noted, so began the spiral effect of "muddled perceptions, stifled communications, and disappointed expectations."[6]

The outcome was the Canadian government's hesitation in responding to the American request to increase the Canadian Forces alert status to Defence Condition (DEFCON) 3. Only after lengthy debates on 23–24 October did the Canadian Cabinet finally and very quietly acquiesce. The existing historiography consistently paints a picture of Canadian political leadership fearing that a Canadian alert would further provoke the Soviets, especially in the context of what many in the Canadian Cabinet felt were unbalanced American policies towards Cuba. These fears, the argument continues, combined with anger over a lack of advance consultation and concerns about implications for Canadian policy on nuclear weapons, all of which reportedly contributed to Prime Minister John Diefenbaker and Secretary of State for External Affairs Howard Green's reluctance to agree to Kennedy's request. As the Soviet ships approached the quarantine zone later in the week, however, the insistence of the minister of national defence, Douglas Harkness, on the need for action gained support and the prime minister finally approved the alert.

[5] This argument appears in many sources to varying degrees of importance as a factor in how events unfolded. For examples of this see Jocelyn Maynard Ghent, "Canada, the United States, and the Cuban Missile Crisis, *The Pacific Historical Review* 48, no. 2 (May 1979): 160–161; John Herd Thompson and Stephen J. Randall, *Canada and the United States: Ambivalent Allies*, 218, Robert Reford, *Canada and Three Crises* (Toronto: Canadian Institute of International Affairs, 1968), 147–217, and J.L. Granatstein and Norman Hillmer, *For Better or for Worse: Canada and the United States to the 1990s* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd., 1991), 203–204. It must also be noted that security concerns prevented President Kennedy from notifying any of his key allies earlier, but that Diefenbaker felt continental defence matters and the NORAD agreement required earlier consultation.

[6] Richard E. Neustadt, *Alliance Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 56.

As is frequently argued, Canada's hesitant response reflected in part the desire of the prime minister and others to preserve the independence of Canadian foreign policy and to maintain a balanced posture in crisis conditions. Diefenbaker and his advisors were determined to uphold Canadian sovereignty, and thus did not wish to be seen as being too close to the American position. The delay, however, was widely criticised both at the time and since as contributing to a growing perception of the indecisiveness of the Diefenbaker government during a crisis that was as much a threat to Canada as the US. Moreover, the government's response to the crisis exacerbated the already difficult relations with the Kennedy administration. While Diefenbaker and former President Dwight D. Eisenhower had shared a warm relationship, the prime minister enjoyed no such rapport with the "Imperial President" Kennedy. Their relationship, frosty at best, may have clouded and complicated discussions about the threat to the continent posed by Communist missiles and what to do about it. The literature raises these issues but does not address them in depth.

Notably lacking in the literature is consideration of what information and analysis the Diefenbaker cabinet sought, what was actually provided to them. That in turn raises the question whether flaws in the processes in place to supply this essential material to Cabinet may have contributed – perhaps fundamentally – to the resulting fiasco. More generally, scholars have ignored or misunderstood the efforts of Canada's Cold War military in the years prior to the confrontation over Cuba to modify Canada's strategic posture and develop measures with which to respond to crises without delay. These early efforts included attempts to modify the Government War Books from the Second World War to provide the military with the means to deal effectively with the Soviet nuclear threat and rapidly developing crises.

After the Second World War, Canada's overall strategic concept was based on its traditional one of mobilization, rather than on the maintenance of large forces in-being. The three services maintained cadre forces to allow for the rapid expansion of the Militia, Naval Reserve and Auxiliary Air Force in the event of war. Ships and aircraft were mothballed, while the resources for several army divisions were stored at various sites throughout the country. The mobilization plan called for the activation of an army roughly the same size and shape as the First Canadian Army deployed in Northwest Europe in

1944–45. Several factors prevented the Militia from maintaining the numbers necessary for such mobilization in peacetime, not least were high employment rates in the postwar boom years.[7]

The concept of national, and even military, mobilization had changed with the advent of nuclear weapons and the possibility of attack with little or no warning. The commitment of national resources to war remained, of course, the responsibility of the state, and as always included political, social, economic, industrial and military components. In the Cold War, planners were influenced by the concept of total war, as it had played out in various forms between 1914 and 1945. Centralized control of national assets, geared toward total victory, had been applied by all combatants, including Canada. Of course, the concept of military mobilization in Canada is tarnished by the memory of Sam Hughes, who, as minister of militia, ignored existing mobilization plans and implemented his own, making him the target of much criticism. The difficulty of maintaining adequate capacity to mobilize the military continued to be a particular problem for the Army well into the Cold War, as it faced the challenge of balancing requirements to respond quickly to crises and the political need to sustain the framework for mobilization of reserve units across the country for longer term preparations.

Nonetheless, Canada and the United States recognized the need for quick decision-making in the event of a threat to the continent as early as 1947. The Canada–US Basic Security Plan, agreed to in that year, outlined an operational plan for Canadian and US forces "in the event of a threat to the security of the Northern part of the Western Hemisphere." In short, it articulated the defensive portions of a war plan for those areas which could be placed in effect when so directed by the two governments. The Basic Security Plan also provided for long-term planning and routine analysis of the evolving threat appreciation by both parties, based on the mutual assessment that a potential enemy would not be able to deliver "weapons of mass destruction in significant quantity on vital areas of Canada and the United States" until 1952. In the event of enemy aggression, the Canada–US Military Cooperation Committee, created shortly after the war to coordinate planning, recommended that the "ultimate

[7] Hon. John A. Fraser, *In Service of the Nation: Canada's Army Reserves for the 21st Century*, a report presented to the Minister of National Defence, the Hon. Art Eggleton, May 2000.

objective of any war effort of both countries is to seize the offensive with the maximum practicable strength in the minimum length of time." As such, an "acceptable state of readiness" could be achieved, with "purely defensive measures" held to "the absolute minimum."[8]

Canadian governments generally agreed that defensive and mobilization capabilities were not a priority by the way they treated the reserve mobilization framework, particularly the Militia, in the years between 1945 and the Cuban Missile Crisis. Over the next few years, as the Soviets demonstrated their atomic capability and the Canadian military had to undergo "peacetime" mobilization for the Korean War and the NATO Integrated Force in Europe, strategic planning became more focussed on the likelihood of a nuclear – and rapidly decided – war. Of course, Cold War responsibilities also meant that Canadian forces were required to participate in alliance activities. However, the Active Force, consisting mainly of the Mobile Striking Force and oriented to fulfill Canada's share of continental defence requirements in line with the Basic Security Plan, amounted to the "rough equivalent of a brigade of troops." Tasked with the dual role of handling continental and homeland defence, the force could not be deployed since it was already over-committed.[9] For the Korean War, a two brigade-group force was raised "off the streets" using the legal term 'Special Force' since this was supposed to be a limited engagement for this particular operation. One brigade group acted as a manpower pool while the other, 25 Brigade, deployed to Korea. During the early stages of the Korean conflict (1950–1953), the government also deployed forces to Western Europe as part of NATO, the army component being 27 Brigade. To be sure, this was a new type of conflict that was markedly dissimilar to the Second World War. The Cold War required standing forces both to deter enemy action and, in the event of a conflagration, hold ground until larger forces could be mobilized.[10]

[8] Library and Archives Canada (LAC), MG 26 J4, The Papers of William Lyon Mackenzie King, Volume 318, File 3365 PJBD 1946–1948, "Memorandum by the Canada–United States Military Co-operation Committee, "Implementation of the Canada–United States Basic Security Plan, 23 July 1947.

[9] J.L. Granatstein, *Canada's Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 316.

[10] Sean Maloney, *War Without Battles: Canada's NATO Brigade in Germany* (Toronto: McGraw Hill Ryerson, Ltd., 1997).

With the growing threat of a nuclear war, however, a reserve force geared to longer term mobilization might have seemed a luxury in the minds of Army leadership, concentrating as it was on maintaining forces in-being at a high state of readiness.[11] Studies led by Major-General Howard K. Anderson in 1954 and by Brigadier W.A.B. Anderson in 1957 examined the reserve forces. The Kennedy report proposed to rename the reserve force the Canadian Army (Militia), and to streamline the organization organize sothat it could more speedily mobilize a smaller number of units. The Anderson report, completed at the direction of the chief of the general staff, General Howard Graham, had a shorter term focus, to improve the militia's capability to fill out the "1st Canadian Infantry Division on M-Day" and to provide "reinforcements for the 1st and 2nd Canadian Infantry Divisions and Corps troops at M plus 30 days." The study also recommended that the militia perform civil defence tasks if necessary.[12] Civil defence, as opposed to combat operations, would soon become the militia's primary task, however, when John Diefenbaker's Tories won the 1957 election, and Major-General George Pearkes became minister of national defence.

Pearkes strongly favoured a civil defence role for the Militia, a role that had been in the hands of the Department of National Health and Welfare since 1951.[13] It was an opportune time for new ideas, because the enemy's deployment of a thermonuclear capability and the means to use it against North America generated an even greater shift in emphasis toward continental defence. The air defence system absorbed the bulk of the defence budget. Projects like the Avro Arrow, Bomarc, and the sensor systems in the North took absolute priority. Consequently, an increasing amount of money was drained from supporting reserve forces. Mobilization was now considered a dead issue since there would not be enough time to mobilize during a nuclear war. In 1959, therefore, the Diefenbaker government assigned the role of civil defence and "national survival" duties to the Militia,

[11] T.C. Willett, *Canada's Militia: A Heritage at Risk* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987), 76.

[12] Tamara Sherwin, "From Total War to Total Force: Civil-Military Relations and the Canadian Army Reserve (Militia) 1945–1995" (Master of Arts Thesis in History, University of New Brunswick, 1997), 70–75.

[13] Reginald H. Roy, *For Most Conspicuous Bravery: A Biography of Major-General George R. Pearkes, V.C., Through Two World Wars* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1977), 296–297.

mainly among the combat arms units. Debate over the wisdom of that decision has since continued.[14]

Despite the internal military debates over roles and assigned resources, however, civil defence remained a serious national and strategic problem in the 1950s. Bureaucrats and military officers knew the necessity of rapid decision-making in the event of any type of nuclear exchange long before 1962, and increasingly acknowledged the requirement to accord the civil defence organization, housed in the Department of National Health and Welfare, higher status as an emergency measures organization.[15] There was understanding within the Canadian bureaucracy that in a nuclear emergency the menace would be truly continental; circumstances might preclude full consultation and consideration of options with US authorities. In January 1957, Arnold Heeney, then the ambassador in Washington, observed that "an occasion may arise where time does not permit consultation before the declaration of an alert because the imminence of attack seems to either Government to be a matter of hours rather than days."[16]

Since 1947, therefore, Canadian civil and military leaders sought to develop a strategy that would either deter a nuclear attack or deal with its aftermath. In so doing, a series of plans were needed to mobilize national resources to meet these ends. Plans came in the form of the Government War Books. Indeed, the War Books represented early attempts to conceptualize the very significant problems associated with determining who was responsible for what in the case of an enemy attack. Recently, this kind of planning has re-emerged as the latest in a series of new and revolutionary concepts as "the Comprehensive Approach."[17]

[14] See, for example, John A. English, *Lament for an Army: The Decline of Canadian Military Professionalism* (Concord, ON: Irwin, 1998), 51–52; also see Andrew Burtch, *Give Me Shelter: The Failure of Canada's Cold War Civil Defence* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013), 138.

[15] Directorate of History and Heritage (DHH), 73/1223 Raymont Papers, Memorandum from ESO to CCOS, "Report of Working Group on War Measures," 21 January 1957.

[16] DHH, Raymont Papers, Series IV, File 2126. ADP Heeney, "Draft Letter to US Secretary of State," January 1957.

[17] Lieutenant-General Andrew Leslie, Mr. Peter Gizewski, and Lieutenant-Colonel Michael Rostek, "Developing a Comprehensive Approach to Canadian Forces Operations," *Canadian Military Journal* 9, no.1; Joint Doctrine and Concepts Centre, "The Comprehensive Approach", *Joint Doctrinal Note* 4/05 (Swindon: Joint Doctrine and Concepts Centre, 2006); United States Department of Defense,

At the top of the hierarchy was the Government of Canada War Book, which provided subordinate departments a framework within which to develop their own War Books. But given the responsibilities of the Department of National Defence in wartime, the Department of National Defence (DND) War Book was a close second in importance. The books laid out measures "to meet an emergency that might or does lead to war, and to assign responsibility for executing the measures."[18] In many ways, this was a true "whole of government" effort to mobilize national resources to respond to Soviet aggression, the lessons from which are something current concept developers should note when developing contemporary initiatives often touted as being revolutionary breaks with past experience.[19] Those who argue for the revolutionary change in the complexity of operations in recent times, and the innovative nature of the required combined action by multiple departments and agencies are quite simply wrong.

The War Books were written to deal with threats that were, constantly in flux. For example, the first post-Second World War Government War Book was written in 1948 with the experience of that war in mind. Its authors, therefore, expected mobilization rather than large standing forces to be the norm. The speed with which major crises erupted in the late 1940s and 1950s, and, starting in the late 1950s, the possibility of a nuclear exchange by intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM), rendered the mobilization concept largely irrelevant. Nonetheless, and contrary to the interpretation in key

Quadrennial Defense Review Report (Washington DC, February 2010), 11.

[18] DHH, Joint Staff Fonds, 2002/17, "The Department of National Defence War Book," July 1961, 1.

[19] Chief of Force Development, "The Future Security Environment 2007–2030, Part One" (Ottawa: unsigned draft dated 8 November 2008); US JFCOM "The Comprehensive Approach: A Conceptual Framework for Multi-National Experiment 5 – A Summary Paper," Suffolk: Joint Futures Lab, United States Joint Forces Command, November 2006, 1; US JFCOM "The Comprehensive Approach: A Conceptual Framework for Multi-National Experiment 5 – A Summary Paper, Suffolk: Joint Futures Lab, United States Joint Forces Command, November 2006; Chief of Force Development, "Objective Force 2028" (Ottawa: undated draft document); and Chief of Force Development, "Integrated Capstone Concept", (Ottawa: draft document dated 30 June 2009), on page 26 refers to the period from 1838–1989 as "Jominian and Simpler," a completely indefensible and superficial characterisation of past experience. For a contrary position, one showing that these revolutionary concepts are no such thing, see Brad Gladman and Peter Archambault, *An Effects Based Approach to Operations in the Domestic and Continental Operating Environment: A Case for Pragmatism* (Ottawa: DRDC CORA Technical Memorandum 2008–033, 2009).

published works on the Cuban Missile Crisis, this article shows that the outdated War Books remained in effect until replacement versions were approved.[20]

The Government War Book stated in general terms the measures required in an emergency, and designated the department or agency of government responsible to execute these measures. The DND war book listed and described the measures for which the minister, the deputy minister, the chairman of the chiefs of staff, and the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC) were responsible.[21] The wording here is key, as a main theme in the Canadian historiography focuses on the perceived lack of authority on which defence minister Douglas Harkness raised readiness levels of the armed forces and authorized various other activities.[22] The confusion that existed during the initial stages of the crisis shaped the subsequent action or lack of action.

After the briefing on 22 October 1962 by US special envoy Livingston Merchant on the planned US quarantine of Cuba, Harkness met with the chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, Air Chief Marshal Frank Miller, and told him to "order the Chiefs of Staff to put their forces on the 'READY' state of alert."[23] According to Harkness, the chairman questioned whether this authority was available to the defence minister. The difficulty arose because the updated DND War Book, which included detailed descriptions of the circumstances in which the defence minister could raise the alert levels of the armed forces, had been under review by various government departments since at least early 1961, and had yet to be approved by Cabinet. Thus, as Harkness later state, "my legal right to take such action was

[20] Peter Haydon, *The 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis*, 96.

[21] DHH, Joint Staff Fonds, 2002/17, "The Department of National Defence War Book," July 1961, 1.

[22] See David Welch's review of "Peter Haydon, The 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis: Canadian Involvement Reconsidered," *Journal of Conflict Studies* 15, no.1 (Spring 1995): 149–153; Jocelyn Maynard Ghent, "Canada, the United States, and the Cuban Missile Crisis," *The Pacific Historical Review* 48, no.2 (May 1979); John Herd Thompson and Stephen J. Randall, *Canada and the United States: Ambivalent Allies* (Athens GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1997); Robert Reford, *Canada and Three Crises* (Toronto: Canadian Institute of International Affairs, 1968); J.L. Granatstein and Norman Hillmer, *For Better or for Worse: Canada and the United States to the 1990s* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd., 1991); also see Peter Haydon, *The 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis*, 210.

[23] LAC, MG 32, Papers of Douglas Harkness, Vol. 57, "The Nuclear Arms Question and the Political Crisis Which Arose From it in January and February, 1963", 8–9.

not clear."[24] After a short discussion it was decided that this action needed to be cleared with the prime minister. This mistaken advice opened the way for extended debate at a time when united and timely action was needed both to defend the continent against a burgeoning threat, and to avoid the appearance of a divided Western alliance at a time of severe crisis.

The reasons for the need to revise both the DND and Government War Books were that the existing DND War Book presupposed a conventional war, and thus "policy guidance for a nuclear war was inadequate." As well, the Canadian Formal Alert Measures dating from 1955 were "increasingly unrealistic to deal with the speed and decisiveness with which a nuclear attack [could] be delivered."[25] In this instance, capable planners had identified and looked for a means to overcome this weakness.

The planners believed that the declaration of a Formal Alert by the Government of Canada would take too much time, would unnecessarily alarm the public, and could increase international tensions. They proposed a series of revisions to the Cabinet Defence Committee for measures that could be taken without instituting a Formal Alert.[26] These were the "States of Military Vigilance" to be ordered when the readiness of the forces needed to be raised, but where there was no need to begin mobilizing national resources for a war. It was noted at the time that there were several instances in which a "State of Military Vigilance" could have been applied appropriately, including the Suez and Lebanese crises, as well as those in the Congo and Laos.[27] While there was a significant difference between incidents like the 1960 Congo crisis and a direct threat to North America from Soviet missiles in Cuba, what is interesting in these debates is the assumption that declaring a Formal Alert would alarm the public and increase international tensions. One wonders where this belief originated or whether any rigorous analysis went into its formulation,

[24] Ibid.

[25] DHH, Box 83, File 2002/17, Joint Staff Fonds, "Memorandum to The Minister: Revised DND War Book," August 1961.

[26] LAC, MG 32 Papers of Douglas Harkness, Vol. 57, "The Nuclear Arms Question and the Political Crisis Which Arose From it in January and February, 1963", 11; LAC, RG2, Cabinet Defence Committee Documents, Vol. 2752, File D-1-6-1, "Memorandum to Cabinet: Revised DND War Book, 9 January 1962.

[27] DHH, Joint Staff Fonds, 2002/17, Box 83, Memorandum to the Minister, "Revised DND War Book", p.2.

or if this was another example of opinion becoming "received wisdom" that could not be challenged. In any event, the assessment of the speed at which a nuclear conflict could develop certainly was sound. At the very least, these beliefs drove the Joint Planning Committee to revise the DND alert measures.

Because of changes in the character of the threat, the Joint Planning Committee developed additional Canadian Forces States of Increased Military Vigilance to supplement the alert measures in the DND War Book. These new states would alert the forces "during a period of international tension prior to the declaration of an Alert by the Canadian Government."[28] The two proposed states of military vigilance, "Discreet" and "Ready," would be called by the chiefs of staff, and the chairman of the chiefs of staff committee would inform the minister. The "Discreet" state of military vigilance would, amongst other things, require the services to review their emergency plans, place ships and aircraft on short notice to move, and increase the readiness of intelligence and communications facilities.[29] The "Ready" state of military vigilance increased force protection measures at bases and defence installations, cancelled military leave, deployed mobile and alternate headquarters, alerted standby battalions for deployment, and brought units up to wartime strength. These states of military vigilance were designed for use prior to implementation of the existing Canadian formal alert levels of Simple, Reinforced, and General alerts which could only be declared with the approval of the Federal Cabinet.[30] Before these amendments were made, the War Books simply did not meet the requirements of the threat environments the country faced. The point here is that changes were made to the War Books in force during the Cuban Missile Crisis: the military and political leadership could have used the measures without Cabinet approval.

The "States of Military Vigilance" applied only to the armed forces, and were similar to those adopted by the major NATO command areas. These states provided for precautionary measures that could be taken by the RCAF, Canadian Army, and RCN in Canada during

[28] LAC, RG 24, Department of National Defence Records, Vol. 549 File 096 103 v.3, Joint Planning Committee to the Chiefs of Staff Committee, "Canadian Forces States of Increased Military Vigilance, 23 December 1958."
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.

periods of heightened international tension. They consisted only of military measures, and could be ordered by the Chiefs of Staff Committee prior to the declaration of a formal alert by the Canadian Government. The Formal Alert Stage was still to be declared by the Government, but confusion existed over what measures were available to senior military and civilian leadership to act when needed.[31] Thus, as Harkness later recalled, Miller's contention that the minister's legal right to take such action was not clear, and the decision to first clear this action with Diefenbaker.[32] Aside from the seeming confusion by both the senior civilian and military leadership over what measures were available to the chiefs of staff and the minister of national defence is the curious temerity of a military leader in giving an unsolicited legal opinion to the civilian authority. Regardless, any attempt to understand the sophistication of Canadian strategic thinking at the time must include an analysis of the measures that were in place and the reasons for the confusion at this critical juncture. Such analysis must also engage the accepted national narrative, which misinterprets this central aspect of Canadian involvement in the Cuban Missile Crisis.

One of the most commonly cited sources is Peter Haydon's *The 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis*.[33] In his discussion of the Canadian crisis management system, Haydon outlines the five alert phases proposed in the July 1961 version of the DND War Book, which had not been approved by Cabinet before the crisis began. Indeed, it was only after three days of delay during which the entire Cabinet debated how Canada would respond that the Cabinet Defence Committee finally met and the Minister of National Defence raised the War Book matter. On 25 October 1962, after nearly nine months' deferment of a decision "to allow time for further study by other departments" the Cabinet Defence Committee finally "approved in principle the Department of National Defence War Book, including the concept of States of Military Vigilance," but with a curious provision that "the Minister of National Defence would obtain the approval of the Prime

[31] LAC, RG2, Cabinet Defence Committee Documents, Vol. 2752, File D-1-6-1, "Memorandum to Cabinet: Revised DND War Book," 9 January 1962.
[32] LAC, MG 32 Papers of Douglas Harkness, Vol. 57, "The Nuclear Arms Question and the Political Crisis Which Arose From it in January and February, 1963," 9.
[33] Peter T. Haydon, *The 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis: Canadian Involvement Reconsidered.*

Minister before declaring a Ready State of Military-Vigilance."[34] This requirement, which speaks volumes about the nature of Canadian strategic culture, stood in defiance of the entire reason for changing the War Book: the need for speed and decisiveness in response to attack. However, what Haydon's analysis misses is that a half-step towards this crisis system had been taken.

Harkness and Miller's confusion following Merchant's briefing regarding what measures were available to the Chiefs of Staff Committee and the minister of national defence is perplexing given the recent developments regarding alert measures. According to the Canadian Army's director of military operations and planning (DMO&P), the states of military vigilance (discreet and ready) "were adopted by the Chiefs of Staff Committee on 18 Jun 1959."[35] These were exclusively military measures and could "be ordered by the Chiefs of Staff Committee prior to the declaration of a formal alert by the Canadian Government." He wrote that those states of military vigilance had "been added to the DND War Book by Amendment No.1 dated 21 Dec 59,"[36] which means those measures had been approved by the Government of Canada. This contradicts an observation made by another scholar of the period, Sean Maloney, who argued that the "Chiefs of Staff approved these new States of Military Vigilance in July 1959," but that they do "not appear to have been referred to Cabinet for approval."[37] Again, while Maloney correctly analyzes the evidence he cited, the fact remains that he, like Haydon, has not accounted for the amendments made to the 1955 DND War Book which, although not perfect, would have allowed Miller to act as Harkness wished.

Haydon's account does, however, assert that "the war books had been withdrawn for updating" and that they "could only be put back into force by cabinet direction."[38] He reiterated this conclusion

[34] LAC, Record Group 2, Cabinet Defence Committee Documents, The one hundred and thirty-seventh meeting of the Cabinet Defence Committee, 25 October 1962, 2.
[35] DHH, File 115.3M1.009 (D6), Colonel AJB Bailey, Director Military Operations and Planning, "Draft Amendment – Army War Book, States of Military Vigilance," 12 February 1960.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Sean Maloney, *Learning to Love the Bomb: Canada's Nuclear Weapons During the Cold War* (Dulles VA: Potomac Books, Inc., 2007), 192.
[38] Peter T. Haydon, *The 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis: Canadian Involvement Reconsidered*, 96.

in an article published in for *The Northern Mariner* in 2008.[39] In both cases Haydon provides no substantiation for this assertion, and the available evidence shows that the problems were not due to the lack of an authorized DND War Book, but rather to the confusion or outright misunderstanding of the measures available to senior leadership. At the very least, Haydon's assertion that the War Books had been withdrawn for updating seems a misreading of the available record. It made no sense to withdraw the War Books from service while debating even significant updates. Had war erupted before completing this exercise, which lasted from roughly mid–1960 to late 1962, the government would have been left without a coherent response plan. This simply would not have been a rational move, and there is sufficient evidence showing the War Books remained in effect throughout the crises, even if they needed updating. A memorandum to the minister in August 1961 supports the argument that the War Books were in effect during the crisis. It states that in "1955, DND adopted the War Books currently in use in the Department for the development of emergency defence plans and for their execution when the need should arise." Additionally, on 25 October the Vice Chief of the Air Staff noted that the "Air Staff has gone over the War Book with the Minister," indicating the War Books were in effect.[40] Moreover, as early as 1948 the early post-war version of the Government War Book was submitted to the Cabinet Defence Committee for approval despite the document not being "well balanced or complete." The planners advised that despite "these shortcomings, it should form a useful framework for further planning, which in turn should permit its progressive revision."[41] Thus, the tradition was to keep even imperfect plans in place until revised, and not, as Haydon argues, to remove them from service altogether.

Further evidence that the DND War Book had not been taken out of service before the crisis can be seen in communication to the US government from the clerk of the privy council and cabinet secretary, R.B. Bryce, on 24 October 1962, a day before the Cabinet

[39] Peter T. Haydon, "Canadian Involvement in the Cuban Missile Crisis Re-Reconsidered," *The Northern Mariner* XVII, no.2 (April 2007): 60.

[40] DHH, 79/469 Folder 26, Air Vice-Marshal M.M. Hendrick Papers, Daily Diary October 1962, Thursday, 25 October 1962.

[41] LAC, Record Group 2 Vol. 2750, File VI, Cabinet Defence Committee Documents, Memorandum For Cabinet Defence Committee: Government War Book, September 1948.

Defence Committee approved the revised DND War Book.[42] The US ambassador in Ottawa advised the secretary of state that Bryce had

> told [him] confidentially that Cabinet had authorized Defence Minister Harkness to invoke for Canadian Air Force (NORAD only) "ready phase of military vigilance" to bring Canadian force at NORAD into line with US forces." General James informs me that this is equivalent to US DEFCON 3 which is present stage our forces. James informed by Defence Ministry that Canadian forces NORAD have been authorized to assume NORAD DEFCON 3.[43]

Had the War Books been withdrawn from service, the Cabinet could not have done so until after the Cabinet Defence Committee approved the DND War Book the following day. When the decision was finally taken, it was not to restore the War Books but rather to approve the series of updates that had been pending for some time. Ultimately, and something demonstrating a lack of appreciation for the needed changes, the decision taken was a retrograde step due to the curious provision that "the Minister of National Defence would obtain the approval of the Prime Minister before declaring a Ready State of Military-Vigilance."[44]

A key point to understanding the confusion that occurred during the Cuban Missile Crisis was that the major revision of the 1955 War Book planned for 1961 was not, as some authors argue, about adopting the new alert system but rather over making clear distinctions between the categories of alert. The 1959 amendment to the DND War Book which brought the new alert system into effect contained a "certain amount of duplication particularly between "Discreet" vigilance measures and "Simple" alert measures," and the "major revision of the DND War Book ... [was] to remove these discrepancies and to bring the War Book into line with current

[42] LAC, Record Group 2, Cabinet Defence Committee Documents, The one hundred and thirty-seventh meeting of the Cabinet Defence Committee, 25 October 1962, 2.
[43] US National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), RG 59, General Records of the Department of State, Records Relating to the Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962–1963, Telegram From Ambassador White to the Secretary of State, 24 October 1962.
[44] LAC, Record Group 2, Cabinet Defence Committee Documents, The one hundred and thirty-seventh meeting of the Cabinet Defence Committee, 25 October 1962, 2.

concepts."[45] The updates to these measures were proposed in mid-1961, but reflecting a lack of appreciation of the threats faced, the debate continued into late 1962. This was not, however, due to the War Books having been withdrawn from service, nor was it because the measures had not been approved. The only issue was that the existing measures were a bit confusing and had some wrinkles to be ironed out. Because of this, and seemingly because of a lack of awareness of the 1959 update to the DND War Book which allowed the COSC to raise the readiness level of the CF, Miller told Harkness that "the new War Book covering the instances in which the Minister of Defence had authority for this action had not yet been approved by Cabinet."[46] While this statement was not incorrect, it served to obfuscate the fact that the COSC had the authority, granted them by the 21 December 1959 amendment to the 1955 DND War Book, to act.

Thus, when Harkness told Miller to raise the alert level of the armed forces to a "Ready" state of military vigilance, while it may not technically have been the responsibility of the minister of national defence with the procedures then in place, the Chiefs of Staff Committee certainly could have done so. As Miller should have known, the measures adopted by the chiefs of staff in June of 1959 and by amendment to the DND War Book in December, made it quite clear that this responsibility was vested in the Chiefs of Staff Committee and could be used prior to the declaration of a general alert by the Government of Canada. Doing so would have avoided the entire mess of long Cabinet debates involving ministers with no real appreciation of defence issues. If Harkness' account is correct, the question then becomes: why did Miller give the advice that he did? After all, Miller had been deputy minister of National Defence when these measures were adopted by the Chiefs of Staff Committee and later that year as an amendment to the DND War Book, and must have been aware of the changes.[47] Possibly the debate and significant

[45] DHH, File 115.3M1.009 (D6), Colonel AJB Bailey, Director Military Operations and Planning, "Draft Amendment – Army War Book, States of Military Vigilance," 12 February 1960.

[46] LAC, MG 32 Papers of Douglas Harkness, Vol. 57, "The Nuclear Arms Question and the Political Crisis Which Arose From it in January and February, 1963."

[47] LAC, RG2, Records of the Privy Council Office, Cabinet Defence Committee meetings. The records of these meetings show Mr. Miller's attendance as Deputy Minister of National Defence.

delay over the adoption of the revised version of the DND War Book pushed these developments out of mind.

If there was a time for the chiefs of staff to use their initiative and the authority granted to them by the revised DND War Book, it was in October 1962. The threat posed by the missiles in Cuba was as much a military threat to Canada as it was to the United States. The US military posture, including CINC NORAD's repeated requests to the Chiefs of Staff Committee to raise the readiness levels of the Canadian assets over which he theoretically had operational control, demanded a concomitant increase in the Canadian forces' readiness to demonstrate that there were no cracks in the Western Alliance that the Soviets might exploit.[48] Yet, whether because of political pressure or because of a lack of awareness of the measures available, the Chiefs of Staff Committee failed to act. Moreover, Diefenbaker assumed that the practices of the NATO alliance, of which he incorrectly felt NORAD was a part, entitled him to be consulted on any proposed course of action that would involve raising readiness of the Canadian armed forces.[49]

Failing to do so led directly to the needless Cabinet debate on 23–24 October. While the debate continued the degree of disappointment of the US leadership was apparent. Assistant US Secretary of State Harlan Cleveland, then working very closely with the US ambassador to the United Nations, Adlai Stevenson, reported to the White House on 24 October 1962 that the "Canadians are still pressing their resolution holding everything up until observers are sent to check accuracy of the President's statement."[50] The report went on to comment that Cleveland "thinks we will have more

[48] DHH 79/469, Air Vice Marshal M.M. Hendrick Papers, Daily Diary, 25 October 1962, Record of Conversation between Vice Chief of the Air Staff and Air Officer Commanding Air Defence Command, 25 October 1962.

[49] Charles Foulkes, "Canadian Defence Policy in a Nuclear Age," *Behind the Headlines* 2, no.1 (May 1961); 12; Joseph T. Jockel and Joel J. Sokolsky, "Continental Defence: 'Like farmers whose lands have a common concession line,'" in David S. McDonough, ed., *Canada's National Security in the Post-9/11 World: Treaties, Interests, and Threats* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 120.

[50] John F Kennedy Presidential Library (JFK), Papers of John F. Kennedy, National Security Files, Countries–Cuba–Night Log, 10/04/62–10/30/62, Memorandum for MacGeorge Bundy, Night Log, 24 October 1962; Diefenbaker Canada Centre (DCC), MG01XIIC120 Volume 56, Memorandum for the Minister, Cuba, 24 October 1962, 4.

trouble from the Canadians."[51] The frustration with what the Americans viewed as foot-dragging by the Canadians reflects a very different threat perception – both of the Soviet Union in general and this incident specifically – between the political leadership of each country. Had the Canadian chiefs of staff exercised the authority vested in them, this strain in relations could have been avoided.

The literature on the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Canadian hesitation and delay in closing ranks with our most important ally at a critical time has left many questions unanswered. Published works point to confusion at the highest levels of the Canadian government, but do not sufficiently account for it. The literature either misinterprets what could have been done or places the blame for the government's delay on the lack of an approved DND War Book. This study has shown that the Chiefs of Staff Committee had ample means to raise the readiness levels of all services without appealing to Cabinet. Scholars have delighted in castigating Diefenbaker for his mistakes while overlooking the military leadership's role in the crisis.

Another common issue in the scholarship is whether measures taken by commanders outside of Ottawa prior to the belated authorization of increased readiness, and the pressure exerted by the chiefs of staff that ultimately brought the Cabinet to give that authority reflected the collapse of civilian control of the military. This paper has shown that the chiefs of staff could in fact have raised readiness levels to match those of the US without Cabinet approval, and offers an explanation of why this did not happen. That raises a higher level question: What apparatus was in place to support the prime minister with the information he needed for decision making? It has been argued here that ill-informed military advice provided to the minister of national defence stymied further dialogue with the prime minister on what could and should be done.

Therefore, this study challenges the argument, made by Peter Haydon for example, that had Diefenbaker only sought and considered

[51] JFK, Papers of John F. Kennedy, National Security Files, Countries – Cuba – Night Log, 10/04/62–10/30/62, Memorandum for MacGeorge Bundy, Night Log, 24 October 1962.

advice from Canadian military leaders on their perception of the situation, there would have been less needless delay. While there is some truth to this contention, it ignores the fact that the military itself was misguided on a question as simple as the status of its own War Book. Even so, while it is stunning that the chairman of the chiefs of staff Committee would tell the minister of national defence that the military could not act when there clearly were measures in place to do so, it is equally alarming that the civilian leadership was no better informed or interested in investigating further.

The incident served as a stark reminder of the need for a national security apparatus to bring forward to decision-makers in a timely fashion all relevant information. This is not to suggest that information and advice will necessarily be heeded, or that it will bring Canadian political leadership into line with their American and other alliance counterparts. Rather, the process through which this full information is developed and presented to senior leadership increases the likelihood that military and political leaders will develop a coherent, well grounded perception of a threat. How that threat is dealt with will be the subject of debate, but with the advantage of a deeper understanding of what are very complex matters. The alternative is incoherence, as was the case in October 1962. In the absence of a rigorous and expert-driven national security structure, military and political leaders were too easily able to accept reasons to justify inaction in the face of a grave threat to North America.

While personalities inevitably influence events, the lack of rigour in the system did nothing to soften the sharp edges of wilful characters and clashes among them since it did not force realistic and timely assessments of the nation's geostrategic imperatives, or of the developing threat from Soviet missiles in Cuba. Indeed, a degree of laziness in strategic thinking, enhanced by the slow move away from a mobilization paradigm to one with large forces in-being, had crept into the nation's planning and analysis of the likely nature of the next conflict. The American "essence of decision," while far from perfect, attempted to understand the context, the adversary's perspective, and tried to apply a degree of rigour to the decision-making process that may have prevented the crisis from developing into a major war. The "essence" of Canada's decision was even further from perfection – bad military advice leading to needless debate by a government more concerned with a perceived slight over lack of prior consultation and longer term policy disagreements instead of dealing appropriately

with a clear and present danger to both Canada and the United States.

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