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Pearl Harbor In Reverse: Moral Analogies In The Cuban Missile Crisis

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"Pearl Harbor in Reverse"

Moral Analogies in the Cuban Missile Crisis

✣ **Dominic Tierney**

> [A] course of action where we strike without warning is like Pearl Harbor . . . It's
> . . . it's the kind of conduct that's such that one might expect of the Soviet
> Union. It is *not* conduct that one expects of the United States.
>
> *George Ball, Thursday, 18 October 1962.*

This article analyzes the role of the Pearl Harbor moral analogy in the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. People draw moral analogies when they judge the rights and wrongs of an act on the basis of parallels with previous actions deemed to be moral or immoral. Such analogies are part of the broader class of historical analogies. Whereas *strategic* historical analogies use past cases to discern what is at stake in a situation and whether certain policies will be effective, *moral* historical analogies focus on the ethics of a decision. For example, recent proponents of humanitarian intervention in Darfur regularly invoke the failure to halt genocide during World War II or in Rwanda in 1994. In the first presidential debate between John Kerry and George Bush in 2004, Kerry stated that he would be willing to use military force in Sudan: "I'll tell you this, as president, if it took American forces to some degree to coalesce the African Union, I'd be prepared to do it because we could never allow another Rwanda. It's the moral responsibility for us and the world."[1]

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1. "Transcript of the Candidates' First Debate in the Presidential Campaign," *The New York Times,* 1 October 2004, p. A20. At the groundbreaking for the U.S. Holocaust Museum, George H. W. Bush told the audience, "Here we will learn that each of us bears responsibility for our actions and for our failure to act. Here we will learn that we must intervene when we see evil arise." Michael C. Desch, "The Myth of Abandonment: The Use and Abuse of the Holocaust Analogy," *Security Studies,* Vol. 15, No. 1 (January–March 2006), p. 2. One reason for President Bill Clinton's shift toward supporting the use of air strikes against Serbia in the Yugoslav conflict may have been his attendance at the dedication of the U.S. Holocaust Museum in April 1993, which according to one adviser left Clinton "very anguished." See Douglas C. Foyle, "Public Opinion and Bosnia: Anticipating Disaster," in Ralph G.

During the Cuban missile crisis, a number of U.S. policymakers argued against a surprise U.S. air strike against Soviet missile sites in Cuba because it would be morally analogous to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. The use of this moral analogy in the Cuban missile crisis is important in at least five respects.

First, ethical parallels with 1941 contributed significantly to President John F. Kennedy's decision not to launch immediate air strikes against Cuba and to proceed instead with a naval blockade of the island. The Pearl Harbor moral analogy was a sufficient condition for Kennedy to reject the option of an air strike without prior warning to Moscow. Furthermore, by eliminating the surprise attack option, the Pearl Harbor moral analogy removed the most attractive air strike option in strategic terms and thereby pushed the administration toward choosing the blockade.

Second, the moral analogy's causal impact in 1962 is remarkable for several reasons: first, because it challenged one of the dominant postwar historical analogies—the Munich analogy—that suggested a tough response to aggression; second, because a strong international norm against surprise attacks did not yet exist; third, because policy toward Cuba was an arena in which the Kennedy administration previously had displayed few moral qualms; fourth, because the exigent circumstances of the missile crisis would lead one to expect that ethical concerns would have been secondary to strategic considerations; and fifth, because the proposed U.S. attack was not, in fact, morally analogous to Pearl Harbor.

Third, although many historians of the Cuban missile crisis have noted the use of the Pearl Harbor analogy, no previous studies have examined its role in any detail.[2] Fortunately, a major source has recently become available that sheds light on this role. President Kennedy secretly taped many of the key meetings during the crisis, enabling us to hear and assess the impact of the analogy on the discussion and actors' policy preferences.[3] The tapes reveal a

Carter, ed., *Contemporary Cases in U.S. Foreign Policy: From Terrorism to Trade* (Washington, DC: CQ Inc., 2005), p. 9.

2. Many studies of the missile crisis weave references to the Pearl Harbor analogy into the narrative but provide little reflection on its role in decision-making. Paul Anderson briefly discussed the analogy in a 1981 article, although at the time only limited sources were available. Paul A. Anderson, "Justifications and Precedents as Constraints in Foreign Policy Decision-Making," *American Journal of Political Science,* Vol. 25, No. 4 (November 1981), pp. 738–761.

3. The tapes can be downloaded from www.whitehousetapes.org, a website run by the Miller Center of Public Affairs at the University of Virginia. Ernest May and Philip Zelikow should be applauded for their efforts to transcribe the tapes, initially published as Ernest R. May and Philip D. Zelikow, eds., *The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House during the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), and then revised and republished in 2001 as Timothy Naftali, Ernest May, and Philip Zelikow, eds., *The Presidential Recordings, John F. Kennedy: The Great Crises,* Vols. 2 and 3 (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001). However, their volumes, especially the 1997 edition, are marred by

story starkly at odds with early accounts of how the Pearl Harbor analogy featured in the crisis. The writings and memoirs of the former special counsel to the president Theodore Sorensen and former Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy suggest that Robert Kennedy was the one who introduced the analogy into the discussion as part of an ethical argument against air strikes.[4] In reality, Robert Kennedy was extremely hawkish at the start of the crisis. The officials who first discussed the moral analogy were Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director John McCone and Under Secretary of State George Ball. Robert Kennedy, far from having been the first to champion the normative parallel, was himself deeply influenced by it as he changed from being a hawk to a dove.

Fourth, the use of ethical parallels in the Cuban missile crisis offers insights into wider foreign policymaking. Scholars previously have explored how decision-makers employ historical analogies, but they have not focused specifically on moral analogies.[5] This neglect is unwarranted because moral analogies have unique characteristics and can enable ethical concerns to feature suddenly and unexpectedly in decision-making. Moral analogies tend to be employed by leaders with a propensity for moral rhetoric in regard to formative experiences. The analogies have the greatest impact when referring to conspicuously immoral behavior. The fact that moral analogies prospered in the unfertile soil of the Cuban missile crisis deliberations provides significant evidence for their wider potential impact.[6]

Fifth, four decades after the Cuban missile crisis ended, analogies with

important errors. The volumes should therefore be used in conjunction with Sheldon Stern's interpretive narrative, *Averting the "Final Failure": John F. Kennedy and the Secret Cuban Missile Crisis Meetings* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003). See also Sheldon M. Stern, "What JFK Really Said," *The Atlantic Monthly,* Vol. 285, No. 5 (May 2000), pp. 122–128; and Sheldon M. Stern, "Source Material: The 1997 Published Transcripts of the JFK Cuban Missile Crisis Tapes: Too Good to Be True?" *Presidential Studies Quarterly,* Vol. 30, No. 3 (September 2000), pp. 586–593. I listened to all the relevant material from the Kennedy tapes, but I cite from the above works where I consider the published version to be an accurate rendition of what was said. In several cases I found errors in the published transcript, as indicated in the relevant footnotes.

4. Theodore C. Sorensen, *Kennedy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 684; Elie Abel, *The Missile Crisis* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1966); and Robert F. Kennedy, *Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1999).

5. Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992); Ernest R. May, *"Lessons" of the Past: The Use and Misuse of History in American Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); and Richard E. Neustadt and Ernest R. May, *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision-Makers* (New York: The Free Press, 1986).

6. Harry Eckstein, "Case Study and Theory in Political Science," in Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby, eds., *Strategies of Inquiry* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1975), pp. 79–137; and Alexander L. George, "Case Studies and Theory Development: The Method of Structured Focused Comparison," in Paul Gordon Lauren, ed., *Diplomacy: New Approaches in History, Theory and Policy* (London: Macmillan, 1979), pp. 43–68.

Pearl Harbor were reborn on both sides of the debate over the war in Iraq. Indeed, the very phrase "Pearl Harbor in reverse" that was invoked to discredit air strikes during the Cuban missile crisis, was again employed to question the morality of a U.S. attack on Iraq. However, in comparison to the missile crisis, the "Pearl Harbor in reverse" argument generated little traction in 2003. The varying power of this moral analogy over time highlights the circumstances in which ethical parallels tend to be effective and ineffective.

The story of the Cuban missile crisis is well known. Soviet missile installations in Cuba were discovered on 15 October 1962, and President Kennedy was briefed the following morning. The White House perceived the deployment as a major threat to national security and the U.S. position in the region and assembled an executive committee (the "ExComm") to deal with the crisis. On Monday, 22 October, after nearly a week's deliberations, Kennedy publicly announced both the discovery of the missiles in Cuba and Washington's imposition of a "quarantine" or blockade on shipments of offensive weapons to the island. After a period of great tension, the crisis ended on 28 October when Nikita Khrushchev announced that he had ordered the weapons dismantled and returned to the Soviet Union. The United States in return pledged not to invade Cuba and secretly told Moscow that U.S. missiles in Turkey would be removed within a few months.

This article begins with a brief theoretical examination of the role of morality, analogies, and moral analogies, in foreign policymaking. The article then explores the impact of the "Pearl Harbor in reverse" argument in the Cuban missile crisis, offering answers to four main questions:

(1) Whose moral concerns were actors in 1962 worried about?
(2) What was the causal impact of the historical analogy with Pearl Harbor?
(3) What does this case suggest about the wider use of moral analogies?
(4) Are scholars right to label the Pearl Harbor analogy an example of the wise use of history?

Morality in Foreign Policy

Many theorists of international relations relegate moral concerns to a peripheral role in the formation of foreign policy. The realist tradition has focused on the importance of anarchy in international politics, which necessitates the pursuit of national interest defined narrowly in terms of power. Hans Morgenthau depicted moral concerns either as rhetorical justification for power political interests or, if genuine, as a form of dangerous "sentimental-

ism" especially prevalent in the United States.[7] Other scholars, however, have argued that politics is inherently goal-oriented and that moral principles can shape an actor's objectives.[8] Morality in international relations is evident, for example, with widespread prohibitions on torture, colonialism, and unjust aggression. Robert McElroy has argued that ethical concerns can shape foreign policy through a number of different "pathways": (1) *individual conscience* (leaders follow moral standards because they personally believe they are right); (2) *domestic public opinion* (leaders fear the political consequences of violating a widely held domestic norm); and (3) *world opinion* (leaders wish to avoid the condemnation resulting from violation of a widely held international norm).[9]

Morality does not always matter, particularly if the moral principle is ambiguous. The bombing of Dresden in World War II indicates that ethical concerns can erode over time. In this case, the norm against targeting civilians in warfare was undermined by the belief that German civilians were directly or indirectly contributing to the war effort and thus were, in a sense, "combatants." In contrast, the clear-cut nature of the norm against chemical warfare has allowed for relatively few violations.[10]

The Norm against Surprise Attacks

Richard Betts has defined a surprise attack as an assault against a target that is not prepared for it because of mistaken estimates of whether, when, where,

7. Hans Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), p. 200; and Robert W. McElroy, *Morality and American Foreign Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 23. Robert Art and Kenneth Waltz argue that "states in anarchy cannot afford to be moral. The possibility of moral behavior rests upon the existence of an effective government that can deter and punish illegal actions. . . . The preconditions for morality are absent in international politics. Every state, as a consequence, has to be prepared to do what is necessary for its interests as it defines them." See Robert J. Art and Kenneth N. Waltz, "Technology, Strategy and the Uses of Force," in Robert J. Art and Kenneth N. Waltz, eds., *The Use of Force: International Politics and Foreign Policy* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), p. 6.

8. J. E. Hare and Carey Joynt, *Ethics and International Affairs* (London: Macmillan, 1982); Leslie H. Gelb and Justine A. Rosenthal, "The Rise of Ethics in Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs,* Vol. 82, No. 3 (May/June 2003), pp. 2–7. For the argument that states are often motivated by concerns about justice as well as power, see David A. Welch, *Justice and the Genesis of War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993). On U.S. morality during the Cold War, see John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the End of the Cold War: Implications, Reconsiderations, Provocations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

9. McElroy, *Morality and American Foreign Policy,* pp. 8–13, 39–53. On moral restraints, see also Nina Tannenwald, *The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and the Nonuse of Nuclear Weapons since 1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

10. McElroy, *Morality and American Foreign Policy,* pp. 176–177; and Ronald Schaffer, *Wings of Judgment: American Bombing in World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

and how the enemy will strike.[11] When participants in the ExComm discussions used the phrase "Pearl Harbor in reverse," they were at least implicitly subscribing to the view that surprise attacks are inherently wrong. The norm against surprise attacks featured to a remarkable extent in the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, given the norm's inherent ambiguity. The supposed immorality of surprise attacks implies that states typically issue a warning before starting hostilities, but after World War II countries largely abandoned the practice of declaring war on each other. Moreover, surprise attacks are not necessarily more likely than other attacks to violate the norm against targeting civilians or the laws of war. Such assaults often use the benefits of surprise to target military or other directly threatening objectives rather than civilians.

Further ambiguity arises from the fact that surprise attacks rarely can be clearly distinguished from non-surprise attacks. Ephraim Kam concluded that "since 1939 there have been only a few cases in which [for the victim] the outbreak of war was not a surprise."[12] A U.S. air strike against Cuba in 1962 might have qualified as one of those rare instances when the defenders would not have been surprised. Fidel Castro and Khrushchev considered a U.S. attack quite likely given Washington's earlier backing for the 1961 invasion of Cuba by Cuban expatriates at the Bay of Pigs.[13] Furthermore, a norm against surprise attacks raises a number of moral and policy dilemmas. Are surprise attacks unjust even if the cause is just? President Kennedy would have considered the overthrow of the Castro regime to be a moral good. What kind of warning is necessary before fighting a moral war? Can surprise not be considered an inherent part of warfare? When the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), General Maxwell Taylor, first heard about the missiles in Cuba, he argued for the "great importance of getting a strike with all the benefit of surprise."[14]

In any case, the Cuban missile crisis seems an unlikely occasion for the

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11. Richard K. Betts, *Surprise Attack: Lessons for Defense Planning* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1982), p. 11.

12. Ephraim Kam, *Surprise Attack: A Victim's Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 230.

13. In 1989, former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara argued that the Kennedy administration had not intended to invade Cuba in 1962. Many scholars have contested this claim, and even McNamara acknowledged that for an outside observer the evidence at the time, including U.S. military exercises in the region, pointed strongly toward such an invasion. See Raymond L. Garthoff, "Documenting the Cuban Missile Crisis," *Diplomatic History,* Vol. 24, No. 2 (Spring 2000), p. 312; Thomas C. Reeves, *A Question of Character: A Life of John F. Kennedy* (London: Bloomsbury, 1991), p. 364; and James G. Hershberg, "Before 'The Missiles of October': Did Kennedy Plan a Military Strike against Cuba?" in James A. Nathan, ed., *The Cuban Missile Crisis Revisited* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), pp. 237–280.

14. Naftali, May, and Zelikow, eds., *The Presidential Recordings,* Vol. 2, p. 408.

Kennedy administration to have been guided by a moral inhibition against surprise attacks. Ethical concerns had featured only to a limited extent in the administration's previous policies toward Cuba. In 1961, the president had stated in a speech to Congress that "our arms will never be used to strike the first blow in any attack," adding in his televised speech on 22 October 1962 regarding the Cuban missiles: "Our goal is not the victory of might, but the vindication of right."[15] In reality, U.S. policy toward Cuba under Kennedy had shown little sign of restraint because of moral concerns. Just three weeks after the 1961 speech announcing that the United States would never strike the first blow, Kennedy supported a surprise attack by Cuban expatriates at the Bay of Pigs (which turned into a debacle). The administration also carried out subversion, psychological warfare, and assassination in Cuba—effectively state terrorism.[16] In U.S. policy toward Cuba, the ends (removing Castro) usually justified the means.

Furthermore, the Cuban missile crisis is the type of foreign policy situation in which we would expect morality to be relatively unimportant. Robert McElroy argued that moral concerns matter less in "the sphere of clear and absolute state necessity," especially when "the military or economic security of a state would be genuinely endangered by compliance with an international moral norm." McElroy also thought that morality would be less likely to matter in "crisis situations" compared to "long term consultative processes."[17]

Analogies in Foreign Policy

The norm against surprise attacks had a powerful effect on U.S. deliberations during the Cuban missile crisis because of the vividness of the analogy drawn

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15. U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, "Special Message to the Congress on the Defense Budget, 28 March 1961," House Document 123, 87th Cong., 1st Sess., 1961; and Stern, *Averting the "Final Failure,"* p. 32.

16. On Tuesday, 16 October 1962—the first day of the Cuban missile crisis—Attorney General Robert Kennedy called for a stepped-up program of sabotage on the island. The next day, President Kennedy approved a series of subversive actions in Cuba, including a grenade attack on the Chinese embassy in Havana. See Stern, *Averting the "Final Failure,"* p. 14 n.32; May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes,* pp. 25, 77; James G. Blight and Peter Kornbluh, eds., *Politics of Illusion: the Bay of Pigs Invasion Reexamined* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1998), pp. 59–132; Evan Thomas, *Robert Kennedy: His Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), pp. 211–212; C. David Heymann, *RFK: A Candid Biography of Robert F. Kennedy* (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 260; Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *"One Hell of a Gamble": Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy 1958–1964* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1997), p. 228; and Don Bohning, *The Castro Obsession: U.S. Covert Operations against Cuba, 1959–1965* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2005).

17. McElroy, *Morality and American Foreign Policy,* p. 42, 46, 183.

with the 1941 Japanese air strike against Pearl Harbor. Yuen Foong Khong has defined an analogy as "an inference that if two or more events separated in time agree in one respect, then they may also agree in another."[18] One of the primary debates about historical analogies is whether policymakers use them as rhetorical tools to advocate positions that they reached for other reasons. In other words, do analogies and the perceived lessons of history independently determine how policymakers assess options? Some scholars have argued that analogies are mostly used as post-hoc rationalizations.[19] Khong, by contrast, claims that leaders use analogies not only to justify policies but also to perform specific cognitive and information-processing tasks essential to political decision-making. Analogies, in his view, enable an actor to define problems, to understand the political stakes involved, to contemplate possible solutions, to gauge the odds of success, to weigh moral concerns, and to grasp potential dangers.[20] Even when an analogy is being employed purely as a rhetorical device, the rhetoric can encourage *other* policymakers to internalize the analogy and alter their preferences accordingly.

A wide range of historical analogies was used during the Cuban missile crisis. On one occasion, General Curtis LeMay described President Kennedy's blockade policy as analogous to appeasement at Munich in 1938, a reference that played on Kennedy's sensitivity to the fact that his father, Joseph P. Kennedy, had suffered political disgrace for his pro-appeasement stance in the 1930s.[21] President Kennedy noted that a U.S. attack on Cuba might give the Soviet Union an opportunity to take military action in Berlin, in the same way that the USSR invaded Hungary in 1956 while the West's attention was focused on the Suez Crisis.[22] Toward the end of the Cuban missile crisis, the Kennedy brothers discussed how World War I had broken out through a series of actions with unintended consequences—a historical parallel they clearly wished to avoid.[23]

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18. Khong, *Analogies at War,* pp. 6–7; and May, *"Lessons" of the Past,* p. ix.

19. Andrew J. Taylor and John T. Rourke, "Historical Analogies in the Congressional Foreign Policy Process," *Journal of Politics,* Vol. 57, No. 2 (May 1995), pp. 460–468.

20. Khong, *Analogies at War,* pp. 6–21. See also Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 217; David Patrick Houghton, "The Role of Analogical Reasoning in Novel Foreign-Policy Situations," *British Journal of Political Science,* Vol. 26, No. 4 (October 1996), pp. 523–552; and David Patrick Houghton, "Analogical Reasoning and Policymaking: Where and When Is It Used?" *Policy Sciences,* Vol. 31, No. 3 (September 1998), pp. 151–176.

21. Stern, *Averting the "Final Failure,"* pp. 7, 123.

22. Ibid., pp. 121–122.

23. Thomas, *Robert Kennedy,* p. 211.

Pearl Harbor and U.S. Historical Memory

The most important historical analogy used during the Cuban missile crisis was drawn between prospective U.S. air strikes and the Japanese assault on Pearl Harbor. At approximately 8:00 A.M. on 7 December 1941, 353 Japanese aircraft attacked the U.S. naval base on the island of Oahu, Hawaii. A total of 21 U.S. ships and nearly 350 aircraft were damaged or destroyed, and more than 2,400 Americans were killed. Pearl Harbor was a shocking and unexpected attack on U.S. territory, and President Franklin Roosevelt used explicitly moralistic language to describe it, calling Pearl Harbor a "date which will live in infamy" and an "unprovoked and dastardly attack."[24] Pearl Harbor quickly gained iconic power as "a sometimes contradictory representation of 'infamy,' the obligations of national loyalty, the importance of military and foreign policy vigilance, the Roosevelt administration's ineptitude or deceit, the unfair scapegoating of the military, and the need to commemorate the courage of ordinary soldiers and sailors."[25] For many people, Pearl Harbor led to a war neatly drawn along the lines of good and evil.[26] At the same time, the attack shattered the American isolationist movement and provided the impetus for a global national security policy.

Pearl Harbor was the watershed event for the Kennedy generation—the day that changed their lives. John F. Kennedy entered the U.S. Navy despite poor health, and his subsequent heroism in the Pacific War (together with the public relations efforts of his father) made Kennedy famous back in the United States. He developed a lifelong revulsion toward the death and destruction he had seen.[27] Robert Kennedy, who was sixteen at the time of Pearl Harbor, was among the many policymakers who never forgot the Japanese attack.[28] As Robert Jervis wrote: "Events that are seen first-hand, that happen

24. Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Speech to Congress," 8 December 1941, in U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States,* Japan: 1931–1941, Vol. II (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1943), pp. 793–794 (hereinafter referred to as *FRUS,* with appropriate year and volume numbers).

25. Emily Rosenberg, *A Date Which Will Live: Pearl Harbor in American Memory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 6. For the debate over intelligence and Pearl Harbor, see ch. 1. On the debate over Roosevelt's responsibility for the attack and whether Pearl Harbor had been deliberately provoked as a backdoor into World War II, see Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 539–541; and Rosenberg, *A Date Which Will Live,* ch. 2.

26. During the Cuban missile crisis, Secretary of State Dean Rusk claimed that Pearl Harbor had given the United States a "clear conscience" to fight World War II. See Naftali, May, and Zelikow, eds., *The Presidential Recordings,* Vol. 2, pp. 521–523.

27. Stern, *Averting the "Final Failure,"* p. 35.

28. May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes,* p. 4; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *Robert Kennedy and his Times* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978), p. 41.

early in a person's adult life, and that affect him and his country have great impact on his later perceptual predispositions."[29] Ernest May and Philip Zelikow suggest that Pearl Harbor had a pervasive presence during the Cuban missile crisis, causing decision-makers to fear that the Soviet Union might launch a surprise attack with nearby MRBMs.[30]

The Pearl Harbor analogy was also invoked in October 1962 to argue against a surprise U.S. air strike on Cuba. The ExComm participants did not carefully reflect on the ethics of Japanese actions in 1941. After all, the Pearl Harbor attack did not target civilians or necessarily violate the laws of war. Pearl Harbor did contravene the norm of declaring war before initiating hostilities, although the limited salience of this norm even before World War II is indicated by the lack of protests when Japan launched a surprise attack against Tsarist Russia in 1904.[31] Moreover, Pearl Harbor was not intended to be a complete surprise attack. Tokyo had planned to break off relations with the United States thirty minutes before striking Pearl Harbor, but logistical problems caused the message to be delivered several hours after the attack had begun.

Despite a degree of ethical complexity, Pearl Harbor came to be perceived as a clear-cut evil act, with disingenuous Japanese diplomacy followed by a devastating attack against the innocent United States. Roosevelt remarked in his speech the day after Pearl Harbor: "Always will we remember the character of the onslaught against us."[32] Pearl Harbor engendered many historical "lessons" and memories, but "infamy" was chief among them. The U.S. government and media quickly developed the slogan "Remember Pearl Harbor!" as a latter day equivalent of "Remember the Maine!"[33]

Moral Analogies in Foreign Policy

One of the main reasons that decision-makers rely on moral analogical thinking is that it enables them to go beyond the immediately available normative

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29. Jervis, *Perception and Misperception,* p. 281.

30. May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes,* p. 4; Naftali, May, and Zelikow, eds., *The Presidential Recordings,* Vol. 3, p. 149. During the crisis, Robert Kennedy sent journalist Charles Bartlett to see Georgi Bolshakov, a Soviet intelligence officer in Washington, DC. Bartlett told Bolshakov that the President "is very angry about what has happened in Cuba. It reminds him of the Japanese deception before Pearl Harbor." See Fursenko and Naftali, *"One Hell of a Gamble,"* p. 251.

31. Although the 1904 attack was not widely condemned, it was still remembered. In 1941 the United States considered a surprise attack by Japan as a likely way for hostilities to begin—in light of the 1904 parallel—although few thought that the target would be Pearl Harbor.

32. Rosenberg, *A Date Which Will Live,* p. 12.

33. Ibid, p. 16.

information. Decision-making often involves complex and competing ethical claims. Leaders may be tempted to reach clear moral judgments about policy options by thinking about past decisions that are judged to have been right or wrong. In other words, moral analogies provide the perception of ethical certainty in an uncertain moral world.

Moral analogies are most likely to be invoked in countries that have a tradition of moral rhetoric in foreign policy and of reasoning by historical parallel. Leaders in the United States readily use moral language in foreign policy statements. The use of historical analogies is part of the U.S. "national style."[34] At the individual level, a number of variables increase the likelihood that moral analogies will be employed, notably if the early adulthood of an individual coincides with a salient moral event such as Pearl Harbor, if the individual tends toward moralistic thought, and if the individual has knowledge of and interest in history.[35]

Moral analogies are an intellectual device that gives normative concerns an unusual degree of significance in policymaking. They bring to center-stage ethical issues that otherwise might not be explicitly present in the policy-making process. Moral analogies fuse a general moral lesson ("surprise attacks are wrong") with a specific and salient example (the Japanese attack in 1941). The general behavior (surprise attacks) becomes associated with memories of the particular case (the brutal nature of the Japanese war effort), so that surprise attacks and Japanese behavior become fused in the mind as collectively immoral. By invoking an analogy, a policymaker can take an ambiguous moral concept such as "surprise attacks are wrong" and considerably enhance its salience and its impact on decision-making.

When will moral analogies be most effective in altering beliefs? Five main variables are apt to determine the efficacy of moral analogies: (1) the *ambiguity* of the underlying moral claim (a moral analogy about chemical warfare will be more effective than one about bombing civilians); (2) the *similarity* between the cases (the more comparable the events, the more relevant the analogy);[36] (3) the *foreign policy scenario* (moral analogies will be less effective in

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34. Stanley Hoffmann, *Gulliver's Troubles, or the Setting of American Foreign Policy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968). Recent work in the neurosciences has shown that information received when an individual is emotionally aroused is more likely to be recalled at a later date. Such vivid experiences, particularly at a formative period in life, become the basis for many historical analogies. See Stephen Peter Rosen, *War and Human Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), ch. 2.

35. Khong, *Analogies at War,* ch. 2.

36. The Holocaust moral analogy ("never again") would be much more effective if another regime gassed its population to death in extermination camps, as opposed to killing its population in almost any other way. Similarly, officials who worried in 1962 that air strikes against Cuba would violate the moral norm against surprise attacks had fewer concerns that a U.S.-supported invasion of Cuba by expatriates might also violate this norm. Prospective U.S. air strikes bore some slight physical resem-

crisis situations involving core national interests); (4) the *salience* of the historical case (the most effective moral analogies refer to striking cases that are typically viewed in black-and-white moral terms, such as the Holocaust, Pearl Harbor, and September 11); and (5) whether the past event is *rightful* or *wrongful* (parallels are more effective when they concern historical wrongful acts—it is easier to argue that past behavior was morally wrong than to claim that it was morally right).[37]

The Cuban Missile Crisis

Caution is needed when assessing the role of moral analogies in the Cuban missile crisis or indeed in foreign policy more generally. References to analogies and to moral concerns can be purely rhetorical devices to build support for policies adopted for other reasons. To distinguish analogies used in a rhetorical fashion from analogies that actually shaped an actor's policy preferences, we need to consider whether historical parallels were used consistently and coherently both in public and in private. We also need to bear in mind that moral and analogical arguments can sometimes shape policymaking implicitly. Even when decision-makers did not raise the Munich analogy directly in October 1962, they had internalized the "lesson" that concessions to aggressive dictators would merely invite further aggression.

The discussion here is not intended to give the false impression that the 1941 attack was the sole factor in the minds of the ExComm participants. The dozen or so occasions when Pearl Harbor was mentioned were spread out over a week of the crisis. The moral analogy with Pearl Harbor was by no means the only variable at work in 1962, but it did prove to be of great significance; it was sufficient to eliminate the option of a surprise attack and thereby push the administration toward enacting a blockade. The Kennedy tapes allow us to determine precisely when and for whom the Pearl Harbor analogy mattered, how it shaped the discussion, and in what ways it solidified opinion for and against particular policy options.

The Pearl Harbor analogy was used in three different ways during the crisis. First, it was employed largely as a rhetorical device to warn about the

blance to the Japanese attack and therefore suggested the historical parallel, whereas the Bay of Pigs invasion did not.

37. Failing to intervene to stop genocide is more clearly wrong than any particular intervention to stop genocide is clearly right. Once we examine specific "moral" actions in international affairs, the normative clarity starts to blur, and we tend to question the motives of the actors involved. Furthermore, an analogy drawn with historical positive moral behavior has the burden of proposing a series of active measures for decision-makers today. In contrast, analogies with immoral acts tell a decision-maker what to avoid. Criticizing a policy choice is usually easier than upholding one. Therefore, moral analogies tend to be more effective at eliminating rather than supporting policy options.

likely strategic repercussions of an air attack on Cuba. Second, the parallel with 1941 was invoked as a moral analogy, representing both a rhetorical tool to win support in the ExComm and an intellectual device that independently shaped policymakers' opinions. Third, references to Pearl Harbor served as a rhetorical tool to explain the administration's policy to Congress and the American public.

Initially, however, none of these uses of the analogy was evident. During the first meeting of the ExComm, on the morning of Tuesday, 16 October, moral debate was largely absent. Instead, the participants broadly agreed that the Soviet missiles in Cuba would have to be removed either by an air strike or by an invasion. Officials put forth strong arguments for a sudden air strike that would destroy the missiles before they became operational. Any warning before an American attack, even to U.S. allies, would pose major risks. Secretary of the Treasury C. Douglas Dillon averred that a warning might escalate the situation if it induced the Soviet Union to take a tough stand. National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy stressed that a warning would produce divisions among America's allies. President Kennedy commented that "warning [U.S. allies], it seems to me, is warning everybody. And obviously you can't sort of announce that in four days from now you're gonna take them out. They may announce within three days that they're gonna have [nuclear] warheads on 'em. If we come and attack, they're gonna fire them. Then what . . . whadda we do?"[38]

During this initial meeting, Robert Kennedy displayed no moral concerns about a surprise air strike against Cuba. Indeed, he was a leading proponent of the invasion option. His hawkish stance reflected his shock at the Soviet Union's secret deployment of missiles and was in keeping with his previous hardline positions on Cuba. In Robert Kennedy's mind, any attack was risky, and an immediate invasion would minimize the risks by providing a definitive solution to the Cuban problem. The first ExComm meeting ended with a broad consensus in favor of surprise air strikes at least against the missile sites. President Kennedy noted that the United States would "certainly" take out the missiles—the only question was whether to broaden the attack.[39]

At the second ExComm meeting, later that evening, the president considered publicly announcing the discovery of the missiles 24 hours before the strikes began. General Taylor, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, Dillon, and Bundy all criticized the efficacy of a warning. Under Secretary of State George Ball thought that a few hours notice would be useful for rela-

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38. Stern, *Averting the "Final Failure,"* pp. 66–71; and Naftali, May, and Zelikow, eds., *The Presidential Recordings,* Vol. 2, p. 412.

39. Thomas, *Robert Kennedy,* p. 209; Stern, *Averting the "Final Failure,"* pp. 73–75; and Naftali, May, and Zelikow, eds., *The Presidential Recordings,* Vol. 2, p. 422.

tions with U.S. allies, but "more for the appearance than for the reality." Robert Kennedy was still bellicose, suggesting that the United States should invade Cuba: "just get into it, and get it over with." He raised the possibility of creating a pretext for an invasion by "getting involved in this through Guantánamo Bay or something. Or whether there's some ship that . . . you know, sink the *Maine* again or something." Clearly, for him and for the ExComm more generally, moral considerations were at this stage peripheral at best.[40]

After the second ExComm meeting had formally ended and the president had left, the discussion continued. Deputy CIA Director General Marshall Carter used the analogy with Pearl Harbor in its first sense—as a warning about unintended escalation. The participants began to discuss a possible blockade strategy, but Ball was critical, seeing a blockade as "a greater involvement almost than a military action." Carter, however, was leaning toward the blockade, and argued: "this comin' in there on Pearl Harbor [with a surprise attack] just frightens the *hell* out of me as to what goes *beyond.*" Bundy was confused by this comment and asked: "beyond what?" Carter replied: "You go in there with a surprise attack; you put out all the missiles. This isn't the *end;* this is the *beginning,* I think." Thus, when the Pearl Harbor analogy was initially drawn, it was largely used as a rhetorical device to suggest the escalatory potential of air strikes. The Japanese attack had inflamed the United States and led to almost four years of war. Carter's analogy helped to establish the growing feeling that military action in Cuba might have unexpected and costly consequences.[41]

Carter's boss at the CIA, John McCone, was the one who first used the analogy with Pearl Harbor in its second incarnation—as an ethical parallel—when he met President Kennedy the next morning, 17 October. From this point on, the moral analogy was the dominant reference to Pearl Harbor. The ethics of Pearl Harbor were not discussed in a sophisticated manner. Rather, the Japanese attack was viewed as the epitome of wrongful behavior, and association with it was a powerful taboo. Although the analogy was certainly employed as a rhetorical device, it also influenced policymakers' beliefs, helping them to make sense of a complex situation under great time pressure. In a memorandum, which McCone carried with him at the discussion, the CIA director challenged the apparent consensus in favor of a sudden air strike. The missiles must be removed, he said. "However, the United States should not act without warning and thus be forced to live with a 'Pearl Harbor indictment'

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40. "Transcript of a Meeting at the White House," 15 October 1962, in *FRUS, 1961–1963,* Vol. XI, pp. 45–47; Stern, *Averting the "Final Failure,"* pp. 76, 82–87; Naftali, May, and Zelikow, eds., *The Presidential Recordings,* Vol. 2, pp. 432–452; and Thomas, *Robert Kennedy,* p. 205.

41. Naftali, May, and Zelikow, eds., *The Presidential Recordings,* Vol. 2, p. 466 (emphasis added); and Stern, *Averting the Final Failure,* p. 92.

for the indefinite future." McCone wanted an ultimatum issued to Moscow threatening air strikes within 24 hours if the missiles were not dismantled.[42]

According to Theodore Sorensen, the moral analogy came up again later that day when former Secretary of State Dean Acheson was arguing for a military attack on Cuba without delay. In Sorensen's telling, Robert Kennedy handed Sorensen a note, the purported content of which has often been cited: "I now know how Tojo felt when he was planning Pearl Harbor." Sorensen also claims that Robert Kennedy then told Acheson that "my brother is not going to be the Tojo of the 60s" and suggested that a surprise U.S. air strike would be "a Pearl Harbor in reverse, and it would blacken the name of the United States in the pages of history." The lack of any documentary evidence for this conversation means that extreme caution (and indeed skepticism) is required. The alleged note has never been found, and the exchange reported by Sorensen does not appear in the transcript of the ExComm meeting. Sorensen's account of the crisis, and Elie Abel's book *The Missile Crisis* (published in 1966, a year after Soresen's account appeared), are the only sources for the anecdote.[43] Because Robert Kennedy initially was vehemently in support of an immediate invasion of Cuba and saw a blockade, by contrast, as "a very slow death," one can reasonably conclude that Sorensen in his post-hoc account (written at a time when the administration's handling of the missile crisis was regarded as a great success and when Robert Kennedy was already beginning to contemplate a run for the presidency) significantly embellished Robert Kennedy's moral conversion at that stage.[44]

We do, however, have substantiation for George Ball's "Pearl Harbor" memorandum, which he wrote on Wednesday evening, opposing air strikes and favoring a blockade. Ball drew a clear moral analogy with 1941, noting that "we tried Japanese as war criminals because of the sneak attack on Pearl Harbor." If a surprise attack were carried out against Cuba, Ball argued, then

> far from establishing our moral strength . . . [the United States] . . . would, in fact, alienate a great part of the civilized world by behaving in a manner wholly contrary to our traditions, by pursuing a course of action that would cut directly athwart everything we have stood for during our national history, and condemn us as hypocrites in the opinion of the world.[45]

42. Fursenko and Naftali, *"One Hell of a Gamble,"* p. 228.

43. "Transcript of a Meeting at the White House," 16 October 1962, in *FRUS, 1961–1963,* Vol. XI, pp. 94–100; Thomas, *Robert Kennedy,* pp. 215, 434; Schlesinger, Jr., *Robert Kennedy,* pp. 507, 976; Sorensen, *Kennedy,* p. 684; and Abel, *The Missile Crisis,* p. 64.

44. Stern, *Averting the "Final Failure,"* pp. 98–102; and Naftali, May, and Zelikow, eds., *The Presidential Recordings,* Vol. 2, p. 534.

45. Naftali, May, and Zelikow, eds., *The Presidential Recordings,* Vol. 2, p. 515; and May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes,* p. 121.

The Pearl Harbor moral analogy played a major role in the discussions on Thursday, 18 October. On Thursday morning, Sorensen told Kennedy that "two big questions must be answered." First, what kind of military response would be adopted? Second, would a warning be issued to Khrushchev before any attack?[46] By the end of the day, the first question had still not been settled, although opinion had shifted toward a blockade. On the second question, the president abandoned his initial view and at this point favored issuing a warning before any air strike began—in large part because of the analogy with Pearl Harbor.

At the ExComm meeting that day, Rusk noted the military advantages of a "quick strike" but also suggested (without mentioning Pearl Harbor) that prior notification to Khrushchev would legitimize a U.S. military response and retain the support of allies. In response, the president echoed some of his earlier fears about what Khrushchev might do in the period between any warning and the initiation of air strikes. Kennedy speculated that the Soviet Union might try to hide the missiles in the Cuban woods. He became more interested in a warning when McNamara indicated that the United States could probably keep track of the missiles. But the president worried that Khrushchev's response to a warning about air strikes would be to announce his own ultimatum: "If you [attack the Soviet missiles], we're going to take Berlin."[47]

Ball then argued that a surprise attack would create a "sense of affront" in allied countries unless Khrushchev was given a way out—a 24-hour warning before air strikes began.

> Even though it may be illusory, I think we *still* have to do it, because I think that the impact on [world] opinion and the reaction would be very much different. I think that a course of action where we strike without warning is like Pearl Harbor. . . . It's . . . it's the kind of conduct that's such that one might expect of the Soviet Union. It is *not* conduct that one expects of the United States.

This statement marked a turning point in the conversation. Before Ball mentioned Pearl Harbor, President Kennedy had been noncommittal on the issue of a warning and raised a series of possible objections to this course of action. But after Ball spoke, Kennedy favored issuing an announcement to Khrushchev before any air strikes began. The president challenged his own earlier argument that giving notice to Khrushchev would threaten Berlin: "The point is . . . [Khrushchev's] . . . going to grab Berlin anyway"—warning or no warn-

46. Naftali, May, and Zelikow, eds., *The Presidential Recordings,* Vol. 2, p. 515.

47. Stern, *Averting the "Final Failure,"* p. 100; and Naftali, May, and Zelikow, eds., *The Presidential Recordings,* Vol. 2, pp. 521–532.

ing.[48] If one listens to the tapes, Kennedy's sympathy with Ball's argument is obvious.

Having come to oppose a surprise attack, the president outlined a possible plan. He could publicly announce the discovery of the missiles on Friday, the 19th, and issue a warning before proceeding with air strikes on the 20th: "So everybody knows about it. It isn't Pearl Harbor in that sense. We've told everybody. Then we go ahead Saturday and take [the missiles] out." Pearl Harbor was clearly uppermost in President Kennedy's mind. When General Taylor suggested attacking on Sunday, 21 October, Kennedy replied wryly that: "Sunday has historic disadvantages"—a reference to Sunday, 7 December 1941. The president admitted that "the only advantage" of a warning would be to maintain alliance "solidarity." Although he still believed that issuing a warning would be militarily risky and might allow Khrushchev to outmaneuver them, he stressed that notification to Khrushchev "wouldn't put us quite in the position of almost acting in such a bad way."[49]

Once the president accepted the Pearl Harbor moral analogy, it also found favor with Robert Kennedy. Maxwell Taylor later recalled that until the discussion of Pearl Harbor arose, Robert Kennedy "had been a hawk constantly." Struck by Ball's reference to the Japanese attack in 1941, and probably also taking his cue from his brother's changing preferences, Robert Kennedy suddenly abandoned his belligerent stance: "I think George Ball has a hell of a good point . . . assuming that you do survive all this . . . [a warning would affirm] . . . what kind of country we are." Dean Rusk added a Biblical reference, stating that a warning would be preferable to "carrying the mark of Cain on your brow for the rest of your lives." Robert Kennedy argued that the United States had been trying over the past fifteen years to prevent a first strike by the Soviet Union and that attacking a small country without warning would therefore be incongruous: "I think it's a hell of a burden to carry." President Kennedy agreed that although the United States would lose the advantage of surprise, a warning would give Khrushchev a chance to get Soviet personnel out of the firing line.[50]

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48. My transcription of Ball's speech is slightly different from that in the Naftali, May, and Zelikow volume. That volume also states that Kennedy said "he's probably going to grab Berlin anyway." Actually, the president did not use the word *probably.* See Naftali, May, and Zelikow, eds., *The Presidential Recordings,* Vol. 2, p. 539; and Stern, *Averting the "Final Failure,"* p. 104.

49. Stern, *Averting the "Final Failure,"* p. 107; and Naftali, May, and Zelikow, eds., *The Presidential Recordings,* Vol. 2, pp. 545–546.

50. Stern, *Averting the "Final Failure,"* pp. 108, 113, 119; and Naftali, May, and Zelikow, eds., *The Presidential Recordings,* Vol. 2, p. 547. Gilpatric recalled that Robert Kennedy "brought up the analogy of Pearl Harbor. He didn't want this country to be in the position that Japan had put itself in with that raid. He felt that a sneak attack would only make us look bad in the eyes of the world." See Heymann, *RFK,* p. 272.

As the meeting drew to a close, McNamara summarized "the only two courses of action that we are talking about": (1) a blockade; or (2) air strikes *after* a warning to Khrushchev. The surprise attack option, which only recently had been the consensus approach, had been eliminated. Sorensen remarked to Kennedy that "there has been general though not unanimous agreement that you are likely to be making some kind of representation to Khrushchev ahead of time, maybe very shortly ahead of time." The president replied: "Yes. Well, we have to have . . . certainly to [contact] Khrushchev. We have to decide how much time in advance [of the attack] we'd do it or whether I would make [a] public statement."[51] Overall, by the end of the meeting the general tone was considerably more cautious. The discussion reflected a greater sense of the need for restraint. Officials pointed out that air strikes might not destroy all the missiles and could even provoke a crash effort to launch the surviving MRBMs. They also warned that in the event of a surprise attack the Soviet Union might respond elsewhere, and the United States would achieve global infamy.

After the meeting, Acheson met with President Kennedy and urged immediate surgical air strikes. The president countered that this action would be "Pearl Harbor in reverse." Acheson called the analogy "silly," and in a reference to Robert Kennedy and Ball, Acheson remarked: "I know where you got that. . . . It is unworthy of you to talk that way." The former secretary of state chided John Kennedy for repeating "his brother's clichés."[52]

On Friday, 19 October, the JCS and Dean Acheson set out the case for swift air strikes, although they accepted that the "political disabilities" of this option might require some sort of warning to maintain alliance cohesion. In response, with the president absent, Robert Kennedy paced the room, arguing that he now supported a blockade. Earlier that morning, during discussions at the State Department, Robert Kennedy was still toying with the idea of an attack, but now he was firmly against this course of action.[53] According to Ralph Meeker, who wrote the minutes,

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51. Stern, *Averting the "Final Failure,"* p. 112; and Naftali, May, and Zelikow, eds., *The Presidential Recordings,* Vol. 2, p. 557, 562. The transcript in *The Presidential Recordings* (p. 562) contains an important error. According to the transcript, Kennedy said, "We have to decide in advance we'd do it," implying that the decision to offer a warning to Khrushchev had yet to be made. But in fact Kennedy said: "We have to decide *how much time* in advance we'd do it," meaning that the decision to offer a warning had been made; the issue left was how much time there would be between the warning and air strikes. Another less important error features in Sorensen's comment before Kennedy spoke, in which Sorensen considered what kind of warning to offer Khrushchev: "Were it a letter, what will be a satisfactory answer?" *The Presidential Recordings* (p. 562) states that Sorensen then concluded, "And soon," but he actually concluded "And so on."

52. Dean Acheson, "Dean Acheson's Version of Robert Kennedy's Version of the Cuban Missile Crisis," *Esquire,* Vol. 71, No. 2 (February 1969), pp. 76–77.

53. Fursenko and Naftali, *"One Hell of a Gamble,"* p. 234.

> [Robert Kennedy] thought it would be very, very difficult indeed for the President if the decision were to be for an air-strike, with all the memory of Pearl Harbor and with all the implications this would have for us in whatever world there would be afterward. For 175 years we had not been that kind of country. A sneak attack was not in our traditions.

Although Robert Kennedy stressed that the administration had to deal with the Soviet threat right away, he wanted to gain the support of the Organization of American States and to give Khrushchev an opportunity to pull back. A surprise attack, he insisted, would be unacceptable. Douglas Dillon later claimed that he had been convinced by Robert Kennedy's speech—indeed he thought the whole ExComm had been persuaded by it, with a couple of exceptions.[54] The reality, however, was not quite that simple.

On Saturday, 20 October, the tenor of the discussions initially shifted in a more hawkish direction. The president worried that the missile threat would increase each day, and he again broached the possibility of air strikes, albeit with a few hours' notice so that Soviet personnel could leave the vicinity. His brother supported a mixture of blockade followed by air strikes to avoid a Pearl Harbor-style attack. The president himself finally swung around in support of the blockade, which despite some difficulties would buy time and keep more options open. A CIA report also suggested that eight nuclear missiles in Cuba might already be operational, raising the stakes for any U.S. strike. Secretary of State Rusk immediately agreed with the president—a sudden attack had no support in law or morality and therefore had to be ruled out.[55]

By the time the ExComm met on Monday, 22 October, in the final hours before President Kennedy publicly announced the U.S. response, Robert Kennedy was even more strongly opposed to immediate air strikes. He indicated on Sunday to the president that such a move "would be a Pearl Harbor type of attack" and would provoke an unpredictable response from Moscow,

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54. Stern, *Averting the "Final Failure,"* p. 121; *FRUS, 1961–1963,* Vol. XI, pp. 116–122; Naftali, May, and Zelikow, eds., *The Presidential Recordings,* Vol. 2, pp. 599–601; and May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes,* p. 189; Schlesinger, Jr., *Robert Kennedy,* pp. 509–510. Dillon recalled that Robert Kennedy said "We've got to look at history over its length. We never want it said that the United States did the very same thing that we so resented when the Japanese did it to us in 1941. And it would be much worse since we are so much larger and stronger than Cuba." See James W. Hilty, *Robert Kennedy: Brother Protector* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), p. 446. Robert Kennedy was also reported as saying on Friday evening, "from here on out, if we make a surprise attack, we will be accused of another Pearl Harbor." Fursenko and Naftali, *"One Hell of a Gamble,"* p. 234. At the Friday meetings, Robert Kennedy was following the president's orders to forge a consensus for the blockade while the president was away on a campaign trip. See Stern, *Averting the "Final Failure,"* p. 130.

55. Naftali, May, and Zelikow, eds., *The Presidential Recordings,* Vol. 2, pp. 601–607; Stern, *Averting the "Final Failure,"* pp. 134–135; May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes,* pp. 194–198; "Transcript of a Meeting at the White House," 19 October 1962, in *FRUS, 1961–1963,* Vol. XI, pp. 126–136; and Fursenko and Naftali, *"One Hell of a Gamble,"* pp. 234–235.

with the possibility of escalation to nuclear war. A blockade would avoid these problems and leave more options open. Robert Kennedy privately noted that the two main reasons the United States had decided against a surprise attack were, first, Pearl Harbor, and second, doubts about destroying all the missiles: "Recognize military problems giving warning [before any air strikes], but Pearl Harbor would have been such a shock that busted alliance." The president affirmed that he had given up the idea of a quick strike the previous morning: "it looked like we would have all the difficulties of Pearl Harbor and not have finished the job." These difficulties would include a "nearly fatal" shock to the Western alliance.[56] Later, when President Kennedy talked to members of Congress, he asserted that he had chosen a blockade because he could not be sure of destroying all the missiles: "you would do the Pearl Harbor attack and you'd only get half."[57]

The Pearl Harbor analogy was used that same day in a third sense: as a factor to emphasize when explaining the administration's policy to Congress and the American public. According to Robert Kennedy, the administration could argue that air strikes were "just not considered on the basis of the fact that we couldn't have the Pearl Harbor kind of operation, rather than go into all the details of why it would not" be practical. Rusk suggested saying that the bombing was "not done" rather than "not considered," which the president agreed was "fair enough."[58]

Not everyone at the ExComm meeting used the Pearl Harbor analogy, however. Adlai Stevenson favored a negotiated settlement from the start but did not base his position on moral concerns about a surprise attack. Rather, he stressed the risk of starting a world war.[59] Dean Acheson was harshly critical about the relevance of moral analogies with Pearl Harbor. In 1969, Acheson summarized his thinking:

> [A]t Pearl Harbor the Japanese without provocation or warning attacked our fleet thousands of miles from their shores. In the present situation, the Soviet Union had installed ninety miles from our coast—while denying they were doing so—offensive weapons that were capable of lethal injury to the United States. This they were doing a hundred and forty years after the warning given in

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56. *FRUS,* 1961–1963, Vol. XI, p. 140; Naftali, May, and Zelikow, eds., *The Presidential Recordings,* Vol. 3, p. 43; Stern, *Averting the "Final Failure,"* pp. 151–152; May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes,* p. 207, 230; and Thomas, *Robert Kennedy,* p. 219.

57. Stern, *Averting the "Final Failure,"* p. 168; and Naftali, May, and Zelikow, eds., *The Presidential Recordings,* Vol. 3, p. 79.

58. Stern, *Averting the "Final Failure,"* p. 156; and Naftali, May, and Zelikow, eds., *The Presidential Recordings,* Vol. 3, pp. 51–57.

59. May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes,* pp. 118, 198–199.

[the Monroe Doctrine]. . . . How much warning was necessary to avoid the stigma of "Pearl Harbor in reverse"?[60]

Despite the frequent invocation of Pearl Harbor during the discussions from 16 to 22 October, the moral analogy (and most other historical analogies) suddenly disappeared from the ExComm deliberations. Having focused intensely on the crisis for more than a week, the ExComm members came to regard the situation as largely unique and felt less need to search for historical reference points.[61]

Robert Kennedy later wrote a memoir of the crisis, *Thirteen Days,* published posthumously in 1968. The book was written with the help of Theodore Sorensen as part of Kennedy's election campaign, and its depiction of the role of the Pearl Harbor analogy in the Cuban missile crisis is often at stark odds with the record in the Kennedy tapes. The book claims that on the first day of the crisis the Attorney General gave President Kennedy a note about potential U.S. air strikes: "I now know how Tojo felt when he was planning Pearl Harbor."[62] Robert Kennedy then supposedly backed McNamara's proposal for a blockade, overruling the Joint Chiefs' preference for air strikes. *Thirteen Days* then reports that when Dean Acheson pressed for air strikes, Robert Kennedy rebuffed him:

> Whatever validity the military and political arguments were for an attack in preference to a blockade, America's traditions and history would not permit such a course of action. Whatever military reasons [Dean Acheson and others] could marshal, they were nevertheless, in the last analysis, advocating a surprise attack by a very large nation against a very small one. This, I said, could not be undertaken by the U.S. if we were to maintain our moral position at home and around the globe. Our struggle against Communism throughout the world was far more than physical survival—it had as its essence our heritage and our ideals, and these we must not destroy.[63]

The tape recordings of the ExComm meetings underscore how fanciful this depiction is. In reality, Robert Kennedy at the start of the crisis was bellicose and confrontational—strikingly different on occasion from the romanticized image in *Thirteen Days.*

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60. Acheson, "Dean Acheson's Version of Robert Kennedy's Version of the Cuban Missile Crisis," pp. 76–77; Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas, *The Wise Men* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), p. 622; Schlesinger, Jr., *Robert Kennedy,* p. 508; Neustadt and May, *Thinking in Time,* p. 7; and Reeves, *A Question of Character,* p. 378.

61. May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes,* p. 700.

62. Kennedy, *Thirteen Days,* p. 25.

63. Ibid., p. pp. 30–31.

Forty years later, the Pearl Harbor analogy was revived in the debates over the U.S. response to the September 2001 terrorist attacks, preemptive or preventive war, and the decision to invade Iraq. For many Americans, the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon seemed to parallel Pearl Harbor, notably the element of surprise and the intelligence failure.[64] On the evening of 11 September, President George W. Bush wrote in his diary: "the Pearl Harbor of the 21st century took place today."[65] The Bush administration invoked Pearl Harbor to argue for an offensive strategy against terrorists and tyrants—a strategy that would require the United States to act preemptively or even preventively.[66] On the anniversary of Pearl Harbor on 7 December 2001, Bush commented: "What happened at Pearl Harbor was the start of a long and terrible war for America. Yet out of that surprise attack grew a steadfast resolve that made America freedom's defender." Drawing a parallel with his own proclaimed war on terrorism, Bush remarked: "The terrorists are the heirs to fascism. . . . Like all fascists the terrorists cannot be appeased; they must be defeated."[67]

Whereas the Bush administration drew a parallel between the terrorists and the fascists of World War II, opponents of the 2003 war in Iraq sometimes likened the United States to the Japanese in 1941. The Pearl Harbor moral analogy was used by critics of the Bush administration to suggest that a preventive attack would be as morally wrong for Washington in 2003 as it had been for Tokyo in 1941. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., who had been an adviser to President Kennedy, made precisely this point when voicing his opposition to the Iraq War:

> Preventive war, anticipatory self-defense, was the doctrine with which the Japanese justified Pearl Harbor. FDR, an earlier American president, said that it was a date that will live in infamy. And now the Bush doctrine is a doctrine of preventive war, which makes America the self-appointed world's judge, jury and executioner.

Such attacks, Schlesinger claimed, would be "Pearl Harbor in reverse."[68] Similarly, Senator Edward Kennedy in 2002 noted Robert Kennedy's use of the

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64. Rosenberg, *A Date Which Will Live,* p. 2.

65. Bob Woodward, *Bush at War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002), p. 37.

66. Preemptive wars are fought against an immediate threat while preventive wars are fought against distant threats. The Bush administration's 2002 National Security Strategy argued that current threats are so dangerous that the United States should "not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right of self-defense by acting pre-emptively." See The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States,* Washington, DC, 2002.

67. George Bush, "Remarks by the President on the U.S.S. Enterprise on Pearl Harbor Day," 7 December 2001, speech text distributed by The White House.

68. Brian Braiker, "Pearl Harbor in Reverse," *Newsweek,* 22 March 2003, p. 41.

Pearl Harbor moral analogy in 1962: "Earlier generations of Americans rejected preventive war on the grounds of both morality and practicality, and our generation must do so as well."[69]

Although both the ExComm in 1962 and critics of the Iraq War in 2002–2003 invoked the "Pearl Harbor in reverse" moral analogy, they were drawing different parallels with Japanese behavior in 1941, which involved the launching of a surprise attack for preventive reasons. In 1962 the ExComm was concerned about the potential immorality of a surprise attack, whereas in 2002–2003 Arthur Schlesinger and Edward Kennedy focused on what they deemed the immorality of preventive wars. The U.S. strikes against Iraq in March 2003 obviously were not a surprise. Indeed, they were one of the most telegraphed invasions in history. Hence, that aspect of the Pearl Harbor analogy never came into play.

Conclusions

This article raises a number of questions. Where did the proponents of the Pearl Harbor moral analogy locate the source of normative concern: at the individual, domestic, or international level? Was the analogy primarily used as a rhetorical device, or was it an independent variable shaping actors' preferences? What does the case suggest about the wider use of moral analogies? Was this an example of the wise use of history?

McElroy argued that morality can influence foreign policy via three pathways: individual conscience, domestic public opinion, and world opinion.[70] During the Cuban missile crisis, the Pearl Harbor moral analogy took the first and third pathways: individual conscience and world opinion. George Ball, and later Robert Kennedy, were opposed in principle to surprise attacks similar to Pearl Harbor. Concern also existed that a surprise attack would produce global outrage at the United States, with negative consequences for U.S. foreign policy. President Kennedy's views were shaped through both of these channels. He claimed that a surprise attack would put the United States into the position of "acting in such a bad way."[71] Kennedy was also sensitive to the potential deterioration of America's global image if it launched air strikes without warning.[72] But there is little evidence that he or other policymakers

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69. "Senator Edward M. Kennedy's Induction Remarks," American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 5 October 2002.

70. McElroy, *Morality and American Foreign Policy.*

71. Stern, *Averting the "Final Failure,"* p. 107; and May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes,* pp. 148–151.

72. Stern, *Averting the "Final Failure,"* p. 100.

were worried about the domestic consequences of surprise air strikes. On the contrary, their main fear at home, as repeatedly expressed in the ExComm, was that the blockade would be perceived as being too weak a response.[73]

The Kennedy tapes reveal that the Pearl Harbor moral analogy had a major causal impact during the first week of the crisis. By 22 October the air strike option (especially strikes without any warning) had been branded the "Pearl Harbor" option. The ethical parallel with Pearl Harbor was repeatedly invoked in a coherent and consistent manner, and on each occasion it tended to frame the subsequent discussion. Every time a surprise air strike was compared to the Japanese actions in 1941 the analogy unsettled the ExComm. Surprisingly, the moral parallel between air strikes and Pearl Harbor was never openly questioned within the ExComm meetings, even by those whose arguments the analogy undermined (although Dean Acheson did criticize the relevance of Pearl Harbor on at least one occasion outside the ExComm).[74] Although the historical parallel was used in part for advocacy and justification, the evidence strongly suggests that the analogy's chief exponents, such as Ball, Robert Kennedy, and John Kennedy, believed in its essential truth. President Kennedy cited the analogy in the ExComm discussions, in a private conversation with Dean Acheson, and in a meeting with members of Congress. The perceived lessons of Pearl Harbor helped policymakers comprehend the moral nature of the air strike option and the likelihood of subsequent global infamy. Members of the ExComm exhibited a range of concerns about a surprise attack: the fear of killing Soviet troops or civilians, the irreversibility of an attack, the possibility of escalation, personal guilt, and international repercussions. The Pearl Harbor analogy tied many of these disparate arguments together into a highly salient formulation. In doing so, the analogy made an ambiguous moral argument against surprise attacks far more powerful.

The Pearl Harbor moral analogy was crucial in spurring the ExComm to reject the option of an air strike without warning. Before the introduction of the Pearl Harbor analogy on Thursday, 18 October, President Kennedy had been wary of issuing a warning, for fear that Khrushchev might use the opportunity to outmaneuver him, threaten Berlin, hide the missiles, or prepare them for launch. After Ball's remarks (and McNamara's claim that the United States could probably keep track of Soviet missiles after any warning), the president's position changed dramatically. He suggested that if the adminis-

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73. Naftali, May, and Zelikow, eds., *The Presidential Recordings,* Vol. 2, p. 605; and Stern, *Averting the "Final Failure,"* p. 152. Dean Rusk did, however, argue on 18 October that an initial consultation with Khrushchev would help to convince Americans that military force was a last resort. See Naftali, May, and Zelikow, eds., *The Presidential Recordings,* Vol. 2, p. 523.

74. Many of the same figures were critical of the use of historical analogies in the Vietnam War decision-making process. See Khong, *Analogies at War,* p. 134.

tration issued a warning on Friday (the 19th) before air strikes began on Saturday, this would ensure that "it isn't Pearl Harbor."[75] A few hours later, Kennedy repeated the Pearl Harbor argument to Dean Acheson. The president acknowledged the military disadvantages of a warning, but by this point he was convinced that it was the best policy, and he never again seriously entertained a surprise attack.[76]

The Pearl Harbor analogy had a far-reaching impact on Robert Kennedy, whose position underwent a remarkable shift from the cynicism of his "sink the *Maine*" comment to his later idealistic moralism. The tapes suggest that despite his initial bellicosity, he came to accept and internalize the moral parallel between air strikes and Pearl Harbor. Robert Kennedy was not a dove who latched onto the Pearl Harbor analogy merely as a rhetorical device. Rather, he was a hawk who altered his position largely because of the Pearl Harbor analogy. Most writers attribute a major role to Robert Kennedy in shaping the ExComm discussions, especially at the meetings when President Kennedy was absent (where Robert Kennedy would often be circulating ideas at his brother's behest).[77] Robert Kennedy's speech on Friday, 19 October, played a considerable role in firming up the blockade position at a time when the JCS, Acheson, Bundy and others were mobilizing for an attack on the missile sites. McNamara later argued that Robert Kennedy's arguments against a Pearl Harbor–style strike had been important in swinging the president toward the quarantine.[78] Douglas Dillon also switched his position to a large extent because of the Pearl Harbor analogy. McCone, for his part, had been worried about the "Pearl Harbor" implications of a surprise attack from the start.[79]

The impact of the Pearl Harbor moral analogy—first on McCone and Ball, then on President Kennedy and Robert Kennedy, and later on Dillon, Rusk, McNamara, and others—suggests that it was a sufficient condition to eliminate the option of a surprise air strike. Even in the absence of other factors, ethical parallels with 1941 would have been enough to prevent a surprise attack. It is more difficult to demonstrate that the moral analogy was a necessary condition for the decision to issue a warning (i.e. that in the absence of the moral analogy, the United States would not have decided to abandon the surprise attack option). The desire to allow Soviet personnel to evacuate the

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75. Stern, *Averting the "Final Failure,"* p. 107; and May and Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes,* pp. 148–151.

76. Stern, *Averting the "Final Failure,"* p. 151.

77. Thomas, *Robert Kennedy,* p. 214.

78. Schlesinger, Jr., *Robert Kennedy,* p. 511.

79. Lawrence Freedman, *Kennedy's Wars: Berlin, Cuba, Laos and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 179.

target areas was another factor that might have been sufficient to avert a surprise attack, with or without the moral analogy.[80] Even if no one had mentioned Pearl Harbor, the ExComm would have worried about the potential wider political repercussions of air strikes. On the other hand, if the analogy had not been invoked, the participants would probably not have drawn such a stark moral-political line between an air strike with a warning and one without.

If the Pearl Harbor moral analogy was a sufficient condition to eliminate the option of a surprise attack, what role did it play in undermining the option of an air strike *with* a warning and thereby encouraging the decision for a blockade? Memories of Pearl Harbor were by no means the only factor that favored a blockade. President Kennedy raised doubts about the likely success of air strikes and about possible Soviet responses. As he told the JCS on 19 October, the blockade offered a degree of control, helping to avoid escalation to nuclear war.[81] John Kennedy's caution and his desire to keep options open, as well as his willingness to examine how things looked from the other side, were personal traits largely independent of historical analogies.

Nevertheless, the Pearl Harbor parallel proved to be an important causal factor in the decision to introduce a blockade. The rejection of a surprise attack placed the next option—an attack preceded by a warning—in the spotlight. The strategic difficulties attending this course of action in turn pushed the administration toward the quarantine. Although a surprise U.S. attack could, at least in theory, have been a surgical strike against the missile sites, any warning to the Soviet Union would have necessitated a much larger-scale assault to counter the expected mobilization of Cuban air defenses. President Kennedy was well aware that the larger the attack became, the greater the risk of Soviet retaliation. From the start he favored the most limited strike possible.[82] Furthermore, one of the major U.S. concerns was whether an air strike would destroy all the missile sites. Air strikes after a warning would have offered fewer guarantees in this regard than a surprise attack. Moreover, the ExComm could only guess what Khrushchev would do in the interim between a warning and the first sorties. By eliminating the most effective air strike option in strategic terms—a surgical surprise attack—the Pearl Harbor analogy played an important causal role in eliminating *all* air strike options and thereby facilitating the blockade.[83] In the absence of the moral analogy,

80. Stern, *Averting the "Final Failure,"* p. 107.

81. Ibid., p. 128.

82. Freedman, *Kennedy's Wars,* p. 179; Stern, *Averting the "Final Failure,"* p. 83; and Naftali, May, and Zelikow, eds., *The Presidential Recordings,* Vol. 2, pp. 599–601.

83. For a theoretical discussion of the role of policy alternatives in decision-making, see Amy Oakes,

the choice might have come down to a surprise attack versus a blockade, making the air strike option much more attractive.

This case supports Yuen Foong Khong's argument that historical analogies are used not only to justify decisions but also to make them, most notably in the process of rejecting options (in this case the rejection first of an air strike without warning and then of an air strike before the blockade). Moral analogies are intellectual devices that can bring ethical concerns into policy-making, even when vital national interests are at stake. As discussed earlier, the effectiveness of a moral analogy depends on a range of variables, including the clarity or ambiguity of the moral argument, the nature of the foreign policy issue under question, the similarity between the cases, and the salience of the analogous example. In the Cuban missile crisis, the moral norm against surprise attacks was not clear-cut, the high stakes involved in the crisis allowed only a limited role for morality, and the parallels between air strikes against Cuba and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor were only superficial. Nonetheless, the analogy still mattered; mainly, it appears, because of the extraordinary salience of Pearl Harbor. This finding suggests that the key variable shaping the impact of moral analogies is whether they focus on a striking event such as Pearl Harbor, the Holocaust, or the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. Pearl Harbor was still so resonant in 1962 that decision-makers applied a moral injunction against surprise attacks in the Cuban missile crisis, even though few if any of them regarded such a ban as a compelling wider ethical principle. To get a sense of the salience of Pearl Harbor in 1962, one can imagine a situation today in which the United States discussed a policy option that involved exploding an aircraft or targeting a tall building. The action might be abandoned simply because it bore some slight physical resemblance to the attacks of 11 September 2001.

Why was the moral analogy with Pearl Harbor more effective as an argument in 1962 than in 2003? First, Pearl Harbor was a far more resonant case in 1962. The event remains iconic but is not as salient for policymakers who were born after 1941. Second, prospective air strikes on Cuba bore some slight physical resemblance to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, thus making the analogy more striking. The invasion of Iraq bore no physical resemblance at all to events in 1941, and thus the analogy was purely abstract. Third, in 1962 the moral analogy referred to the Japanese surprise attack, whereas in 2002–2003 critics of the Bush administration critics referred to Japan's preventive-war motivation. Pearl Harbor is infamous primarily because it was a surprise or "sneak" attack, not because of Japan's motivation for

fighting. If the Japanese had offered a clear warning or declaration of war before initiating an explicitly preventive conflict in 1941, the attack on Pearl Harbor would probably not have achieved the same degree of notoriety.

If, during the Cuban missile crisis, a comparatively weak moral norm against surprise attacks proved to be remarkably effective because of its association with a salient historical case, did this represent a successful use of history? Were air strikes against Pearl Harbor and Cuba in fact morally analogous?

Ernest May, Richard Neustadt, and Yuen Foong Khong all viewed the Cuban missile crisis as a positive instance of learning from the past.[84] However, we need to distinguish between the wisdom of a policy promoted by a particular argument and the strength of the argument itself. President Kennedy made a wise choice in deciding on the quarantine, but the moral parallel between air strikes against Cuba and Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor was superficial at most. In 1941, the Japanese struck first to provoke a wider war and achieve a dominant imperial position in East Asia. In 1962, the United States could have claimed a moral case for destroying the missiles with a proportionate attack, given the deceitful manner in which they were placed on the island, and perhaps also by invoking the Monroe Doctrine. Few international observers would have jumped to make the Pearl Harbor moral analogy, given its relative lack of salience outside the United States. Furthermore, the notion that countries had to give a formal warning before engaging in hostilities was not a universally accepted moral norm. A limited air strike would likely have provoked criticism, including from key allies such as Britain, but it seems far-fetched to suggest that this censure would have paralleled Japanese infamy.

What created a sense of moral equivalence between the projected air strikes against Cuba and Pearl Harbor was to a large extent the surface physical resemblance—in both cases, an attack from the sea with aircraft. Although the Kennedy brothers had supported aggressive covert actions (including plots to assassinate Castro) and a sneak attack by Cuban expatriates against Castro's regime over the previous eighteen months, these did not physically look like the handiwork of Tojo. Dean Acheson, whose hawkish preferences in the Cuban missile crisis might have sparked a disastrous war, nevertheless had a point in describing the Pearl Harbor parallel as a "thoroughly false and pejorative analogy."[85] As Ernest May writes, when policymakers use analogies

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84. Neustadt and May, *Thinking in Time,* pp. 1–17; and Khong, *Analogies at War,* pp. 5, 30.

85. Acheson, "Dean Acheson's Version of Robert Kennedy's Version of the Cuban Missile Crisis," p. 76; and Schlesinger, Jr., *Robert Kennedy,* p. 508.

they tend to use them badly, failing to "analyze the case, test its fitness, or even ask in what ways it might be misleading."[86] Fortunately on this occasion, a superficial analogy was internalized by decision-makers and helped to avert a nuclear exchange that would have been what Kennedy called "the final failure."[87]

86. May, *"Lessons" of the Past,* p. xi. Yuen Foong Khong sees poor use of analogies as the norm. Khong, *Analogies at War,* p. 31. See also Glenn Snyder and Paul Diesing, *Conflict among Nations: Bargaining, Decision Making, and System Structure in International Crises* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 321.

87. Stern, *Averting the "Final Failure,"* p. 106.