Origins of the Cuban Missile Crisis
Kagan’s Thesis

“It is not enough for the state that wishes to maintain peace and the status quo to have superior power. The [Cuban Missile] Crisis came because the more powerful state also had a leader who failed to convince his opponent of his will to use its power for that purpose” (548).
Background

• 1/1/1959 – Castro deposes Fulgencio Batista
  – Still speculation as to whether he was Communist (452)
• Feb. 1960 – USSR forges diplomatic ties w/ Castro
  – July – CUB seizes oil refineries b/c they refused to refine USSR crude
  • US responds by suspending sugar quota, which was 80% of Cuban exports to US ⇒ By October, CUB sells sugar to USSR & confiscates nearly $1B USD invested in CUB ⇒
• US implements trade embargo
• **KAGAN**: CUB traded one economic subordination for another (453)
Response

Ike invokes Monroe Doctrine → NK says it’s dead
  – Ike threatens missile strikes if CUB is violated
  – By Sept. 1960, USSR arms arrive in CUB
  – KAGAN: NK takes opportunity to reject US hegemony in region; akin to putting nukes in HUN 1956 (454)
Nikita, Why Cuba? (455-56)

- NK is adventuresome & wanted to see Communism spread around the world
- Opportunity prevented itself
- US had allies & bases close to USSR. Their turn.
- KAGAN: NK was a “true believer” & he was genuinely impressed w/ Castro (456)

“What can I say, I’m a pretty impressive guy” – Fidel
Bay of Pigs Timeline

• March 1960 – Ike begins training exiles on CIA advice to overthrow Castro

• 1961 – JFK elected & has to live up to campaign rhetoric against Communism he may not have believed in (Arthur Schlesinger qtd. in Kagan 460)
  – Might break up his “Alliance for Progress” in LAm.
  – Afraid USSR might seize Berlin, lead to war, or break up NATO
• 4/14/1961 – Air strikes begin → so ineffective, US denies involvement

• 4/17 – Bay of Pigs Invasion → exiles pinned on beach

• 4/18 – NK responds by hinting at doing something big in Berlin
  – Ike chastises JFK: NK provoked by indecision, not action. He’s bluffing and afraid (464)

• 4/19 – JFK gives a speech sounding like he wants to invade CUB someday → didn’t want to sound like a “paper tiger” (465)
  – KAGAN: JFK is all profile, and no courage (466)

“What a terrible idea.”
– JFK & Castro
(w/ different inflection)
Vienna Summit (June 1961)

- NK on coexistence: “Democracies had no right to intervene in Communist world, which communists had every right in intervene in democratic world” (Schlesinger 468)

- NK went “berserk” according to JFK
  - JFK concedes “balance in US/Sino-Soviet relations” (470); KAGAN: Not true.

- Results: cease-fire over Laos, no test ban treaty, Kennedy too inflexible on Berlin (Beschloss qtd. in Kagan 473)
  - JFK thinks NK a bully, NK thinks JFK weak (475-476)
  - Basically a draw (Sorensen 475)

“It’s going to be a cold winter” – JFK