HISTORY OF THE STRATEGIC ARMS COMPETITION 1945–1972

Part I

Office of the Secretary of Defense
Historical Office

March 1981
numbering at least 5,000 men, with T-54 tanks and antitank weapons. Some estimates are as high as 10,000 combat troops out of a total of 22,000 Soviet troops in Cuba.\textsuperscript{20} It is not clear whether the primary mission of these troops was to defend the missile sites against a possible U.S. attack or to ensure that they remained under Soviet rather than Cuban control.

Soviet Motives

Why the Soviets undertook an unprecedented deployment of strategic weapons to Cuba is a complicated question that has never been wholly clarified. Among the motives attributed to Khrushchev and his associates are the following:

1. To use the threat of missiles emplaced in Cuba for limited political ends, primarily to extract a pledge from the United States not to take military action against the Castro regime, whose fears of invasion—whether justified or not—had led to pressure upon the Soviet Union for some form of protection.

2. To use the missiles and IL-28s as bargaining counters to induce the United States to withdraw its forward-based missiles in exchange for withdrawal of Soviet offensive weapons from Cuba. A tradeoff of the Soviet missiles in Cuba for U.S. JUPITER IRBMs was proposed in Khrushchev's 27 October letter, though this may have been an afterthought for crisis bargaining purposes.\textsuperscript{21}