

## Foreword

IT HAS NOW BEEN MORE THAN EIGHT YEARS since the publication of *Averting 'the Final Failure': John F. Kennedy and the Secret Cuban Missile Crisis Meetings* (2003) and more than six since *The Week the World Stood Still: Inside the Secret Cuban Missile Crisis* (2005), both in the Stanford University Press Nuclear Age Series. During that time, in many discussions about the missile crisis, I have often been asked about the historical reliability of Robert Kennedy's *Thirteen Days* as well as the published recollections of other key participants in the Executive Committee of the National Security Council (ExComm), such as Robert McNamara, Ted Sorensen, and others.

Unfortunately, it became apparent as the decade progressed that many historians writing about those participants' accounts were unwilling to make the commitment of time required to listen to the missile crisis recordings of the ExComm. Some chose instead to rely on the extremely flawed 1997 Harvard Press transcripts or the more reliable 2001 Miller Center/Norton transcripts. Nonetheless, despite the availability of the often revelatory and incontrovertible evidence on the tapes, many of the myths that had taken root before the recordings became available continued to flourish. No myth is more resilient than the notion that RFK saved the peace by persuading the president to accept the terms in Khrushchev's private offer to remove the missiles for a U.S. pledge not to invade Cuba, and later to ignore the terms of the Soviet leader's public offer to remove the missiles in Cuba if the U.S. withdrew its missiles from Turkey.

This book builds on my own narrative account of the ExComm meet-

ings to expose the misconceptions, half-truths, and outright lies that have shaped the still dominant but largely mythical version of what happened in the White House during those harrowing two weeks of secret deliberations. A half century after the event, it is surely time to document, once and for all, that RFK's *Thirteen Days* cannot be taken seriously as a historical account of the ExComm meetings.

It is equally essential to explore the specific role of key individuals (Dean Rusk, McNamara, McGeorge Bundy, Llewellyn Thompson, etc.) in those meetings, the details of which often conflict directly with RFK's memoir, and with their own published recollections. Finally, it is necessary to make clear that only one person at the ExComm meetings consistently and persistently resisted the advocates of military escalation from the ExComm, the Joint Chiefs, and the Congress: President Kennedy himself.

I am especially indebted to my son, Dr. Jeremy A. Stern, a historian in his own right, for urging me to write this book in order to close a critical gap in the historiographical record about the most dangerous crisis of the Cold War era. Special thanks as well to my wife Helen and my daughter Jennifer, and for the memory of my brother Marty (1935–2012).

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