

Many of the specifics which McNamara discusses happened in the early and mid 60s, prior to an age when I could begin to understand them, yet the images, the events, the television news sound bites, are clearly part of my memory. The significance of the Cuban missile crisis was largely lost on me; at the age of 10, it was simply not possible to imagine the magnitude of events in play that could have destroyed me in an instant, or perhaps worse, over agonizing months.

As many others have noted, I remember quite clearly where I was when I heard that President Kennedy had been shot: I was at Caldwell Elementary in Garland, TX, in Mrs. Cody's 5th grade classroom, when Principal Brank announced it over the PA system. I remember that Gary Brooks was weeping brokenly and had to be escorted from the room.

McNamara's discussion of the events of those days brought back those memories, and so many more. To learn now that there were 160 nuclear warheads already in Cuba during the October 1962 crisis is a sobering jolt. That was brinksmanship at the highest stakes, and the US administration did not even know it.

10, 20, 50, 60, 100 megatons... all these numbers ran together, with no real idea of what they meant, beyond that the bigger the number more of us, or them, would die in a momentary bright flash. It was not until the early 80s reading Jonathan Schell's *Fate of the Earth* that I began to understand something of what I had heard in my childhood. Schell's detailed analysis of a 1 megaton bomb at Manhattan as ground zero stands as a landmark in my memory of just what could happen.

Considering the current world situation with massive global power shifts, and the stakes being entire cities or even nations, this dialog seems far more urgent than ever before.

Share this page: