

## The Need for Photo Interpreters

Two incidents underscore the difficulty of interpreting even not-so-subtle images. A convincing sign of planned Soviet missile deployments in Cuba in 1962 was an image of a peculiar road pattern called “the Star of David” because of its resemblance to that religious symbol. To the untrained eye it looked like an odd road interchange, but trained U.S. photo interpreters recognized it as a pattern they had seen before—in Soviet missile fields. Without explaining the image, and perhaps without showing photos of Soviet missile fields, interpreters could have faced ridicule from policy makers.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, when Cuba was sending expeditionary forces to various parts of the Third World, newly constructed baseball fields indicated their arrival. To understand the significance of these fields, policy makers needed to know that Cuban troops play baseball for recreation. Interpreters would have to supply supporting analysis, perhaps a note explaining how seriously Cubans take baseball, to avoid being dismissed out of hand. New fields, in this case, could have meant large troop concentrations.