Historical Security Council (1962)

The Cuban Missile Crisis

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Introduction

The Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962 marked an important moment in the Cold War, bringing the United States and the Soviet Union close to nuclear conflict. The roots of this confrontation lay deep within the Cold War's escalating tensions and the relentless arms race between the two superpowers. Post-World War II, the United States and the Soviet Union emerged as global adversaries, each determined to propagate its ideological system—capitalism and democracy for the U.S., and communism for the U.S.S.R. This ideological rift fueled a series of proxy wars, espionage activities, and an intense competition for global influence, with nuclear weapons at the center of their power struggle.

The development and stockpiling of nuclear weapons became a feature of the Cold War, as both superpowers sought to achieve and maintain strategic superiority. The U.S. was the first to develop nuclear capabilities, demonstrated with the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. The Soviet Union quickly followed suit, successfully testing its first atomic bomb in 1949. This initiated an arms race.

By the early 1960s, the Soviet Union was eager to bolster its strategic position against the United States. Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviet Premier, sought ways to address the disparity in intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM) capabilities, where the U.S. held a clear advantage. The opportunity arose with the Cuban Revolution of 1959, which brought Fidel Castro to power. Castro's alignment with the Soviet Union and his antagonism towards the U.S. provided Khrushchev with a strategic ally just 90 miles off the American coast. The Soviet decision to place nuclear missiles in Cuba was a calculated move to deter any future invasion of the island by the U.S. and to shift the nuclear balance of power.

The discovery of these missile installations by American reconnaissance in October 1962 triggered an intense 13-day standoff fearing an impending nuclear war. President John F. Kennedy and his administration faced the daunting task of navigating this crisis without tipping the scales toward

catastrophe. The Cuban Missile Crisis not only epitomized the perils of the Cold War's nuclear brinkmanship but also underscored the urgent need for improved communication and diplomatic channels between the superpowers to prevent future confrontations from escalating to such a perilous degree.

Definition of Key Terms

Arms race

A competition between nations for superiority in the development and accumulation of weapons.

Nuclear missile

An explosive device whose destructive potential derives from the release of energy that accompanies the splitting or combining of atomic nuclei.

Bay of Pigs

The Bay of Pigs is the location in Cuba where the failed attempt by the US to overthrow Castro's government took place.

Communism

In a Communist system, individual people do not own land, factories, or machinery. Instead, the government or the whole community owns these things.

Capitalism

Capitalism is an economic and political system where trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit.

Executive Committee of the National security Council (Ex-Comm)

The executive committee within the United Nations.

Cold War

The Cold War was a period of geopolitical tension between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, marked by rivalry and proxy wars.

General Overview

Arms race

An arms race originated during the Cold War starting in 1947. The strife between the USA and the Soviet Union extended in Europe, parting it in a capitalist and a communist block. This caused the two superpowers to intensely construct nuclear missiles, but not only did this occur in Europe. When Cuba became independent of Spain through help of the US, the States became the protector of the island. However, Fidel Castro committed a coup d'etat on the former government of Fulgenco Batista. Despite a first failed attempt, Castro got the power and implemented a communist party. Causing agriculture to decrease, because of a feudal system. through which the US lost their ground. They reacted in trade sanctions, because the former ground produced a part of their economics. By doing so, their relationship crumbled off. And additionally, because Krushchev was pro-communism they gave protection to Cuba, that the marshall plan only gave to countries increasing capitalism. Because of this two sided aid, John Franklin Kennedy (JFK) was frustrated by the fact that both rivals were in support of Cuba. Therefore, JFK invaded the Bay of Pigs. The goal of this invasion was to overthrow Castro's communist government, but the USSR was through espionage of the Soviet's KGB (government agency) already aware of the movement. Ultimately, Cuba's position in this conflict was no longer that of a pawn in a chess game between two world powers

Construction of nuclear missiles

The protection of the Soviet Union resulted in constructions of nuclear missiles aimed at the US. Because the US had already placed such missiles in Italy and Turkey, in case something escalated with the Soviet Union.

After the failed mission at the Bay of Pigs the relations between Cuba and the US started deteriorating. Resulting in Castro becoming more resolute in his opposition to U.S. influence. And the

U.S. imposed a full economic embargo on Cuba in February 1962. This embargo included restrictions on trade, travel, and financial transactions, aiming to isolate Cuba economically and politically.

Multiple U-2 planes flew over Cuba to take secret pictures of the land. This was the first day of the thirteen day crisis. On October 14th 1962, evidence confirmed the construction of nuclear missiles that could destroy the States. JFK was in power at that time, and he placed a naval blockade at the trade waters around Cuba, to avoid any more military supplies. However, the US called this a quarantine, because the blockade would be an act of war.

Diplomacy

The process of the two superpowers continued with the US maintaining a blockade and the Soviet Union wanting to keep the missiles resulting in even greater tensions. There were multiple conversations between Khrushchev and JFK over letters. On the 22nd JFK announced a missile threat and stationed the blockade. A day later, on the 23rd, Krushchev refused to move their missiles.

After long deliberation with Kennedy's advisors on the 27th, the US Attorney General and the Soviet Ambassador came to a deal; if the Soviet Union, under United Nations supervision, would deconstruct the missile installations in Cuba, then the US would call off the blockade.

On Oct. 28, Khrushchev decided that nuclear war would be catastrophic, and decided to accept the American proposal. He ordered that the missile installations in Cuba should be dismantled and transported to the Soviet Union. In addition, the ships en route to Cuba would turn right around.

The US promised to respect Cuban borders and sovereignty, not to interfere in Cuban internal affairs and not to invade or engage in any other form of aggression. Furthermore, the US also withdrew their missiles from Turkey and Italy.

Major Parties Involved

United States of America

The United States were in this time period in a major ideologies conflict with the Soviet Union between capitalism and communism. Whilst the US was busy in Cuba, they were dealing with numerous conflicts on a mondial scale, for example in Vietnam. They protected Cuba after they helped them with the dependency of Spain.

Soviet Union / Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)

The Soviet Union, just like the USA, was dealing with multiple actions in the world, whilst working towards a communist world. They could by protecting Cuba, further enlarge their communistic influences and further plant nuclear missiles.

Cuba

Cuba was the third key player in the Cuban Missile Crisis. Castro's revolutionary government had come to power in 1959 and quickly aligned itself with the Soviet Union, seeking protection against potential U.S. aggression following the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961. Cuba's strategic location made it an ideal site for Soviet nuclear missiles. Castro was deeply involved in the negotiations and preparations for the missile installations. During the crisis, Castro was prepared for a potential U.S. invasion and even suggested a pre-emptive nuclear strike against the U.S. if such an invasion occurred.

Robert F. Kennedy and Anatoly Dobrynin

Robert F. Kennedy and Anatoly Dobrynin were the ones to make the final deal. Kennedy was the former Attorney General of the United States. Dobrynin was the Soviet Ambassador for the USSR. The deal was brokered during a secret meeting on October 27, 1962. The Attorney General met with Dobrynin to convey President John F. Kennedy's message. The U.S. offered to secretly remove its missiles from Turkey in exchange for the Soviet Union withdrawing its missiles from Cuba. This proposal allowed both superpowers to back down without appearing weak publicly.

Timeline of Key Events

The timeline of Key Events shows the most important occasions to understand the full picture of the history:

Date Description of event

October 17th 1961	Invasion Bay of Pigs
October 14th, 1962	U.S spy plane takes photos of cuban missile construction
October 16th, 1962	JFK meets with Executive Committee of the National Security Council for advisory
October 22nd, 1962	JFK announces missile threat and stations quarantine
October 23rd, 1962	Krushchev sends letter refusing the movement of missiles
October 27th, 1962	US Air Force pilot shot down by Cuban Fire → further raising tensions + Attorney General Kennedy and Soviet Ambassador meet to privately strike a deal
October 28th, 1962	Krushchev sends letter to JFK to announce removing missiles + JFK states publicly agreeing with the deal

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

UN involvement of the Secretary-General

The former Secretary-General U Thant operated as a mediator between John Franklin Kennedy and Nikita Krushchev to find a solution without military movements. During this process he said: "Today the United Nations faces a moment of grave responsibility. What is at stake is not just the interests of the parties directly involved, nor just the interests of all the Member States, but the very fate of mankind. If today the United Nations should prove itself ineffective, it may have proved itself so for all time."

Treaty

Removal of Jupiter Missiles Agreement 1962

Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty 1963

Establishment of the Moscow Washington Hotline 1963

Establishment of the Moscow-Washington Hotline

After the crisis, both superpowers recognized the need for better communication to prevent future crises. In June 1963, they established the Moscow-Washington Hotline, a direct communication link between the leaders of the United States and the Soviet Union. The purpose of this "red phone" was to enable fast, direct communication to avoid misunderstandings and manage potential crises more effectively.

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Bay of Pigs Invasion

The Bay of Pigs invasion on October 17th 1962 was an attempt to solve the issue performed by the US, aiming to overthrow Castro's government. They believed that this action would remove the threat of the nuclear missiles. The invasion involved a CIA-sponsored paramilitary group of Cuban exiles who landed at the Bay of Pigs with the hope of sparking a popular uprising against Castro. However, the operation was poorly executed, and the invaders were quickly defeated by Cuban forces.

The invasion's failure had significant repercussions. It humiliated the Kennedy administration and heightened Cold War tensions. Castro, fearing further U.S. aggression, sought closer ties with the Soviet Union, leading to the secret installation of nuclear missiles in Cuba. The Soviet Union saw an opportunity to bolster its ally and counteract U.S. missiles in Turkey.

When the U.S. discovered these missiles in October 1962, it led to the Cuban Missile Crisis. Thus, while the Bay of Pigs was not an attempt to solve the crisis, its failure contributed to the conditions that led to it. However, it may have been a possible attempt as a solution from the U.S's perspective.

Air strikes

Another proposed solution by the US, were targeted air strikes. This strategy was called Operation Oriskany, to destroy missile constructions before they could become operational. Proponents of this approach argued that it would quickly eliminate the threat and resolve. However, President Kennedy and his advisors were concerned about the high risk of Soviet retaliation in Cuba and possibly in Europe and the potential for a larger conflict. The potential for civilian casualties and the uncertainty of completely eliminating all missile sites also made this option less attractive.

Possible Solutions

Different power division

A different solution could be that after the blockade, the United States would deconstruct their missiles in Turkey and Italy. And the USSR would take down their missiles stationed on Cuba. And since Castro was still in power, instead of the revolter ruling, the United Nations could hold political stability for a time period till a democratically chosen minister could be responsible. This is an efficient move, because there was a lot of chaos given the circumstances in Cuba, that the society deserves to take time to resettle. Furthermore, the USSR and the US could still support the state, but only in monetary form. Because this could avoid a new wave of a duel between capitalism and communism.

This research report only has 1 possible solution, since this difficult issue needs a lot of creativity to create new solutions. Therefore, this "different power division" solution could give the delegates a push on to new ideas.

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Appendices

I.   https://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/cuban-missile-crisis

II. https://history.state.gov/milestones/1961-1968/bay-of-pigs