

Cuban Missile Crisis: A Look at the Negotiations.

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Abstract. This academic study proposes an analysis of the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 from the perspective of International Negotiations, with an emphasis on the interaction between the United States, the Soviet Union and Cuba. The analysis incorporates careful consideration of fundamental aspects, such as the objectives of the parties involved and the negotiation techniques and strategies employed to resolve the conflict. The study highlights the importance of integrative negotiation and cooperation as mechanisms to avoid a nuclear conflict, emphasizing the role of the United Nations (UN) in mediation. The Analysis concludes that the crisis was resolved without the presence of absolute winners, but with significant concessions on both sides. Information collection was carried out through online qualitative research, complemented with a bibliographical review to understand the dynamics of the negotiations and the interests of the parties involved.

Keywords. Cuban missile crisis, International negotiations, Integrative negotiation.

1. Introduction

This work presents a case study of the negotiations that took place in October 1962, known as the Cuban Missile Crisis. The primary actors involved in the conflict were the United States, the Soviet Union, and Cuba. However, during the negotiations, the actors were effectively reduced to two—the USA and the USSR—with Cuba serving as an observer-participant, despite its territory being the focal point of the crisis. The confrontation is regarded as the closest the superpowers came to nuclear war during the Cold War era. Arthur Schlesinger Jr., an advisor to American President John F. Kennedy, described this event as ‘the most dangerous moment in human history.’ Two years prior to the dispute, the government of US President Dwight D. Eisenhower trained anti-Castro Cuban exiles for an invasion of Cuba. The invasion, however, was executed under President Kennedy’s command during the operation known as the Bay of Pigs. Cuban President Fidel Castro was aware of the impending attack and successfully defended his country [1].

As tensions escalated, relations between the USA and Cuba deteriorated further as the USA launched Operation Mongoose, one of whose objectives was the assassination of Cuban leader Fidel Castro. Castro believed it was only a matter of time before the United States invaded Cuba [2]. From that point on, the United States was perceived as an enemy of Cuba. In an effort to deter American aggression, the Cuban and Soviet governments formed an alliance.

However, Soviet leader Nikita S. Khrushchev sought a non-conventional alliance, opting instead for the installation of medium-range nuclear missiles in Cuba, capable of reaching a large part of the United States [1]. The Soviet Union viewed the deployment of its missiles in Cuba as a means to expand its influence in the Western Hemisphere and to enhance its power and prestige [3]. Castro accepted the nuclear missiles reluctantly, stating that it was ‘not to guarantee our own defense, but mainly to strengthen communism on the international level’ [1]. Thus began one of the most dangerous periods of American-Soviet-Cuban relations during the entire Cold War era [4].

2. Research Methods

This study examines a period of intense international negotiations and employs an online qualitative research model, supplemented by a comprehensive literature review and insightful analysis. The primary purpose of this study is to decipher the underlying dynamics of the negotiations and discern the interests of the involved parties. In achieving this objective, the research significantly contributes to the understanding of the complexities inherent in international negotiations, especially in the context of global crises.

3. Results

Considering the strategic moves made by the Soviet Union during the height of the Cold War, a

clandestine operation was carried out. The Soviet Union positioned nuclear missiles on Cuban territory, aiming to secure a strategic advantage over the United States. This operation was discovered on October 14, when an American spy aircraft flew over Cuba and captured images that revealed the presence of Soviet missiles on Cuban soil. Upon receiving the information about the Soviet missiles, President Kennedy took immediate action. Over forty contact attempts were made with the objective of dissuading Soviet leader Khrushchev from deploying more missiles in Cuba, which were capable of reaching American territory [4]. This marked the beginning of a tense period of international negotiations.

Faced with an unprecedented threat, Kennedy made two crucial decisions early in the crisis. First, he established that Soviet missiles in Cuba must be removed. Second, he stated this publicly before taking any action. The Soviets responded by asserting that these missiles were only there to protect Cuba. Recognizing that stricter measures were needed for the Soviets to remove the missiles, Kennedy ordered a naval blockade of Cuba on October 22, 1962, to prevent the delivery of more missiles. As the term 'blockade' was considered an act of war, Kennedy always referred to it as a naval 'quarantine'. This action signaled that the American government would not allow offensive weapons to remain in Cuba, and this 'quarantine' would exert pressure on Khrushchev. This type of coercion strategy can be understood as a threat compelling the other party to make concessions. Furthermore, the blockade served as a mechanism to signal the American commitment to ensuring the removal of the missiles. In this way, commitments work by increasing the price the actor will pay if they do not keep their word. The blockade implied that the USA would take even harsher measures if the Soviets did not comply with the demand. The announcement of the blockade was a strong message of commitment, raising the stakes. Both Kennedy and Khrushchev knew that events could spiral out of control. This meant that nuclear war could have occurred even if neither leader wanted it. Once ships, planes, and men were set in motion, no one could be sure what would happen [5]. American uncertainty about how many airstrikes would be needed to destroy the Soviet missiles, and whether they could all be destroyed before they were launched, was crucial to the decision to opt for a blockade. The argument of Kennedy administration advisers was that he had been irresponsible in beginning with threats rather than diplomacy. However, evidence from the Soviet side indicated that a purely diplomatic approach would have failed. Fisher & Ury [6] state that the basic movements that exist in the approach to problem and conflict resolution are for the parties to move from positions to global interests, that is, to focus on the general panorama and not on specific needs.

Given the destructive nature of nuclear weapons and the lack of effective defense against them, the only

way to ensure protection would be to pose a serious threat of retaliation, in hopes of deterring the other side from using these weapons. Therefore, to avoid a nuclear holocaust, integrative negotiation has become essential in circumventing crises like the Cuban Missile Crisis. Integrative negotiation is a model that seeks joint solutions. For the United States, the best agreement would involve the removal of Soviet missiles from Cuba without any confrontation. Kennedy was determined to avoid such a confrontation, stating, 'Domestic politics can only defeat us; foreign policy can kill us.' The near nuclear accident of October 1962 demonstrated that the best alternative was to prevent a nuclear war [2]. Throughout his political career, Kennedy expressed an aversion to war, particularly on a large scale. In 1947, he publicly warned about the potential for a nuclear apocalypse, advocating for diplomacy as the means to avert it [4].

Both sides had clear interests, but it is important to note that the basis of negotiation fluctuated between moments where interests were leveraged and others where power was exerted to achieve objectives. Moreover, there were no fixed positions; the parties sought a solution that would be satisfactory for both, a win-win situation. A common interest between the two parties was to avoid armed conflict, which motivated them to seek as peaceful a solution as possible. On the other hand, the use of power during negotiations was also evident, especially in actions taken to achieve desired outcomes, such as the 'quarantine' imposed by the USA and the USSR's attack on an American plane. Both sides employed power and interest-based strategies during the crisis. The initial stages of negotiation were purely distributive, characterized by contentious tactics such as negotiating from a position of strength and issuing threats. In this sense, negotiation was marked by the use of force to achieve objectives.

Another focus of the analysis is the power asymmetry between the involved parties. The USA held defensive superiority, and the Soviet objective was to 'strengthen the geostrategic position', given that the missiles the USSR possessed at that time were insufficient to offset the American advantage [2]. Therefore, the installation of missiles in Cuba would provide the Soviets with an offensive advantage, potentially equalizing the power differences between them and the United States. The Soviets' superior position became evident post-missile deployment when they demanded that the USA publicly renounce any plans to invade Cuba and remove its missiles from Turkey as preconditions for their missile withdrawal. Other distinguishing characteristics between the parties also played significant roles in the dispute. For instance, the ideological differences between Cuba, the USSR, and the USA were crucial in the negotiations during the Crisis. The political culture of the USA during the Cold War was strongly anti-communist. While the Soviet Union, on the other hand, was seeking its socialist expansion, and Cuba had undergone a revolution, adopting socialism. These differences influence

negotiations, as each country had different objectives and strategies that significantly interfered with its status in the international system.

4. Discussion of the results

Fundamentally, the United States' initial interest was to remove nuclear missiles from Cuba for two primary reasons. First, the missiles represented an immediate threat to their territory. Second, the installation of these missiles would mean interference in a zone of interest for the North American government and could cause an imbalance in world power. In this context, President Kennedy was determined to remove the missiles from Cuba, as he would not tolerate such a threat [1]. The missiles were positioned at a very close distance to the USA; if the Soviets attacked, the scale of the attack would be devastating. It is possible to identify the potential attack perimeter in an image, which shows that cities such as Miami, Houston, and even the capital, Washington, could be hit. See Figure 1.

Driven by security concerns, Cuba's initial objective was to protect itself from possible future attacks by the United States, particularly against an assassination attempt on Castro. By consolidating its alliance with the Soviet Union, Cuba aimed not only to guarantee its protection but also to strengthen the presence of communism on the international stage. The Soviet Union, as an integral part of the conflict, had a considerable range of interests at stake. Its objective was to expand its political and military potential in Latin America. As negotiations progressed, the Soviets perceived the deployment of missiles in Cuba as a political-diplomatic force, which could be used to increase their bargaining power on the international stage. One of Khrushchev's objectives was arguably to neutralize the American nuclear advantage and to prepare the 'terrain' for pressure on Berlin, thus allowing the USSR to exercise control over Eastern Europe. Another point of interest for the Soviet Union was the struggle to be recognized as a full-fledged superpower. If the USSR could not replicate the actions of the US, how could it be considered a full-fledged superpower? Moreover, being a superpower implied the responsibility to protect allies [5].

Khrushchev perceived Castro as a symbol of what he believed to be the advancement of global communism and was therefore motivated to protect his ally against the American threat to overthrow him [4]. The argument that Khrushchev's main motive was to defend Cuba did not receive much credence in the West, especially since the Bay of Pigs invasion was a failure, and the US no longer posed a serious challenge to the Cuban regime. A second objection was that Khrushchev would not have taken such a risk to protect a population that was not of vital interest [5]. These facts contribute to the understanding that Khrushchev's main motive was something beyond simply protecting an ally. In a way, Khrushchev's diverse interests complemented each other; sending the missiles was a strategy to

increase Soviet influence and the expansion of communist regimes in the Third World. Additionally, the increasingly problematic rivalry with China could not be neglected. This rivalry intensified the need to protect Cuba. Khrushchev feared that an apparent lack of determination to protect the Cuban revolution would erode his position as leader of the communist bloc and push Castro into closer ties with his rival [4].

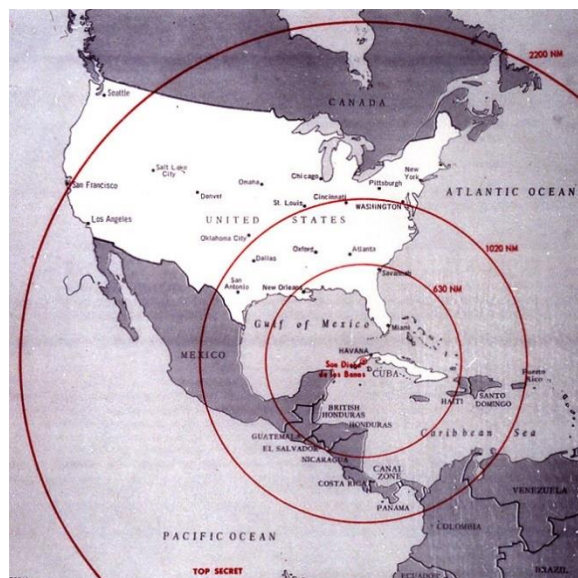


Figure 1. Potential attack perimeter of Soviet missiles on US soil. [8]

5. Conclusions

Reflecting on the events, on October 27, known as "Black Saturday", a U2, an American spy plane, was shot down over the territory of Cuba, causing the death of the pilot. Kennedy decided not to retaliate [2]. This strategy of not reacting to the USSR attack can be identified as the use of the Jiu-Jitsu technique by the USA. One party (USSR) strongly declared a position, but the other party (USA) did not attack that position, but rather sought to highlight how the chosen position would affect the conflict. The USA did not immediately react with military force upon discovering the attack on the plane and opted for a resolution made through diplomatic means, showing that the strategy used was Jiu-Jitsu [7]. The US did not react directly to the Soviet Union's aggressive stance, instead exploring different options and seeking a solution that benefited both parties. It can be said that Kennedy's approach of placing himself under the perspective of the other side, seeking to understand and anticipate their actions, was fundamental to resolving the conflict. If Kennedy had assumed that the Soviets were acting maliciously, he might have been led to respond with military strikes, but he sought to understand the Soviet perspective. During the negotiations, Kennedy turned to his advisors several times, asking them to put themselves in Khrushchev's shoes. While they stated that the best solution would be a surprise air attack, Kennedy said, "I think we should think about why the Russians did this." The president highlighted that his international allies would consider an air strike "a

crazy act by the United States” [1]. In one of his speeches, he stated that a nuclear war would be “the final failure”, the worst possible outcome, much worse than having to retreat [5]. Robert McNamara, American Secretary of Defense during the crisis, stated that if his advice to invade Cuba had prevailed, “nuclear war would have started on the beaches of Cuba and could have ended in a global holocaust” [1]. After the attack on October 27, the attorney general and also the president’s brother, Robert F. Kennedy, suggested responding to Khrushchev’s first offer and accepting his terms. Therefore, Kennedy met with Anatoliy Dobrynin, the Soviet ambassador to the USA, to close the deal behind closed doors. However, the agreement was made under the “assurance that the Soviets did not make the agreement public” [7]. A secret negotiation of an agreement (which most of Kennedy’s advisors opposed) was considered essential for the agreement to be reached. The agreement would not anger NATO allies abroad [1].

As a result, the agreement that ended the crisis involved the removal of Soviet missiles from Cuba. In return, the US agreed to issue a “non-invasion” pledge. The deal also involved a secret guarantee in which the US agreed that it would withdraw all of its missiles from Turkey. The USSR’s first proposal only requested a promise not to invade the US. However, after Khrushchev realized he had greater bargaining power, he sent a second proposal, where he added the removal of American missiles from Turkey as a necessary action to the agreement. Nevertheless, accepting this last demand in public would have been political suicide for Kennedy. A secret agreement was effectively the best solution.

Subsequently, on October 28, the Soviets withdrew their missiles from Cuba, while the US committed to withdrawing its missiles from Turkey, as well as canceling the invasion of Cuba. Thus, the missile crisis was avoided [3]. The United Nations (UN) also became a key player in resolving the conflict. Secretary-General U Thant acted as a third party, mediating between the three parties. He provided an environment for negotiation at headquarters in New York, and assisted with the terms of the agreement to foster collaboration in the negotiation process and consensus building, using a diplomatic approach [7]. The UN also had the role of supervising the removal of Soviet missiles from Cuba. The Cuban Missile Crisis was resolved through intense negotiations, not necessarily between equals, but diplomatically. Both sides made significant concessions, so there were no outright victories. The unprecedented nature of this conflict caught each side off guard, destabilizing everyone’s expectations and making it difficult for anyone to feel that they understood the other side or could predict what the other side would do. The recognition of the need to avoid nuclear war was something both sides shared, and this motivated them to find a peaceful solution.

Surprisingly, neither side won the Cuban missile crisis. Instead, two leaders came to the conclusion that nuclear war was unthinkable. The American

president understood that, once the military conflict between the nuclear superpowers began, all bets were off. He stated in a meeting at the White House, “It is crazy that two men, sitting on opposite sides of the world, are able to decide to put an end to civilization” [4]. In terms of negotiation, the lack of trust, the asymmetry of information between the two parties and the lack of direct communication between military headquarters meant that the chances of a war happening would increase drastically. It is not surprising that a practical lesson from this situation was the creation of the Moscow-Washington Hotline to improve and facilitate communication between the States [2]. The installation of the hotline, or red telephone, the following year, not only allowed the White House and the Kremlin to communicate in a way that eliminated uncertainty, but it can also be seen as a mutual concession, which improved the relationship between the nuclear powers. In short, the parties sought to cooperate to achieve maximum benefits by integrating their interests into an agreement.

6. References

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