

DOI:<https://doi.org/10.61841/cztc1528>Publication URL:<https://nnpub.org/index.php/SSH/article/view/2576>

The Cuban Missile Crisis

Zahid Mammadov

E-mail:zaxidmemmedovvv@gmail.com Maria Curie-Skłodowska University Lublin, Poland

To Cite This Article:

Mammadov, Z. . (2025). The Cuban Missile Crisis. Journal of Advance Research in Social Science and Humanities (ISSN 2208-2387), 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.61841/cztc1528>

ABSTRACT.

The crisis of October 1962 was one of the most dangerous conflicts of the Cold War period which bringing the world perilously close to nuclear disaster. This article aims at analyzing the origin of the conflict between United States and Soviet Union with emphasis on strategic and ideology factors that characterized the conflict. It examines related power politics on the international stage, such as the Soviet Union putting missiles in Cuba in response to the placing of American missiles in Turkey, and related standoff. The nature and consequences of the crisis are described, as well as its contribution to future arms control talks, the process of détente and relations within NATO and the Warsaw Pact. This paper expands the understanding of the dynamics of diplomacy and the role of the United Nations when preventing global disasters when evaluating the aftermath for further development of international security and relations between superpowers.

KEYWORDS. *Cuban Missile Crisis, Cold War, Nuclear diplomacy, USSR, USA, Arms race, Détente, NATO, Warsaw Pact, International Relations, United Nations.*

INTRODUCTION

The second half of October 1962 went down in history as the Cuban Missile Crisis, which arose in an atmosphere of worsening Cold War and brought the world to the brink of nuclear disaster. Here the interests of two bipolar systems met - the USSR and the USA. It is safe to say that their military-political confrontation has become a real threat to the lives of millions of innocent people. Humanity has fully experienced the reality of the apocalypse. Fortunately, the powers of reason then prevailed over recklessness and wild emotions. Statesmen of the USSR, USA and Cuba for the first time realized what a "nuclear impasse" was and, having shown the necessary realism in eliminating the crisis situation, found the strength to embark on the path of solving the most pressing international problems not by military, but by political means.

The purpose of my essay: to show the root causes of conflicts between the USSR and the USA in the post-war decades, to determine how serious and fruitful the steps to prevent them were.

During the Cold War, the confrontation between the two superpowers, the USSR and the USA, was expressed not only in a direct military threat and an arms race, but also in the desire to expand their zones of influence. The Soviet Union sought to organize and support liberation socialist revolutions in different parts of the world. In pro-Western countries, support was provided for the "people's liberation movement," sometimes even with weapons and people. If the revolution won, the country became a member of the socialist camp, military bases were built there, and significant resources were invested there. The Soviet Union's assistance was often free of charge, which aroused additional sympathy for it from the poorest countries of Africa and Latin America.

The United States, in turn, followed similar tactics, organizing revolutions to establish democracy and providing support to pro-American regimes. The preponderance of forces was on the side of the United States - they were supported by Western Europe, Turkey, and some Asian and African countries, for example South Africa.

BACKGROUND

In the immediate aftermath of the Cuban revolution in 1959, leader Fidel Castro did not have close relations with the Soviet Union. During his fight against the regime of Fulgencio Batista in the 1950s, Castro appealed to Moscow several times for military assistance, but was refused¹. Moscow was skeptical about the leader of the Cuban revolutionaries and the very prospects for revolution in Cuba, believing that the US influence there was too great. Fidel made his first foreign visit after the victory of the revolution to the United States, but President Eisenhower refused to meet with him, citing being busy. After this demonstration of an arrogant attitude towards Cuba, F. Castro took measures against the dominance of the Americans. Thus, the telephone and electric companies, oil refineries, and 36 largest sugar factories owned by US citizens were nationalized; the previous owners were offered corresponding packages of securities. All branches of North American banks owned by US citizens were also nationalized. In response, the United States stopped supplying Cuba with oil and buying its sugar, although a long-term purchase agreement was in effect. Such steps put Cuba in a very difficult situation. By that time, the Cuban government had already established diplomatic relations with the USSR, and it turned to Moscow for help. Responding to the request, the USSR sent tankers with oil and organized purchases of Cuban sugar.

PRECIPITATING FACTORS

Cuba can be considered to be the first country to choose the communist path without significant military or political interference from the USSR. As such, it was deeply symbolic for Soviet leaders, especially Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev, who considered the defense of the island critical to the international reputation of the USSR and communist ideology².

In 1961, the United States began deploying 15 medium-range PGM-19 Jupiter missiles with a range of 2,400 km near Izmir in Turkey, which directly threatened the European part of the Soviet Union, reaching as far as Moscow. President Kennedy considered the strategic value of these missiles to be limited, since submarines armed with ballistic missiles could cover the same territory, having the advantage of stealth and firepower. However, in the late 1950s, intermediate-range missiles were technologically superior to intercontinental ballistic missiles, which at that time could not be constantly on alert. Another advantage of medium-range missiles is their short flight time - less than 10 minutes.

Soviet strategists realized that they could effectively achieve some nuclear parity by placing missiles in Cuba. Soviet medium-range missiles on Cuban territory, having a firing range of up to 4,000 km (R-14), could keep Washington and about half of the airbases of strategic nuclear bombers of the US Strategic Air Force at gunpoint, with a flight time of less than 20 minutes.

¹ Adamishin A.L. *The Soviet Union and revolutionary Cuba*. - M. Science, 1987. Pg-85

² Vasiliev V.N. *Caribbean crisis*. - M., 1991. Pg-78

The head of the Soviet Union, Khrushchev, publicly expressed his indignation at the deployment of missiles in Turkey. He considered these missiles a personal insult. The deployment of missiles in Cuba, the first time Soviet missiles left the USSR, is considered a direct response by Khrushchev to American missiles in Turkey.

By June 1962, the General Staff had already developed a cover operation codenamed Anadyr. The operation was planned and led by Marshal of the USSR Hovhannes Khachaturovich Bagramyan. According to the drafters of the plan, this was supposed to mislead the Americans regarding the destination of the goods. All Soviet military personnel, technical personnel and others accompanying the "cargo" were also told that they were heading to Chukotka. For greater authenticity, whole carriages of fur coats and sheepskin coats arrived at the ports. But, despite such a large-scale cover, the operation had one significant flaw: it was impossible to hide the missiles from American U-2 reconnaissance aircraft that regularly flew over Cuba. Thus, the plan was developed in advance taking into account the fact that the Americans would discover the Soviet missiles before they were all installed. The only way out that the military was able to find was to place several anti-aircraft batteries already in Cuba at the unloading sites.³

Missiles and other equipment, as well as personnel, were delivered to six different ports from Severomorsk to Sevastopol. 85 ships were allocated to transport troops. Before sailing, not a single captain knew about the contents of the holds, as well as the destination. Each captain was given a sealed package, which had to be opened at sea in the presence of the political officer. The envelopes contained instructions to proceed to Cuba and avoid contact with NATO ships.

At the beginning of August, the first ships arrived in Cuba. On the night of September 8, the first batch of medium-range ballistic missiles was unloaded in Havana; the second batch arrived on September 16. The headquarters of the GSVK is located in Havana. Ballistic missile divisions were deployed in the west of the island - near the village of San Cristobal and in the center of Cuba - near the port of Casilda. The main troops were concentrated around the missiles in the western part of the island, but several cruise missiles and a motorized rifle regiment were deployed to the east of Cuba - a hundred kilometers from Guantanamo Bay and the US naval base in Guantanamo Bay. By October 14, 1962, all 40 missiles and most of the equipment were delivered to Cuba.

After receiving photographs indicating Soviet missile bases in Cuba, President Kennedy assembled a special group of advisers for a secret meeting at the White House. This 14-member group, which later became known as the "Executive Committee", consisted of members of the US National Security Council and several specially invited advisors. The committee soon offered the president three possible options for resolving the situation: destroy the missiles with targeted strikes, conduct a full-scale military operation in Cuba, or impose a naval blockade of the island.⁴

An immediate bomb attack was rejected immediately, as was an appeal to the UN that promised a long delay. The only realistic options considered by the committee were military measures. Diplomatic ones, barely touched upon on the first day of work, were immediately rejected - even before the main discussion began. In the end, the choice was reduced to a naval blockade and ultimatum, or a full-scale invasion.

The Chief of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), General Maxwell Taylor, and the head of the Strategic Air Command (SAC), General Curtis LeMay, proposed an invasion. In their opinion, the Soviet Union would not have dared to take serious countermeasures. In preparation for the invasion, the transfer of troops to Florida began. The military rushed the president to order the invasion because they feared that by the time the USSR installed all the missiles, it would be too late. It is worth noting, however, that the CIA intelligence data on the number of Soviet troops in Cuba by that time was already significantly lower than the real ones. The Americans were also unaware of the twelve Luna tactical nuclear missile systems already on the island, which could have been activated on the orders of General Pliiev, the commander of Soviet forces on the island. An invasion could have resulted in a nuclear attack on the American troops, with catastrophic consequences. Therefore, at the suggestion of Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, it was decided to consider the possibility of a naval blockade of Cuba.⁵

On October 18, the US President was visited by USSR Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko along with the USSR Ambassador to the US Anatoly Dobrynin. Gromyko categorically denied the presence of any offensive weapons in Cuba. But the next day, another U-2 flight revealed several more mounted missile positions, a squadron of Il-28s off the northern coast of Cuba, and a cruise missile division aimed at Florida.

³ Vasiliev V.N. *Caribbean crisis*. - M., 1991. Pg-80

⁴ Lyubimov M. *The first years of the Cuban revolution*. - M., 1997. Pg-92

⁵ Lyubimov M. *The first years of the Cuban revolution*. - M., 1997.pg-93

The decision to introduce the blockade was made at the final vote on the evening of October 20: President Kennedy himself, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and US Ambassador to the UN Adlai Stevenson, specially summoned from New York for this purpose, voted for the blockade.

However, according to international law, a blockade is an act of war. In this regard, when discussing this option, concerns arose about the reaction of not only the Soviet Union, but the world community. Therefore, the decision to introduce a blockade was submitted for discussion to the Organization of American States (OAS). Based on the Rio Pact, the OAS unanimously supported the imposition of sanctions against Cuba. The action was called not a "blockade", but a "quarantine", which did not mean a complete cessation of sea traffic, but only an obstacle to the supply of weapons. It was decided to introduce quarantine on October 24 from 10 am local time.

Meanwhile, by October 19, U-2 survey data showed four completed launch positions. Therefore, in addition to the blockade, the US military command began preparing for a possible invasion at the first signal. The 1st Armored Division was transferred to the south of the country, in the state of Georgia, and five combined arms divisions were put on high alert.

On the evening of October 23, Robert Kennedy went to the Soviet embassy in Washington. At a meeting with Dobrynin, Kennedy found out that he had no idea about the USSR's military preparations in Cuba. However, Dobrynin told him that he knew about the instructions received by the captains of Soviet ships - not to comply with illegal demands on the high seas

On October 24, Khrushchev learned that the Aleksandrovsk had safely reached Cuba. At the same time, he received a short telegram from Kennedy, in which he called on Khrushchev to "show prudence" and "comply with the conditions of the blockade." The Presidium of the CPSU Central Committee met to discuss the official response to the imposition of the blockade. On the same day, Khrushchev sent a letter to the US President in which he accused him of setting "ultimate conditions." Khrushchev called the blockade "an act of aggression pushing humanity into the abyss of a world nuclear missile war." In the letter, the First Secretary warned Kennedy that "the captains of Soviet ships will not comply with the instructions of the American Navy," and that "if the United States does not stop its piracy activities, the government of the USSR will take any measures to ensure the safety of ships."

On October 25, at an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council, one of the most memorable scenes in UN history took place. US Ambassador Adlai Stevenson attempted to force Soviet Ambassador Valerian Zorin (who, like most Soviet diplomats, was unaware of Operation Anadyr) to provide an answer regarding the presence of missiles in Cuba. But, having received a refusal from Zorin, Stevenson showed photographs taken by US reconnaissance aircraft showing missile positions in Cuba. At the same time, Kennedy gave the order to increase the combat readiness of the US armed forces⁶.

Meanwhile, in Havana the political situation has become extremely tense. Castro became aware of the new position of the Soviet Union, and he immediately went to the Soviet embassy. The Comandante decided to write a letter to Khrushchev to push him to more decisive action. Even before Castro finished the letter and sent it to the Kremlin, the head of the KGB station in Havana informed the First Secretary of the essence of the Comandante's message: "In the opinion of Fidel Castro, intervention is almost inevitable and will occur in the next 24-72 hours." At the same time, Malinovsky received a report from the commander of Soviet troops in Cuba, General I. A. Pliiev, about the increased activity of American strategic aviation in the Caribbean. Both messages were delivered to Khrushchev's office in the Kremlin at 12 noon, Saturday, October 27.

It was 5 o'clock in the evening in Moscow when a tropical storm raged in Cuba. One of the air defense units received a message that an American U-2 reconnaissance aircraft had been spotted approaching Guantanamo. When the U-2 was already over Cuba, the order was given to destroy the aircraft. U-2 pilot Major Rudolf Anderson was killed, the only casualty of the confrontation. Around the same time, another U-2 was almost intercepted over Siberia because General Curtis LeMay, Chief of Staff of the US Air Force, defied the US President's order to cease all flights over Soviet territory.

GLOBAL IMPACT

It is generally accepted that Black Saturday, October 27, 1962, is the day the world came closest to a global nuclear war. On the night of October 27-28, on the instructions of the President, Robert Kennedy again met with the Soviet ambassador in the building of the Ministry of Justice. Kennedy shared with Dobrynin the president's fears that "the situation is about to get out of control and threaten to create a chain reaction." Robert Kennedy said that his brother was ready to give guarantees of non-aggression and the speedy lifting of the blockade from Cuba. Dobrynin asked Kennedy about the missiles in Turkey. "If this is the only obstacle to achieving the settlement mentioned above, then the President does not see insurmountable difficulties in resolving the issue," Kennedy responded.

⁶ Robert McWarren *Cuba - the path to independence*. – Washington, 1982.pg-87

At noon, Khrushchev assembled the Presidium at his dacha in Novo-Ogaryovo. At the meeting there was a discussion of a letter from Washington. However, after Troyanovsky's conversation with Dobrynin, Khrushchev confirmed the fact that Robert Kennedy's message had reached Moscow, and that he regarded this message as agreement to the USSR's condition for the withdrawal of Soviet missiles from Cuba - to remove the missiles from Turkey⁷.

Fearing any "surprises" and breakdown of negotiations, Khrushchev forbade Pliiev to use anti-aircraft weapons against American aircraft. He also ordered the return to airfields of all Soviet aircraft patrolling the Caribbean Sea.

The dismantling of Soviet missile launchers, loading them onto ships and removing them from Cuba took 3 weeks. Convinced that the Soviet Union had withdrawn the missiles, President Kennedy on November 20 ordered an end to the blockade of Cuba. A few months later, American missiles were also withdrawn from Turkey as "obsolete."

Conclusion

During the Cuban Missile Crisis, both U.S. President John F. Kennedy and Soviet General Secretary Khrushchev attempted to advance the interests of their respective countries through mutual statements and steps. One of the most striking and important issues of this crisis is that during the Cuban Missile Crisis, it was not the Cuban state that was dealt with, but a crisis between the United States and the Soviet Union. There is no evidence that the Soviet Union consulted its allies before deploying missiles in Cuba and responding to U.S. challenges. Likewise, the United States did not consult its European or Latin American allies throughout the missile crisis. However, they only learned of their plans shortly before the President of the United States spoke. He therefore viewed the Cuban Missile Crisis as an almost purely bipolar conflict. Likewise, Türkiye's statement about dismantling its Jupiter rocket was not taken into account. Considering the aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis:

Before the Cuban Missile Crisis, the United States believed that the Soviet Union did not dare threaten U.S. interests in the Western Hemisphere. While the United States believed that the Soviet Union could now threaten the United States around the world, Russia believed that the United States could risk nuclear war if necessary. The crisis paved the way for nuclear non-proliferation negotiations and heightened the importance of conventional weapons. The Cuban Missile Crisis created an atmosphere of "détente" and "negotiation" between the two superpowers at the height of the Cold War.

Rather, it was the most important milestone in the transition from Cold War to détente. During a possible crisis, the need for a direct channel of communication between the United States and the Soviet Union became apparent. Given this situation, Washington and Moscow signed an agreement in 1963 to establish direct communications (hotline/red line) via secure long-distance recorders.

After the crisis ended, Khrushchev was accused of adventurism and was ousted in 1964. The Cuban Missile Crisis also had a profound impact on the relations between the various blocs of countries in the bipolar system at that time. Other European NATO members in the Western bloc, including Turkey, made it clear that Washington would not accept their views even in such a major crisis, and as events unfolded that exposed Turkey to the Soviet threat, the United States would act alone in your own interests. Seeing that the United States can ignore Turkey, France launched the Alliance for Western Europe initiative to create a balance between the two superpowers, took important steps to loosen relations with the United States, and launched its own nuclear program under de Gaulle.

This incident led to France becoming a nuclear power and one of the events that led to France's withdrawal from NATO military forces. There was a Sino-Soviet conflict within the Eastern European bloc, with both sides criticizing each other. On July 5, 1963, after the Cuban Missile Crisis, the United States and the Soviet Union signed the "Partial Nuclear Test Ban Agreement" in Moscow to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons. The agreement bans nuclear testing in the atmosphere, space and on submarines, but allows underground nuclear testing. One potential negative consequence of the Cuban missile crisis is that it led both sides to develop intercontinental strategic nuclear weapons. After the Soviet Union withdrew its missiles from Cuba, with no place to move the missiles, it developed missile systems capable of striking the U.S. mainland to provide an effective nuclear deterrent.

The peaceful resolution of the crisis is considered one of Kennedy's greatest political and diplomatic achievements. The main factor behind this success was the uncompromising implementation of Coercive Diplomacy by the USA, in the person of US President Kennedy, in an extremely cold-blooded manner, fulfilling all its requirements. The Cuban Missile Crisis is a good example in terms of showing the importance of the UN in the international arena, although it is inadequate in intervening in events and solving problems (10,p 25). In this context, considering that in the Cuban Missile Crisis and a similar serious crisis environment, a wrong step taken by one of the actors can lead to irreversible consequences, the UN's initiatives to find a common path are very important and valuable as they are based on diplomacy to solve the problems.

⁷ Adamishin A.L. *The Soviet Union and revolutionary Cuba*. - M. Science, 1987.pg-180

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- [1] Adamishin A.L. The Soviet Union and revolutionary Cuba. - M. Science, 1987.
- [2] Alekseev A.I. The Cuban missile crisis as it happened. - M. Laurie, 1998.
- [3] Vasiliev V.N. Caribbean crisis. - M., 1991.
- [4] Golubeva N. M. Caribbean crisis. - M., 1999.
- [5] Dimitrov L.S. 1962 - M., 1999.
- [6] Lyubimov M. The first years of the Cuban revolution. - M., 1997.
- [7] Robert McWarren Cuba - the path to independence. – Washington, 1982.
- [8] Almost the end! The Cuban Missile Crisis — 1962. - Almost the end! The Cuban Missile Crisis — 1962. | by Spacebound | The Geopolitical Economist | Medium
- [9] Cuban Missile Crisis - Cuban Missile Crisis: Definition, Date, Causes & Summary (studysmarter.co.uk)
- [10] Cuban missile crisis - Cuban missile crisis | History, Facts, & Significance | Britannica
- [11] Impact of the Cuban Missile Crisis - Impact of the Cuban Missile Crisis - Owlcation
- [12] Cuban Missile Crisis --Cuban Missile Crisis | The One Hundredth Monkey (leaveeunow.co.uk)
- [13] The 1962 Missile Crisis Was a Turning Point for the Cuban Revolution - The 1962 Missile Crisis Was a Turning Point for the Cuban Revolution (jacobin.com)
- [14] The Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 - The Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 (thoughtco.com)