

Forum: Historical Security Council

Issue: Addressing the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962

Student Officer: Alexander Zhou

Position: President

Introduction

“To the people of Cuba, we know that your lives and land are being used as pawns by those who deny your freedom.” – John F. Kennedy, October 1962

On 27 October 1962, the world came close to a nuclear war between the United States (U.S.) and the Soviet Union, the then two most powerful nations of the world. Yet, the crisis itself never occurred on the mainland of either nation – fittingly named the Cuban Missile Crisis, it unfolded as a 13-day confrontation starting October 16, when a U.S. U-2 spy plane captured photographic evidence of medium- and long-range nuclear launch facilities deployed by the Soviet Union in Cuba. Before then, U.S. intelligence had suggested that the Soviet Union would never use Cuba as a harbor for ballistic missiles. Yet, On October 16, President John F. Kennedy received photos confirming the veracity of these missiles despite his earlier cautions against the deployment of ballistic missiles in Cuba. Given the great secrecy that has concealed information even from high-ranking government officials, the intel surrounding the Cuban missile crisis were only made available to those in the Moscow Kremlin and the White House.

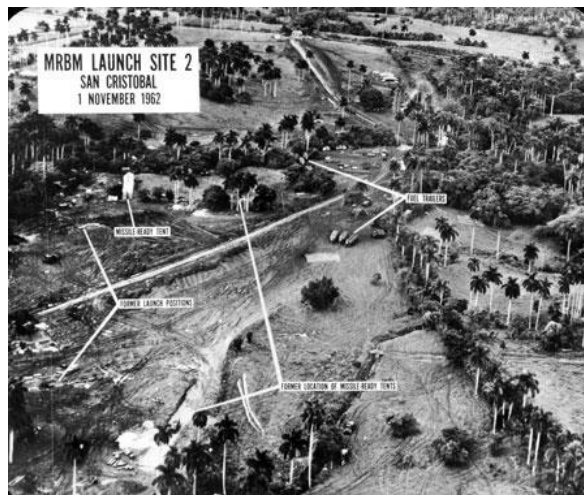


Figure 1 – U-2 Aerial Footage of Nuclear Weapons in Cuba

The Cuban Missile Crisis is one that is characterized by both rational restraint from the leaders of the two nations and entrenched distrust and insecurity. The crisis itself has escalated to the brink of total war between the two nations, and if the war did break out, it would have taken the lives of approximately two-thirds of the world’s population.

Definition of Key Terms

Operation Anadyr

Operation Anadyr Is the 1962 secret Cold War operation by the Soviet Union to deploy a large variety of weaponry (medium-range bombers, ballistic missiles, and even personale) to Cuba for the ultimate goal of preventing an American invasion of the island. However, the plan was thwarted by the United States after the discovery of the operation which ultimately prompted the 'Cuban Missile Crisis'.

The Bay of Pigs Invasion

The Bay of Pigs Invasion was a failed military invasion of Cuba undertaken by the American sponsored rebel group, Brigade 2506 on 17 April 1961. A counter-revolutionary military group (made up of mostly Cuban exiles and some U.S. military personnel), trained and funded by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Brigade 2506 intended to overthrow the increasingly communist government of Fidel Castro. Launched from Guatemala and Nicaragua, the invading force was defeated within three days by the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces, under the direct command of Castro. It was significant in the sense that it was an attempt to prevent Cuba from becoming a communist nation without direct intervention from the United States' military.

Missile Gap

The missile gap was a term coined by American President, John F. Kennedy, and was used to describe the perceived superiority of the USSR's missile program, in terms of power and quantity, in comparison to the United States' (a lack of military parity). The gap in the ballistic missile arsenals did not exist, except in exaggerated estimates made by the Gaither Committee in 1957 and the United States Air Force (USAF). Even the contradictory CIA figures for the USSR's weaponry, which showed a clear advantage for the U.S., were far above the actual count. It was soon demonstrated, however, that the gap was entirely fictional.

Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD)

Coined by Donald Brennan, a strategist working in Herman Kahn's Hudson Institute, mutually assured destruction is a doctrine of military strategy and national security policy in which a full-scale use of nuclear weapons by two or more opposing sides would cause the complete annihilation of both the attacker and the defender. It is based on the theory of deterrence, which holds that the threat of using strong weapons against the enemy prevents the enemy's use of those same weapons. The strategy is a form of the Nash equilibrium, in which, once armed, neither side has any incentive to initiate a conflict or to disarm. It was arguably the main reason the Soviet Union and the United States were hesitant to engage in direct combat.

Ballistic Missiles

A ballistic missile refers to a missile system that could deliver one or more warheads with a high, elliptical trajectory. Having a range of 300 km to 5,500 km, a ballistic missile is guided by a thruster briefly after takeoff, yet the majority of their flight is unpowered. The first intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), V2, was developed by Nazi Germany during World War II.

The USA and USSR both started their own rocket programs as a result. Early American attempts of ICBM started with the RTV-A-2 Hirc in 1946, followed by the Atlas missile program. While the U.S. had German engineers such as Wernher von Braun, the USSR attempted to develop with their own engineers. Surprisingly enough, the USSR was first to launch a successful ICBM, R-7, which carried the first satellite, Sputnik, into space. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, medium-range ballistic missiles, such as SS-4, with a range of 2,500 km and intermediate-range ballistic missiles with a maximum range of 5,000 km were deployed by the Soviet Union. Soviet ICBM systems in Cuba, only 145 km from American shores, could theoretically devastate every American city, but in fact, were not completely reliable enough to do so.

History & Developments

Khrushchev's Motivations

By May 1962, Nikita Khrushchev, the premier of the Soviet Union, was convinced by the idea of stationing intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Cuba to counter the U.S.'s increasing lead in the development and deployment of strategic missiles. Previously, the U.S. was seen as to possessing a stronger first strike capability compared to the Soviet Union, as Italy and Turkey's have already harbored the United States' nuclear-capable PGM-19 Jupiter ballistic missiles since 1956, while there were only 20 Soviet ICBMs in service in 1962 that were able to carry nuclear warheads from the Soviet Union to the United States. There were severe concerns about the missiles' efficacy due to their low precision and dependability.

While the Soviet Union was regarded as having equal nuclear power compared to the U.S., the U-2 spy plane incident in 1960 revealed that the Soviet's nuclear capability was heavily tilted towards medium- and intermediate-range ballistic missiles (MRBMs and IRBMs) over intermediate-class ballistic missiles (ICBMs), the former of which cannot reach the contiguous United States. Hence, Khrushchev wished to expand the availability and efficacy of its nuclear deterrence against the U.S. by deploying nuclear warheads in its traditional sphere of influence, thus creating the doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), as should the U.S. decide to use nuclear force against the Soviet Union, the latter would respond by using nuclear force against the U.S..

Khrushchev's calculation was also informed by his desire to integrate Communist East Germany's West Berlin, which was governed by the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, into the Soviet orbit, as he saw Western dominance over a section of Berlin, situated within the Soviet-controlled German Democratic Republic, as a serious danger to their country. Thus, Khrushchev thought he would be able to force the West out of Berlin by using the missiles as a deterrence.

From the Cuban perspective, Castro and his Communist regime were agitated by the U.S.'s intent to invade or overthrow the government in Cuba and sought protection from the Soviet Union. Previously, the Kennedy administration attempted to launch a military coup via the Bay of Pigs Invasion, tried to remove Cuba from the Organization of American States, the imposed various economic sanctions on the nation. Thus, in an attempt to stop this, the stationing of Soviet missiles in Cuba would bar it from invasion and maintain its membership in the Socialist Bloc. The Soviet Union, having sided with Cuba following the 1959 Cuban Revolution, considered its

acts of stationing nuclear weapons on the island was a means to demonstrate its support for Cuba and for the Cuban people.

The Deployment of Arsenal

In 1962, Soviet military and missile construction specialists met with Cuban Prime Minister Fidel Castro, who had a strong expectation of the U.S. invasion of Cuba. They agreed to place strategic nuclear missiles secretly in Cuba, with Khrushchev and Castro believing that a U.S. invasion was imminent and that losing Cuba would harm communists, especially in Latin America. The Soviets maintained strict secrecy, writing their plans longhand and approving them on July 7. The operation involved elaborate denial and deception, known as "maskirovka," with only a few told the exact nature of the mission. The Soviets arrived in Cuba in July, with 43,000 foreign troops. The U.S. suspected the Soviets of building missile facilities in Cuba, and intelligence services gathered information about sightings of Soviet-built MiG-21 fighters and Il-28 light bombers. Che Guevara traveled to the Soviet Union to sign off on the final agreement regarding the deployment of missiles in Cuba, but Khrushchev insisted on total secrecy and swore the Soviet Union's support if the Americans discovered the missiles.

In August 1962, Senator Kenneth Keating warned the Senate that the Soviet Union was likely constructing a missile base in Cuba, accusing the Kennedy administration of covering up a major threat to the U.S. The Soviets were building nine sites for medium-range missiles and intermediate-range missiles. Cuban President Osvaldo Dorticós Torrado spoke at the UN General Assembly, stating that if attacked, they would defend themselves. Keating reaffirmed his warning in another Senate speech, stating that construction had begun on at least a half dozen launch sites for intermediate range tactical missiles. The U.S. Senate approved Joint Resolution 230, expressing the U.S.'s determination to prevent the creation or use of an externally-supported military capability endangering the U.S.'s security in Cuba. The Soviet leadership believed that Kennedy would avoid confrontation and accept the missiles as a *fait accompli*. They continued the Maskirovka program to conceal their actions in Cuba, denying that the weapons being brought into Cuba were offensive.

The Discovery of Weapons

The Soviet troops arrived in July heavily underprepared, unaware of the tropical climate, rendering many of their weapons and equipment ineffective. As early as August 1962, the U.S. suspected the Soviets of building missile facilities in Cuba. Then-CIA director John A. McCone was suspicious, believing that sending anti-aircraft missiles into Cuba made sense only if Moscow intended to use them to shield a base for ballistic missiles aimed at the United States.

The Soviet leadership believed that Kennedy would avoid confrontation and accept the missiles as a *fait accompli*. They continued the Maskirovka program to conceal their actions in Cuba, repeatedly denying that the weapons being brought into Cuba were offensive in nature. U.S. intelligence received countless reports, many of which could be dismissed as describing defensive missiles.

In September 1962, analysts from the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) noticed that Cuban surface-to-air missile sites were arranged in a pattern similar to those used by the Soviet Union to protect its ICBM bases. On October 14, the U.S. first obtained U-2 photographic evidence of missiles being placed in Cuba. The CIA's

National Photographic Interpretation Center (NPIC) identified the missiles on U-2 imagery, based on reporting by Oleg Penkovsky.

Later, president Kennedy was notified that the Soviets were placing missiles in Cuba, and it was a legitimate threat, making the threat of nuclear destruction a reality, who later convened a meeting of the nine members of the National Security Council and five other key advisers, forming the Executive Committee of the National Security Council (EXCOMM). Both the U.S. and the Soviet Union considered various possible outcomes of their actions and threats during the crisis. The Joint Chiefs of Staff unanimously agreed that a full-scale attack and invasion was the only solution, believing that the Soviets would not attempt to stop the U.S. from conquering Cuba.

On 18 October, Kennedy met with Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, who claimed the weapons were for defensive purposes only. He did not reveal that he was already aware of the missile buildup to avoid panicking the American public.

Revelation and Escalation

On October 21, 1962, President Kennedy met with top advisers and considered two remaining options: an air strike against Cuban missile bases or a naval blockade of Cuba. The term “blockade” was considered problematic as it was considered an act of war according to Article 42 of the UN Charter. By using the term “quarantine,” Kennedy’s administration did not believe the Soviets would be provoked or justified to attack. Legal experts concluded that a declaration of war could be avoided if another legal justification, based on the Rio Treaty for the Defense of the Western Hemisphere, was obtained from a resolution by a two-thirds vote from the members of the Organization of American States (O.A.S.)

Kennedy delivered a nationwide televised address on October 22, 1962, announcing the discovery of the missiles and stating that any nuclear missile launched from Cuba against any nation in the Western Hemisphere would be considered an attack by the Soviet Union on the United States.

The crisis deepened in 1962 when Soviet First Secretary Khrushchev declared the blockade of Cuba an act of aggression. The U.S. offered to withdraw missiles from Italy and Turkey in exchange for the Soviet withdrawal from Cuba, but Turkish officials resisted such a trade. Despite its growing discontent with the Soviets, The People’s Republic of China announced that 650 million Chinese men and women were standing by the Cuban people.

The U.S. requested an emergency meeting of the United Nations Security Council on 25 October, and the U.S. raised the readiness level of Strategic Air Command (SAC) forces to DEFCON 2. On 22 October, Tactical Air Command (TAC) deployed 511 fighters, tankers, and reconnaissance aircraft to face Cuba on one-hour alert status. Later, Kennedy informed EXCOMM that he believed only a complete U.S. invasion would remove the missiles from Cuba. He ordered increased low-level flights over the island and a crash program to institute a new civil government in Cuba if an invasion went ahead. It seemed that the outbreak of a full-scale war is imminent.

At the Brink of War – Black Saturday

On 27 October 1962, the U.S. Navy dropped depth charges on a Soviet submarine, unaware that it was armed with a nuclear-tipped torpedo. The captain of the B-59, Valentin Grigoryevich Savitsky, assumed a war had already started and wanted to launch a nuclear torpedo. However, the commander of the submarine flotilla, Vasily Arkhipov, objected, and the nuclear launch was narrowly averted. On the same day, a U-2 spy plane made an accidental, unauthorised 90-minute overflight of the Soviet Union's far eastern coast. The Soviets responded by scrambling MiG fighters from Wrangel Island, while the Americans launched F-102 fighters armed with nuclear air-to-air missiles over the Bering Sea.

Major parties involved

Republic of Cuba

Cuba was the central stage of the crisis. Led by Fidel Castro, it was a staunch ally of the Soviet Union and supported the missile deployment. Castro had come to power in a revolution in 1959 and had aligned Cuba with the Soviet bloc. The Soviet Union deployed nuclear missiles on the island, which was seen by the U.S. as a direct threat to its national security.

Organization of American States (O.A.S.)

The O.A.S. is a regional organization of American states. It condemned the Soviet missile deployment and supported U.S. actions to remove the missiles by passing a resolution calling for the removal of the Soviet missiles and imposing sanctions on Cuba. All resolutions of the O.A.S. must be passed with a two-thirds majority

United States of America (U.S.)

The U.S. demanded the removal of Soviet missiles from Cuba, and imposed a naval blockade on Cuba to prevent the delivery of additional missiles and military supplies. The U.S. also threatened military action if the Soviet Union did not remove the missiles.

Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R., or the Soviet Union)

The Soviet Union, led by Nikita Khrushchev placed nuclear missiles in Cuba to deter U.S. aggression and to advance its own strategy of deterrence. Initially, the Soviet Union refused to remove the missiles unless the U.S. agreed to remove its missiles from Turkey. The Soviet Union also threatened to retaliate against the U.S. if it attacked Cuba.

United Nations

Due to limitations set by the use of veto power, the UN Security Council was unable to reach a consensus on the crisis, as the Soviet Union vetoed any resolutions condemning its actions. The UN Secretary-General, U Thant, played a behind-the-scenes role in mediating the crisis. He helped to facilitate communication between the U.S. and the Soviet Union and encouraged both sides to seek a peaceful resolution.

Timeline of Events

Date	Event Name
3 January 1961	The United States ends diplomatic relations with Cuba.
27 July 1962	President Castro announces that any direct US attack on Cuba would result in the equivalent of a world war.
10 August 1962	CIA director John McCone informs President Kennedy that Soviet medium-range ballistic missiles will soon be deployed in Cuba.
14 October 1962	U.S. obtains photographic evidence of nuclear missiles stationed in western Cuba.
16 October 1962	President Kennedy and his national security advisors meet to discuss diplomatic and military courses of action.
18 October 1962	Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko meets with President Kennedy and assures him that Soviet weapons were given to Cuba only for the defense of Cuba.
20 October 1962	Kennedy announces in a televised address to the nation the presence of offensive missile sites in Cuba.
23 October 1962	Khrushchev refuses to remove missiles
24 October 1962	Soviet ships en route to Cuba either slow down or reverse course as U.S. blockade entered into effect
26 October 1962	Khrushchev sends a letter to Kennedy proposing to remove his missiles on the condition that President Kennedy would never invade Cuba, and remove missiles threatening the Soviet Union from Turkey and Italy.
27 October 1962	President Kennedy agrees to President Khrushchev's proposal.
28 October 1962	Khrushchev announces over Radio Moscow that he has agreed to remove the missiles from Cuba.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Kennedy secretly agreed to remove all missiles set in Turkey and possibly southern Italy in exchange for Khrushchev removing all missiles in Cuba. Khrushchev knew that the shooting down of the U-2 by a Soviet missile violated direct orders from Moscow, and that the Soviets already had 162 nuclear warheads on Cuba that the U.S. did not then believe were there. Kennedy quickly embraced the Soviet offer, despite almost solid opposition from his senior advisers. The debate ended when Kennedy concluded that a nuclear war would not be very good when the U.S. could have gotten the Soviets out by making a deal on the same missiles as Turkey.

In October 1962, John F. Kennedy responded to Nikita Khrushchev's letter, calling it an important contribution to peace. He issued a formal statement declaring that the U.S. would respect Cuban borders and sovereignty and not interfere in internal affairs. With aerial reconnaissance proving that the Soviets were making progress in removing missile systems, the U.S. ended the blockade on 20 November 1962, and all Jupiter missiles installed in Italy and Turkey were removed by 24 April 1963.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

During the Cuban Missile Crisis, the UN tried to help prevent the situation from escalating. However, its involvement was seen as not very effective, as most negotiations and decisions were made directly between the United States and the Soviet Union. When UN Secretary-General U Thant suggested his ideas, the US had already set up a naval blockade, and tensions were very high. Both the US and the Soviet Union were doubtful about the UN's neutrality, which made it difficult for the UN to act as a mediator. Also, the veto power of the Security Council meant that no resolution could be passed without the agreement of the Soviet Union or the U.S.

Possible Solutions

Throughout the entire conflict, the high level of secrecy among the decision-making bodies of the U.S. and Soviet Union makes the development of the crisis, extremely unpredictable. The following are suggestions that the UN could implement to improve transparency and encourage settlement:

Diplomacy and Negotiation:

- **Direct Communication:** The US and the Soviet Union engaged in direct negotiations to address their concerns and find a mutually acceptable solution.
- **Mediation:** A neutral third party, such as the Security Council, could have been involved to facilitate communication and help the two sides reach an agreement.

Withdrawal of Missiles:

- **Mutual Withdrawal:** Both the US and the Soviet Union could have agreed to withdraw their missiles from the region, ensuring a balance of power and reducing the risk of conflict.
- **Unilateral Withdrawal:** The Soviet Union could have agreed to withdraw its missiles from Cuba in exchange for a commitment from the US not to invade the island.

Security Guarantees:

- **Non-Aggression Pact:** A formalized non-aggression pact or treaty to guarantee the security of Cuba and prevent future conflicts.
- **Regional Security Mechanism:** A regional security mechanism could have been established to address security concerns in the Caribbean and prevent future crises.

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