

Faculty of Letters and Languages – M’sila

Department of English

Level: Master One

Course: American Civilization

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Lecture Two: The Cold War: Containment Policy Cuba Missile Crisis

Introduction

After World War II, the United States and its allies, and the Soviet Union and its satellite states began a decades-long struggle for supremacy known as the Cold War. Soldiers of the Soviet Union and the United States did not do battle directly during the Cold War. But the two superpowers continually antagonized each other through political maneuvering, military coalitions, espionage, propaganda, arms buildups, economic aid, and proxy wars between other nations. The Soviet Union and the United States had fought as allies against Nazi Germany during World War II. But the alliance began to crumble as soon as the war in Europe ended in May 1945. Tensions were apparent in July during the Potsdam Conference, where the victorious Allies negotiated the joint occupation of Germany. The Soviet Union was determined to have a buffer zone between its borders and Western Europe. It set up pro-communist regimes in Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Albania, and eventually in East Germany.

As the Soviets tightened their grip on Eastern Europe, the United States embarked on a policy of containment to prevent the spread of Soviet and communist influence in Western European nations such as France, Italy, and Greece. During the 1940s, the United States reversed its traditional reluctance to become involved in European affairs. The Truman Doctrine (1947) pledged aid to governments threatened by communist subversion. The Marshall Plan (1947) provided billions of dollars in economic assistance to eliminate the political instability that could open the way for communist takeovers of democratically elected governments.

In October 1962, the Soviet provision of ballistic missiles to Cuba led to the most dangerous Cold War confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union and brought the world to the brink of nuclear war. Over the course of two extremely tense weeks, US President John F. Kennedy and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev negotiated a peaceful outcome

to the crisis. The crisis evoked fears of nuclear destruction and invigorated attempts to halt the arms race.

1-The Cuban Revolution

After waging a successful guerrilla war against the regime of Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista, **Fidel Castro** came to power on January 1, 1959. Castro was not yet a communist, and US policymakers initially took a cautious wait-and-see approach to his regime. Over the course of 1959 and 1960, US-Cuban relations worsened due to Castro's anti-US rhetoric and radical policies, especially his refusal to hold elections. When it became clear that Castro intended to pursue an alliance with the Soviet Union, President **Dwight Eisenhower** cut off diplomatic ties to Cuba and began preparing contingency plans for overthrowing Castro and replacing him with someone more amenable to the United States.



Cuban Prime Minister Fidel Castro, left, shakes hands with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev in 1961. Image courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

As US-Cuban relations deteriorated, Castro turned to the Soviet Union for support. The Soviets signed multiple trade and aid agreements with Cuba, provided Castro with arms and

weaponry, and also gave political support to the Cuban Revolution in the United Nations and other international organizations.

2-Origins of the Cuban Missile Crisis

The origins of the Cuban Missile Crisis lie in the failed Bay of Pigs invasion, during which US-supported Cuban exiles hoping to foment an uprising against Castro were overpowered by the Cuban armed forces. After the invasion, Castro turned to the Soviets for protection against future US aggression. The Soviets provided Cuba with nuclear weapons on the condition that the deal would remain secret until the missiles were fully operational. Khrushchev claimed that his motivation for providing Cuba with nuclear weaponry was to safeguard the Cuban Revolution against US aggression and to alter the global balance of power in favor of the Soviet Union.

In October 1962, US U-2 spy plane flights over Cuban territory revealed the missile installation sites. This discovery inaugurated what became known as the Cuban Missile Crisis. The strategic implications of these weapons were enormous: the missiles could easily reach targets in the United States, including New York City and Washington, D.C.

The **Kennedy** administration established a naval blockade to prevent any more missiles from reaching Cuba, and in no uncertain terms demanded the immediate removal of the missiles that had already been delivered. The danger of this approach was that if the Soviets refused to remove the missiles, the United States would be forced to escalate the crisis by authorizing air strikes over Cuba to bomb the missile sites. Contingency plans were drawn up for a full-scale invasion of Cuba and a nuclear attack on the Soviet Union, in the event that the Soviets responded militarily to Kennedy's demands.

Negotiating a peaceful outcome

Though **Khrushchev** initially refused to acknowledge the presence of the missiles in Cuba and declared the US naval blockade to be an act of war, he ordered the suspension of all weapons deliveries currently in transit. Over the course of approximately two weeks, Kennedy and Khrushchev negotiated a peaceful outcome to the missile crisis. The Soviets compared their provision of nuclear weapons to Cuba with the stationing of Jupiter missiles in Turkey, which were in range of Soviet territory. Kennedy agreed to remove the missiles from Turkey, and also pledged that the US government would not undertake another invasion of Cuba.

Throughout the negotiations, Khrushchev failed to consult with Castro. For Castro, this was humiliating and seemed to prove that the Soviets prioritized relations with the United States over relations with their own allies. Castro hoped to negotiate the closing of the US naval base at Guantanamo and the cessation of U-2 flights over Cuban territory. Ultimately, Khrushchev agreed to remove all of the nuclear missiles from Cuba, while failing to even broach the subject of Castro's demands.

3-Consequences of the Cuban Missile Crisis

Although the Soviets attempted to portray the outcome of the missile crisis as a victory, one of the consequences of the crisis was the ouster of Khrushchev. He was forced into retirement by other Soviet officials who claimed that the missile crisis was proof of Khrushchev's reckless decision-making and his inability to lead the Soviet Union. Khrushchev's successor, Leonid Brezhnev, came to power and sought to reduce tensions with the United States.

John F. Kennedy even though he looked like he came out of the crisis in a much better position, there was a hidden term to also remove American nukes out of Turkey in exchange for the Soviet actions. Kennedy's calm but firm stance in the negotiations was heralded as great statesmanship, though it is often forgotten that his bungling of the **Bay of Pigs invasion** had helped lead to the missile crisis in the first place.

The Cuban Missile Crisis also convinced Kennedy of the dangers of nuclear brinkmanship. He and Khrushchev had peered into the abyss of nuclear destruction but had managed to pull back from it. In order to prevent future crises.

In August 1963, the United States, the Soviet Union, and Great Britain signed a treaty banning atmospheric and underwater nuclear testing. Nevertheless, the test-ban treaty failed to halt the arms race, as Kennedy simultaneously authorized a massive arms buildup that vastly expanded the US nuclear arsenal and amplified US strategic superiority in the Cold War.

Conclusion

Both the Americans and Soviets were sobered by the Cuban Missile Crisis. The following year, a direct "hot line" communication link was installed between Washington and Moscow to help defuse similar situations, and the superpowers signed two treaties related to nuclear weapons. The Cold War and the nuclear arms race were far from over, though. In fact, another legacy of the crisis was that it convinced the Soviets to increase

their investment in an arsenal of intercontinental ballistic missiles capable of reaching the U.S. from Soviet territory.

Exercises: Exercises: In a short essay discuss one of the following topics:

1- Were there winners and losers in the Cuban Missile Crisis? If so, who were they?

2- What were the positive and negative consequences of the missile crisis?

REFERENCES

➤ John F Kennedy Library:

Link: <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/jfk-in-history/the-cold-war>

➤ Gaddis, J. L. (2005). *The Cold War: A New History*. London: Clay LTD.