

## COLD WAR REFLECTIONS ON TODAY'S CONFLICTS

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### **Abstract**

After the World War II, a rivalry was established between the USA and the Soviet Union, a rivalry developed at a scientific, economic and political level. Each side tried to propagate greater power than the other in each of these fields. All this turmoil was called the Cold War. The term was first coined by presidential and financial adviser Bernard Baruch during a congressional debate in 1947. The Cold War reached its peak in 1948 to 1953. During this period the Soviets attempted an unsuccessful blockade of the western side of Berlin. Meanwhile, the US and its allies formed the North Atlantic Pact, NATO, a pact created as a response to the Soviets' tendency to overrule Europe (1949). All this sounds very actual from the fact that similar developments are happening throughout the current conflict in Ukraine. This paper aims to place an emphasis on the main events during the Cold War so that the reader can notice the correlation with what is happening today.

*Keywords* : Cold War, USA, Russia, Ukraine, conflict, Cuban Missile Crisis.

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### **1. Introduction**

What made things more complicated, during this period, was the creation of the atomic bomb by the Soviet Union, which ended the US monopoly on nuclear weapons. In China, the communists took power (1949), while the Soviet Union supported the communist government of North Korea, the USA, on the other hand, supported South Korea (1950). All this led to the war between the two Koreas, a war which lasted until 1953 (Mazower, 2000).

From 1953 to 1957, tensions between the US and the Soviet Union somewhat relaxed. The main reason for this was the death of the Soviet communist leader Stalin (1953). In 1955, a military unity was created from the bloc of Soviet states, the Warsaw Pact (Hogan, 1995). In the same year, West Germany joined the NATO pact. The Cold War took a real heat in the period from 1958 to 1962, when the USA and the Soviet Union began the production of intercontinental ballistic missiles, which in 1962 the Soviet Union began to install in Cuba, from where it could attack US cities.

All of this led to the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962), which almost brought the two superpowers into bitter war, until the agreement to withdraw the missiles (Mazower, 2000).

### **2. The Cuban Missile Crisis**

In November 1960 Massachusetts Senator John F. Kennedy (1917-1963) defeated Vice President Richard Nixon (1913-1994) in the presidential election. Kennedy was facing a major crisis in foreign policy because relations with the Soviet Union were constantly deteriorating and the world was facing a major war crisis. Kennedy's televised address on the 22nd of 1962 can be taken as a fact about the great crisis (Mazower, 2000). In this address, he stated that there is indisputable evidence that the Soviets had installed missiles in Cuba, missiles that could reach targets as far as the USA. According to available data, the missiles were installed 145 kilometers off the US coast (Hogan, 1995).

All this caused the superpowers to be on the verge of a nuclear war which would have shocking consequences for the whole world. This is confirmed by Kennedy's speech, which is quoted from the Public Letters of the Presidents of the USA: "If these preparations for military offensives continue, our further action will be justified. I have ordered the armed forces to be on alert for any eventuality. Any missile attack against any Northern Hemisphere country would be considered an attack by the Soviet Union on the USA. It is not known exactly how much all this will cost or what consequences it will bring."

In the decades that followed, especially in the 90s of the XXth century when the Soviet documents were made public it was proved how close these two superpowers were to nuclear war, especially towards the end of October 1962. Things became even more complicated after the intersection of the careers of the president of the USA and the leader, who had just been elected, of Cuba, Fidel Castro (1926-2016) (Hogan, 1995). This was an insurgent whom the US had supported at the beginning of his leadership with Cuba, after the overthrow of Batista. This was the result of the fact that he was not a communist at the time. After the establishment of the communist state by Castro, relations with the USA began to take a completely different direction.

*2.1 Installation of missiles:* In July 1962 the Soviets sailed to Cuba with their missiles loaded onto ships. The newest Soviet combat equipment was also sent to Cuba along with 40,000 Soviet soldiers. Soviet aircraft called MiGs were sent to protect the installation site. The whole organization was massive, which led to the belief that there was no way out of the crisis (Naimark, 2004). All this time, Soviet officials declared that they had no inclination to attack the US or any other country, by stating that the missile installation was defensive in nature and that the Soviet Union otherwise did not need such an installation outside its own territory. These statements were later proven to be false (Mazower, 2000).

*2.2 The truth of October 14, 1962:* The alarming revelations of the National Security Agency (NSA) began in late 1960 and continued through 1961 (Naimark, 2004). The NSA was the primary intelligence institution of the USA that intercepted international communications, as a result of which it was discovered that the construction of places where the missiles would be installed was being done in Cuba. Preparations were made by the Cubans who were assisted by the Soviets.

The NSA also conducted wiretapping of Spanish-speaking people in Czechoslovakia and other Eastern European states that were under the umbrella of the Soviet Union. These proved to be Cuban pilots who were being trained by the Soviet military. Subsequently, it was confirmed that the Soviet ships sailing to Cuba and Havana did not have a record of the cargo they were carrying, which was a typical concealment of the armaments that were sent there (Hogan, 1995). Cuban camps where they trained with Soviet combat equipment were also discovered. All this made the administration in Washington extremely worried.

However, all these could be categorized as ordinary defensive preparations and exercises, which the Soviets constantly insisted on. Even U-2 spy plane photographs showed no offensive sites in Cuba. But on October 14, 1962, everything changed. The U-2 photos that were analyzed in the American institutions showed that in San Cristobal the installation of medium-range ballistic missiles was being carried out, while the long-range missiles seemed not to be ready until the end of the year. The evidence reached the desk of National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy (1919-1996) on the evening of October 15 (Naimark, 2004). Knowing that sleep would come very hard, he decided not to wake up the chairman.

The next day at 9:00 a.m. he showed and explained the photos to Kennedy, who immediately convened a small group of cabinet and other military men to review the situation and get advice on what to do next. This group was named Ex-Com (XCOM), short for Executive Committee of the National Security Council (Hogan, 1995). This group was holding a session almost every day for the next two weeks.

When in the 90s of the XX century the recordings of the meetings of the Ex-Com were heard, it was proved that just one wrong step from either side would have led to an unprecedented disaster.

On October 16, 17 and 18, the Ex-Com group proposed different ways of further action. Some said nothing should be done, at least not immediately; and some proposed that there should be an invasion of Cuba. The Ex-Kom group split into two factions, the Hawks and the Doves. The Hawks favored an immediate military strike to destroy the missiles and overthrow Castro's communist government (Mazower, 2000). The main Hawks were General Maxwell Taylor (1901-1987) and other members who have been combat leaders of the Pentagon. The Doves, on the other hand, fearing the fatal consequences that would result from military intervention, proposed less aggressive measures and a major diplomatic offensive. The main Doves were American Secretary of State Dean Rusk (1909-1994) and Defense Secretary Robert McNamara (1916-2009). President Kennedy's brother Robert Kennedy (1925-1968) supported an immediate military offensive, but after further consideration he was convinced that airstrikes would not be in the US's favor. This also happened with the majority of Ex-Com members who constantly changed their opinions about what should be done (Naimark, 2004).

However, all members of the committee agreed on one issue, and that was that the missiles must be removed from Cuba. Such an intervention would lead to further support of communism by the Soviets and would be a direct threat to US leadership in the Western Hemisphere and would cause great negative reaction in the American public. Kennedy's political future would be in question and the Soviets would surround the US with communist states.

*2.3 President Kennedy addresses the population:* On Thursday, October 18, revelations indicated that short-range and medium-range missiles would be ready for use in a short timespan. In fact, they would be ready to launch within 18 hours. On the evening of October 18, Soviet Foreign Minister Andrej Gromyko (1909-1989), during a meeting of the United Nations, visited Kennedy at the White House. He still insisted that their military presence in Cuba was of a defensive nature (Naimark, 2004).

In the late hours of that night, the Ex-Com decided not to undertake an immediate offensive against Cuba, but decided on another form of defense. It was decided to blockade the waters around Cuba in order to stop Soviet ships which would bring other armaments to their bases in Cuba.

President Kennedy did not want his administration's concerns revealed to the American people, at least not until an actual stance was taken on the situation. Therefore, during his public appearances, he behaved as if nothing was happening. Most of his public appearances in this period were about his support of candidates for the mid-term elections to be held in November.

After the announcement of the blockade of waters around Cuba, Kennedy decided to stop all his public appearances. Since the term "blockade" was against international law, the Kennedy administration decided to use the term "quarantine" (Naimark, 2004).

The White House informed television networks to prepare their programming on the evening of October 22, Monday, for an emergency appearance by the President of the United States. A copy of Kennedy's speech was also sent to the Soviet Union's ambassador to the USA, Anatoly Dobrinin, who was not at all informed of the situation (Hogan, 1995).

In his address, Kennedy revealed the prevailing situation in the relations between the USA and the Soviet Union and told about the measures his administration was taking in relation to the crisis.

*2.4 End of the Cuban Missile Crisis:* On the morning of October 24, the US quarantine came into force, which Soviet Prime Minister Nikita Khrushchev (1894-1971) considered a violation of international law. Meanwhile, President Kennedy's brother, Robert Kennedy, was holding secret meetings with Ambassador Dobrin. The talks discussed the possibility of removing US offensive missiles installed in Turkey and as a result of such an action the Soviet Union would also remove the missiles in Cuba (Naimark, 2004). This was mostly in the spotlight after the long and emotional letter Khrushchev sent Kennedy about the situation in which he said he would withdraw the missiles if Kennedy did not order the invasion of Cuba. In another letter, he demanded

the removal of American missiles from Turkey. But the situation worsened again when the Soviets investigated a U-2 plane in their airspace. In the meantime, the same plane crashed in Cuba. The pilot died in the crash (Naimark, 2004).

Robert Kennedy advised his brother to forget the second letter and consider the request of the first letter and not to invade Cuba. John Kennedy agreed.

After mutual acceptance of the terms, the Soviets began withdrawing the missiles and both sides began to breathe easier. American missiles in Turkey were also removed due to the fact that their operational state had expired.

### **3. Conclusion**

Perhaps the Cuban Missile Crisis was a crisis of only two countries, but when it is taken into consideration that those two countries were the largest military powers in the world, then the scale of the conflict can be considered global. When this is added to the fact that these were states that possessed nuclear weapons, it is very logical that the whole world was worried because the consequences could have been apocalyptic. It cannot be said that the relations between the USA and the Soviet Union or today's Russia (as a representative of the Soviets) are ideal. During the entire period during the cold war and after it, until today, there have been numerous oppositions on the political level between the two states, which shows that the wounds of the Cold War are still not well healed, which is also proven in the current conflict in Ukraine, where we see a rhetoric almost identical to that of the cold war, although perhaps the level of forces is not the same as then. If we were to make a reflection, what happens today on the international level could be considered as in 1968, with the armies of the Warsaw Pact that were prepared to enter Czechoslovakia. If we continue to reflect, it would seem as if it were 1961 during the Berlin crisis, as the Soviets tried to withdraw Western troops from the divided German city. In many ways, the conflict in Ukraine is a crisis that has erupted in a post-Cold War world. It is a reminder that the harsh realities of geopolitical competition did not end with the fall of the Berlin Wall, but continue to this day.

The Cold War in general and the Cuban Missile Crisis in particular will remain as historical chapters that will show how close countries can be to fatal destruction if they make even the smallest strategic mistake, especially in the field of nuclear weapons.

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