



Research Report

HSC

Tackling the Cuban missile crisis
(1962)

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Introduction

After the Second World War, the Cold War between the United States of America (USA) and the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) followed.

When Cuba's government underwent a shift, so did the tensions between the USA and the USSR. The island, relatively close to the USA mainland, had a change in leadership due to a revolution. Fidel Castro took power in 1959 on Cuba and openly aligned with the Soviet ideology.

Since military or political alliance occurring with the newly led Cuba and a foreign power such as the USSR would be a great threat to American security, due to the strategic position the island was in on both physical and political means, the USA supported a operation to invade Cuba. This military operation with anti-Castro forces got the name 'The Bay of Pigs'.

In 1962 the situation grew even tenser, when an American U-2 spy plane discovered missile installations on the island. The USA interpreted the missile installations as an unacceptable provocation and a direct challenge to national security. The discovery triggered a rapid escalation of political pressure. Military measures by the USA included a naval blockade, as a 'quarantine' procedure.

The following days, the world was on the brink of global nuclear war, calling for immediate action to stop the Cuban Missile Crisis from spinning out of control.

Definition of Key Terms

Arms race

A competition between nations for superiority on various fields.

During the Cold War, the USA and USSR were in an arms race. The nations tried to outdo the other by increasing arsenals and spreading ideologies.

Bay of Pigs Invasion

Failed invasion by the USA to overthrow the Castro regime in Cuba.

Black Saturday

October 26th 1962, when the tensions of the Cuban Missile Crisis peaked and the world was on the brink of nuclear war.

Cold War

The Cold War was a period of political, military, and ideological tension between the USA and the USSR after the Second World War. During this Cold War, there was 'warfare' in the form of an arms race, but characterized by the absence of direct military intervention.

Cuban Revolution

A revolution in Cuba that took place in 1959, after which Fidel Castro led the island.

General overview

During the Cold War, the USA and the USSR rivaled politically. The two powers were divided by ideologies and during this period of time there was prolonged tension between the USSR and the USA, without actual direct military intervention/physical warfare. Central to this Cold War was the arms race. Both powers refined their nuclear capabilities and aimed for overall global influence and significance.

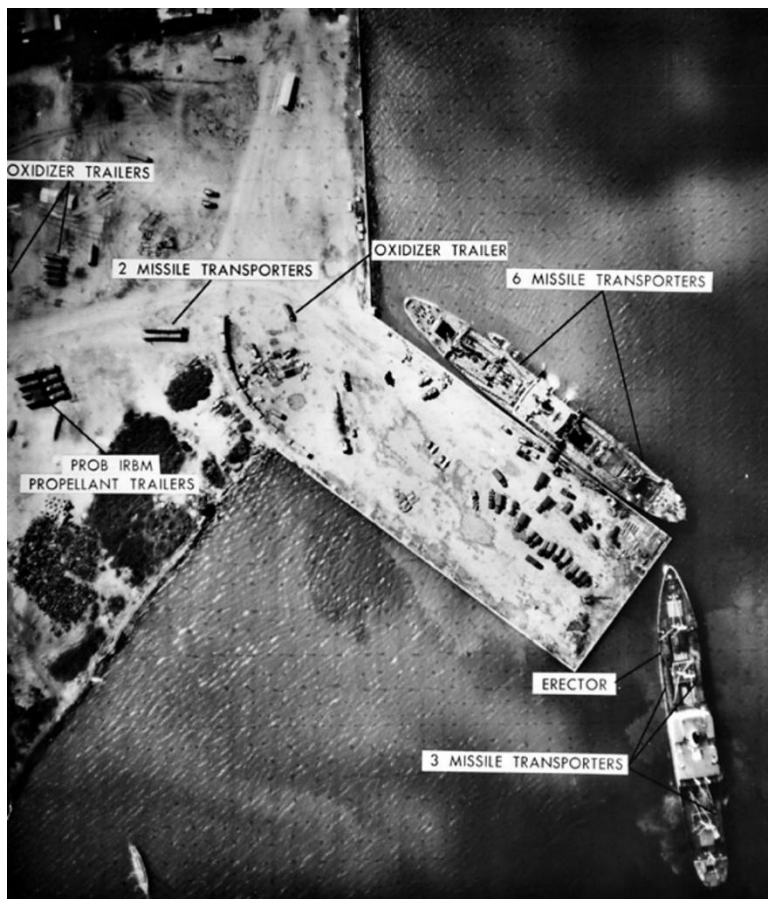
On the island of Cuba a revolution took place in 1959. Fidel Castro overthrew Fulgencio Batista with the revolutionary moment. Quickly after settling as the new leader of Cuba, the leader was public with his fiery anti-American rhetoric and openly supported Soviet ideologies. The before prominent USA-Cuba relations deteriorated, while the bonds between the USSR and Cuba had the opportunity to grow.



Cuba now became exceptionally important in the context of the Cold War. Cuba is located only 145 km (90 miles) off the USA coast and was now a strategically sensitive territory in the Western Hemisphere. Not only did this island switching to socialism

form a symbolic threat to the USA, the country wanting to prevent the spread of communism, but the island could become a fundamental threat to USA security. To overthrow the Castro regime, which concerned the USA due to its required strong bonds with the Soviet regime, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was directed in 1960 to develop a plan for the invasion of Cuba. The newly elected president John. F. Kennedy concluded later that year that Fidel Castro was posing a threat to all of Latin America as a consequence of these bonds with the USSR and gave his consent for the CIA operation. The invasion, later named the Bay of Pigs Invasion, failed. Cuba pursued even closer ties with the USSR, while the Bay of Pigs invasion destroyed bonds between the USA and Cuba.

Then, the Cuban Missile Crisis started with an American U-2 spy plane having photographed nuclear missiles sites on Cuba on the 14th of October in 1962. JFK figured out with his advisors what to do with this information for a few days before giving a public televised speech.



In the aftermath of the advisor meetings, USA President Kennedy started a 'quarantine' to prevent the USSR from bringing more military support on to Cuba. This quarantine included a naval blockade around Cuba. In Kennedy's speech on the 22nd of October, he demanded removal of the missiles on Cuba and expressed his concerns on the matter to the public.

Nikita Khrushchev had a direct response to this with a letter a day later, on the 23rd of October. It stated "The United Nations Charter and international norms give no right to any state to institute in international waters the inspection of vessels bound for the shores of the Republic of Cuba" amongst other things, arguing the USA had violated international law and shown acts of aggression. The USSR implied with the letter they would not respect the so-called 'quarantine' and would respond to any interference. In addition, Khrushchev hoped that the President of the USA would 'display wisdom' and renounce the actions pursued, to prevent catastrophic consequences for world peace.

Nuclear war was around the corner and on the 26th of October the day the crisis had been the closest to escalate to a worldwide catastrophe arrived. On this day, now referred to as 'Black Saturday', multiple things happened that worsened the tensions even more.

In the morning, Khrushchev sent a letter with a request that the USA would also remove their missiles placed in Türkiye. During the same morning, an American plane flying over Cuba got shot down, killing the pilot within. Later that day, an American plane flew off course into Soviet airspace, which got shot down due to their unauthorized presence.

This black Saturday marks the absolute peak of threat for nuclear disaster.

Major parties involved

Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)

The USSR was in rivalry and in an arms race with the USA during the Cold War. The Cuban Missile Crisis has to do with the USSR, a global superpower, being involved with missile constructs on Cuba.

United States of America (USA)

The USA was in rivalry and in an arms race with the USSR during the Cold War. Discovered the missile constructs on Cuba and found it an immediate threat to national security, resulting in a response that triggered further tension.

Cuba

Became a hotspot involving the USSR and USA during the conflict after the revolution.

Timeline of Key Events

1959 – Cuban Revolution

1961 - Bay of Pigs

October 14th, 1962 – A U-2 spy plane photographs missile constructions on Cuba

October 22nd, 1962 – Televised speech by US President John. F. Kennedy on the matter

October 23rd, 1962 – Khrushchev's letter to JFK

October 26th, 1962 – Black Saturday

Further Readings

<https://www.jfklibrary.org/>

<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1961-1968/cuban-missile-crisis>

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Cuban-missile-crisis>

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