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Timothy Berkey

Mexico and Caribbean History

M-Thursday 9am

Cuban Missile Crisis

The Cuban Missile Crisis was also called the October Crisis in Cuba and the Caribbean crisis. This was a 13 day confrontation between Soviet Union and Cuba on one side, and the United States on the other in October 1962. This was also going on during the Cold War and is regarded as the moment in which the Cold War came closest to turning into a nuclear conflict. This was also the first documentation of the threat of mutual assured destruction (MAD) being a big determining factor in a major international arms agreement. The USA attempted to overthrow the Cuban regime which was the Bay of Pigs and Operation Mongoose, in May 1962. Nikita Khrushchev proposed an idea of placing soviet nuclear missiles on Cuba to deter any future invasions. Along the time, Fidel and Khrushchev had meetings to discuss certain things to bring to the table on when and how to act upon to bring the missiles to Cuba.

In October 1962, an American U-2 spy plane secretly photographed nuclear missile sites being built by the Soviet Union on the island of Cuba. President Kennedy did not want the Soviet Union and Cuba to know that he had discovered the missiles. After many long and difficult meetings, Kennedy decided to place a naval blockade, or a ring of ships, around Cuba. The aim of this "quarantine," as he called it, was to prevent the Soviets from bringing in more military

supplies.¹ He demanded the removal of the missiles already there and the destruction of the sites. On October 22, President Kennedy spoke to the nation about the crisis in a televised address.

Although no one knew how Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev would respond to the naval blockade and U.S. demands. But the leaders of both superpowers recognized the devastating possibility of a nuclear war and publicly agreed to a deal in which the Soviets would dismantle the weapon sites in exchange for a pledge from the United States not to invade Cuba. In a separate deal, which remained secret for more than twenty-five years, the United States also agreed to remove its nuclear missiles from Turkey. Although the Soviets removed their missiles from Cuba, they escalated the building of their military arsenal; the missile crisis was over, the arms race was not. In 1963, there were signs of a lessening of tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States. In his commencement address at American University, President Kennedy urged Americans to reexamine Cold War stereotypes and myths and called for a strategy of peace that would make the world safe for diversity. Two actions also signaled a warming in relations between the superpowers: the establishment of a teletype "Hotline" between the Kremlin and the White House and the signing of the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty on July 25, 1963. In language very different from his inaugural address, President Kennedy told Americans in June 1963, "For, in the final analysis, our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's future. And we are all mortal."²

The Bay of Pigs invasion was an unsuccessful attempt by the United States backed Cuban exiles to overthrow the government of the Cuban dictator Fidel Castro. With tensions between

¹ JFK library history of Cuban Missile Crisis

² JFK library history of Cuban Missile Crisis

the United States Government and Fidel's regime, it led to President Dwight Eisenhower to break diplomatic relations with Cuba in January 1961. Although well before that event had occurred, the CIA had been training for anti-revolutionary Cuban exiles for an invasion of the island.³ April 17, 1961 about 1300 exiles, armed with US weapons landed at the Bay of Pigs on the coast of Cuba in hope to have the support of the Cuban population. The plan was to cross over to Havana, from the first few hours of fighting it was looking like it wasn't going to be a victory. With this slim margin to choose from President Kennedy was given the option to use the Air force but decided against it. Fidel army had stopped the invasion on April 19. After Fidel stopped the invasion, came failure and embarrassed Kennedy and the hopes of many during this time.⁴ Although with this event this made Castro very wary that the US will try to invade again and so Fidel had increased fear of another Cuban invasion on the soil.

During this harsh time, relations with the Soviet Union was not the greatest with the United States and is one main reason why the Soviets wanted to have move missiles a little closer to the United States to make things a little more even on the playing field. They also knew that tensions between the United States and Cuba was already high after the failure of The Bay of Pigs, so the Soviets took advantage of this and so Castro and Khrushchev saw the missiles as means of deterring further U.S. aggression.⁵

When President Kennedy found out what the Soviets were up to he kept a cool calm feeling to himself and didn't show much worry. He wanted to keep calm on this issue since the invasion of the Bay of Pigs didn't go as planned, he didn't want to have the American people think that a young President cannot run the country and then lose the faith of the people to trust

³ Cuban Missile Crisis report

⁴ Cuban Missile Crisis report

⁵ History channel

in the American government and in future leaders to lead the way for the future of America. Before the President let any information out to the people he had a meeting with his generals on a plan and they all wanted to plan a fly over attack on Cuba to wipe out the missiles and to end the missiles from ever taking off from Cuban soil and that would help end what could be a devastating missile war. However Kennedy didn't want to do such a thing and try to handle this issue logically and a more peaceful way and not with force but to have a meeting and sit down and see if we can negotiate with the Soviets and make a peace treaty.

While hearing Kennedy speech to the nation it really open the eyes to actually hear him speak really was great to have the sense of connection with what he was feeling from just hearing some of his words you can tell he was a little nervous on what was going to happen after the broadcast was over and if it would get out to other nations and hear on what they have to say about his speech. It was great to hear how he compared events on what he didn't want to happen in history already. According to what Kennedy had mention, "The 1930's taught us a clear lesson: aggressive conduct, if allowed to go unchecked and unchallenged ultimately leads to war. This nation is opposed to war. We are also true to our word. Our unswerving objective, therefore, must be to prevent the use of these missiles against this or any other country, and to secure their withdrawal or elimination from the Western Hemisphere."⁶

I think with this message that Kennedy used was great to hear, since you do not want to repeat history. If anything you can learn is not to repeat since a lot of great examples came from learning from mistakes and you do not want to repeat what you have done already and I think Kennedy did a great thing by not repeating what had happen in 1930's. This was a big strong mission of his to make sure he didn't repeat and have another disaster.

⁶ The History Place, JFK speech on Cuban Missile Crisis

I think it was great that the United States did want to stop the Soviet Union from taking charge of the world from having the missiles pointed at the Western Hemisphere. From Kennedy speech to the Nation, he mentioned that, “The characteristics of these new missile sites indicate two distinct types of installations. Several of them include medium range ballistic missiles capable of carrying a nuclear warhead for a distance of more than 1,000 nautical miles. Each of these missiles, in short, is capable of striking Washington, D.C., the Panama Canal, Cape Canaveral, Mexico City, or any other city in the southeastern part of the United States, in Central America, or in the Caribbean area”.⁷

Additional sites not yet completed appear to be designed for intermediate range ballistic missiles--capable of traveling more than twice as far--and thus capable of striking most of the major cities in the Western Hemisphere, ranging as far north as Hudson Bay, Canada, and as far south as Lima, Peru. In addition, jet bombers, capable of carrying nuclear weapons, are now being uncrated and assembled in Cuba, while the necessary air bases are being prepared.

With the information that Kennedy did not want to happen did make a lot of sense to having the sense to do what we can do and stop an nuclear war to break out, and devastate big metropolitan cities that are important to the world economy. If for some reason if the Soviet Union didn't agree then I'm not sure if the United States would be a big top player in the world and then I think Soviet Union would be the top nation if everything had gone there way. It was a good idea to have an agreement with the United States and the Soviet Union to withdrawn its nuclear missiles out of Cuba and then the United States out of Turkey to make sure nothing like a big threat to the world and lead to a nuclear war in the future.

⁷ The History Place, JFK speech on Cuban Missile Crisis

Fidel Castro is the Leader of Cuba since 1926, he would go on to established the first communist state in the Western Hemisphere after leading an overthrow of the Military dictatorship of Batista in 1959. Fidel would go and rule the country for almost five decades, until he would turn over the power to his younger brother Raul in 2008. Although, Fidel did a great job in certain aspects of Cuba, he improved public health care, stamping out racism. Even with success while he was the Leader of Cuba he did have a big tension with the United States and not a great relationship as one would like being so close to the big nation. Eventually over time the two nations have no diplomatic relations, and the United States has enforced a trade embargo since 1960, when the United State owned businesses.⁸

Even with all the chaos that occurred and a lot of people that were scared from a big nuclear attack and a sudden change in life and to maybe think of how they could make a new living with half of the country gone from the nuclear gases left behind and the national government disappeared from the land, how would the people move on from such a big event. Luck was on the side of President Kennedy and helped him realized to make a peace treaty with the Soviet Union to withdraw military force with the missiles and to make sure to not have this kind of event occur again. Even since the missiles left Cuba, relations with Cuba has not been the same and not any better but maybe someday in the future maybe with new leaders and few on how to run the country just maybe relations with the United States and Cuba might be better then they were in the 1960's and today.

⁸ History Channel Fidel Castro life

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