



Diplomacy at the Edge: The Cuban Missile Crisis and the Secret Agreement that Prevented Nuclear War

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Abstract

The Cuban Missile Crisis was a tense standoff between the United States and the Soviet Union in October 1962. It began when the US discovered that the Soviets were secretly placing nuclear missiles in Cuba, just 90 miles off the coast of Florida. The US considered this a direct threat to its national security. President John F. Kennedy ordered a naval blockade of Cuba to prevent further Soviet shipments, and both countries engaged in intense diplomatic negotiations. The crisis was resolved when the Soviets agreed to remove their missiles from Cuba in exchange for a US commitment not to invade the island and a secret agreement to remove US missiles from Turkey.

Introduction

During October 1962, a momentous 13-day nuclear stand-off between the Soviet Union (USSR) and the US unfolded just 90 miles from US shores due to the Soviets installation of nuclear missiles in Cuba; tension was high during this political and military crisis. Four billion years have passed on Earth, but this is the first time mankind has benefited from the supreme excellence of knowledge and science that has grown in its bosom, only to threaten the Earth's destruction. Mankind has witnessed two devastating world wars so far. World War II was the worst of the two world wars. At the very end of this world war, nuclear weapons are used for the first time. Although both the Soviet Union and the United States fought together to defeat Nazi Germany, the end of World War II saw the Soviets and Americans compete for global dominance with their respective allies. As a result of which mankind had to spend the next few decades with the fear of World War III. In history, that period is called the Cold War. The war of nerves between these two sides has escalated into war several times. The world assumed that another world war could be imminent. The decision to fight has been called off several times at the last minute. In the pages of history, that crisis is known as the 'Cuban Missile Crisis'. Those 13 days of the Cuban Missile Crisis were the most dangerous period of the Cold War.

The main reason conflict existed between the USSR and the US was the fact that during the Cold War era, which was characterized by intense ideological, political, and military competition between the two countries, the United States and the Soviet Union (USSR) were the two superpowers. This global power battle reached its height during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Then President, John F. Kennedy (JFK), distinguished himself when he addressed Americans about the presence of missiles and explained his decision to impose a naval blockade in Cuba. He stated that military force would be necessary should any risk arise to national security. After the briefing on October 22, 1962, fear of a global nuclear conflict hung in the air due to the fact that the USSR and US were in a cold war for global power control. Fortunately, JFK and former Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev reached a peaceful resolution whereby the Soviets would withdraw their Cuban missiles, and the US abandoned its plans to invade Cuba. Some sources, such as Robert F. Kennedy, Library of Congress, National Archives also note that John F Kennedy gave his word to have American missiles stationed in Turkey removed in order to bring

peace and stability to the country. Both sides emerged victorious from this precarious situation by complying with these terms and averting disaster. The United Nations was instrumental in opening up a diplomatic channel to ease tension between the parties. The parties involved developed better understanding and collaboration during these conversations. The crisis acted as a stimulus for greater communication and conversation, opening the door for future diplomatic initiatives to resolve international disputes (Malis 105). Examining President Kennedy's (JFK) and Premier Khrushchev's role in resolving the Cuban Missile Crisis illustrates their successfully negotiated agreement to evacuate nuclear weapons from Turkey and Cuba. The Cuban Missile Crisis (CMC) was resolved through diplomatic conversations and concessions, preventing a catastrophic disaster.

Causes and Opening to the Cuban Missile Crisis

The John F. Kennedy administration and Khrushchev bilateral agreed to remove nuclear warheads from each other's neighboring allies, Turkey and Cuba, during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, a key component to avoid a globally disastrous conflict. This Crisis was tense and dangerous because it evoked a bilateral disagreement between the US and USSR (Borstdorff and Ferris 407). At the time, in 1961, the US established a missile base in Turkey, a strategic location for monitoring Soviet activity. Deploying the Cuban missiles was the USSR's countermeasure to the Turkish missiles because of their obvious threats to Soviet borders (Borstdorff and Ferris 407). However, JFK perceived the Soviet maneuver as a move that escalated the tension between the two ideological superpowers to the brink of war.

Key Events During the Crisis

With catastrophe on the horizon, both parties decided to evacuate nuclear weapons from Turkey and Cuba to prevent a military conflict. It was a decision that was made out of deft discussions, correspondences, and backchannels that took place over a period of weeks (Borstdorff and Ferris 408). Although each side was eager to emerge triumphant in the nuclear arms race, they were both aware of the potential repercussions of a nuclear weapons military conflict.

They recognized that any conflict could destroy both countries and possibly end the world as we know it (Borstdorff and Ferris 409). As such, both leaders were motivated to find a solution that would allow them to avoid a direct military confrontation while also maintaining their respective positions of power in order to help reduce the conflict that could have impacted the global economy (Borstdorff and Ferris 409). In his memoirs, Robert F. Kennedy, the US Attorney General at the time, reflected on the importance of JFK and Khrushchev finding some sort of agreement in resolving the Crisis. He wrote, "The missile crisis was the most dangerous crisis of the Cold War. We solved it because Khrushchev and [John] Kennedy were rational human beings who recognized the dangers of nuclear war" (Kennedy 56). These sentiments provide valuable insight into the Crisis's gravity and the leaders' mindset. The enormous hazards involved in a nuclear conflict are highlighted by JFK's focus on the Cuban Missile Crisis as the most perilous incident of the Cold Conflict. The devastating effects of a nuclear exchange, such as nuclear winter, are among these dangers. The term "nuclear winter" describes the severe temperature drops and decreased agricultural output brought on by the long-lasting impacts of

vast volumes of smoke and dust blocking sunlight on the worldwide climate. Furthermore, deploying nuclear weapons might have catastrophic effects on human society and the environment, including widespread damage, fatalities, and long-term environmental degradation. The seriousness of these dangers highlights how crucial it is to avert nuclear war. He further emphasizes the significance of finding a solution by highlighting the rationality of both Khrushchev and JFK, who recognized the dangers at stake. The two leaders could not risk pitting their allied nations against one another because of pride and a superiority complex. Doing so would have brought the world allied knees due to economic sabotage caused by the war between the two nations.

As the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Home, told the United Nations General Assembly in New York on September 27, 1962: “The latest estimate that has been made of the casualties in the first exchange in a nuclear world is over 300 million people dead in the first few days...and I would add to that unpleasant fact this, that there is the near certainty that local conflicts which draw in the Great Powers could not possibly be confined to wars with conventional weapons. We might try to do so, but with the best will in the world, you cannot, with one kind of equipment, fight another kind of war (The National Archives, 1962)”. Britain was one of the United States Allied nations to the US who had encountered many losses during World War I and II and could not risk another nuclear war. They ensured JFK and Khrushchev communicated effectively and negotiated a solution that allowed both sides to save face and avoid a direct military confrontation.

Role of Intermediaries and Secret Backchannels

Allied nations were part of a large network of intermediaries and secret backchannels that helped negotiate a resolution without engaging in direct communication. For example, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy and Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin held secret meetings to discuss the Crisis and possible solutions (Sagan and Suri 151). These meetings helped to build trust and establish a foundation for further negotiations. Intermediaries helped build trust and established a foundation for further negotiations. Furthermore, secret backchannels allowed JFK and Khrushchev to communicate their concerns, intentions, and proposed actions more candidly, without the constraints and public scrutiny often accompanying official diplomatic channels. This level of secrecy fostered an atmosphere of confidentiality, enabling both leaders to explore potential compromises and alternative paths to resolve the Crisis.

By engaging in these secret meetings and utilizing intermediaries, JFK and Khrushchev were able to establish a direct line of communication, circumventing the potential misunderstandings and escalations that could arise from public exchanges. This facilitated a deeper understanding of each other’s positions and concerns, helping humanize the opposing leaders and cultivating empathy and mutual respect. It also provided a space for nuanced discussions and creative problem-solving by allowing the leaders to consider alternative options beyond a military confrontation.

As a result, JFK and Khrushchev explored potential compromises, understood each other’s red lines, and ultimately worked towards a peaceful resolution of removing nuclear warheads from

both Turkey and Cuba. In a telephone conversation held on October 28, 1962, JFK was recorded telling former President Dwight D. Eisenhower

On Friday night, and we got a message from Khrushchev which said that he would withdraw these missiles and technicians and so on, provided we did not plan to invade Cuba. We then got a message, that public one, the next morning in which he said he would do that if we withdraw our missiles from Turkey. As you know, we then issued a statement that we couldn't get into that deal. So we then got this message this morning. So we now have to wait to see how it unfolds, and there's a good deal of complexities to it. If the withdrawal of these missiles, technicians and the cessation of subversive activity by them, well, we just have to set up satisfactory procedures to determine whether these actions will be carried out (Kennedy and Eisenhower 2).

From this conversation, it can be seen that although JFK did not want to publicly acknowledge the withdrawal of American missiles from Turkey, he understood that their removal was key to how the situation would evolve. JFK wanted a peaceful resolution, while Khrushchev wanted to gain respect in the international community (Sagan and Suri 152). He would put forward a mutually agreed-upon strategy with Khrushchev to arrange removal methods for the Cuban missiles. This proposal would ensure transparency and stop the issue from worsening by dismantling and certifying the evacuation of missiles from Cuban land step by step. JFK's conversation with Eisenhower emphasizes the importance of personal relationships and communication in resolving international conflicts. Both leaders recognized the dangers of nuclear war and were driven by a desire to prevent such a catastrophe. They communicated effectively and negotiated a peaceful resolution to the Crisis, ultimately preventing a devastating war.

United Nations' Influence and Mediation

The United Nations played a crucial role in resolving the Cuban Missile Crisis by providing a platform for diplomatic negotiations and public administration to ensure international cooperation and recognition. The Cuban Missile Crisis was a turning point in the Cold War, and finding a solution was a major triumph for cooperation, public policy, and international diplomacy. The implications could not have been greater since the Crisis had moved the globe closer than ever before to a devastating nuclear war (Dorn and Pauk 261). Fortunately, the Soviet Union and the United States understood how critical it was to find a diplomatic settlement without force (Dorn and Pauk 261). The situation was resolved peacefully due to diplomatic discussions and international cooperation. The United Nations was at the forefront of these discussions, playing a critical role in promoting communication between the US and the Soviet Union (Dorn and Pauk 261). It established a foundation for diplomatic communication, which aided in avoiding a devastating nuclear war. U Thant, the UN Secretary-General at the time, was instrumental in defusing tensions and creating communication lines between the two parties. In a letter to President JFK, the former UN Sec Gen, U Thant, is quoted saying,

I have been asked by the Permanent Representatives of a large number of member Governments of the United Nations to address an urgent appeal to you in the present critical situation. These representatives feel that in the interest of international peace and

security, all concerned should refrain from any action that may aggravate the situation and bring the risk of war (Thant 3).

U Thant was central to the crisis resolution because his role as the secretary general was important to negotiate a peaceful solution. His appeal on behalf of various world leaders indicated the need for dialogue, diplomacy, and cooperation in resolving international conflicts by acting as a neutral arbitrator, he was able to help bridge the gap created by mutual distrust. His involvement was so crucial that on October 29, 1962, New York Times published a brief with the headline “US and Soviet Reach Accord on Cuba: JFK Accepts Khrushchev’s Pledge to Remove Missiles Under United Nations Watch” (New York Times n.p). It is clear to say Thant’s involvement in the Crisis helped to create a framework for diplomatic dialogue that prevented a catastrophic nuclear conflict. He had full support from the United Nations Security Council, which comprised many government officials and decision-makers engaged in the Crisis. They all had important duties and responsibilities that shaped their viewpoints and affected the way they made decisions.

For instance, Adlai Stevenson, the US Ambassador to the United Nations, played a crucial role in presenting evidence to the UN Security Council that revealed the presence of Soviet missiles in Cuba. He exposed the threat and mobilized international support for their removal. According to Dorn and Pauk (283), “Stevenson’s persuasive speeches during the Security Council meetings helped to rally global condemnation of the Soviet Union’s actions and contributed to the diplomatic pressure on the USSR to seek a peaceful resolution.”

Stevenson also persuaded U Thant and the United Nations Security Council to act more like mediators rather than the cause because people’s judgments and actions are not detached from their roles and responsibilities. According to Shafritz (114), assigned functions, such as protecting the country at all costs, could significantly influence decision-making processes during the Crisis. President JFK, for example, was responsible for preserving American interests and maintaining national security (Dorn and Pauk 291). Similarly, Soviet Union representatives under Premier Nikita Khrushchev were also tasked with safeguarding Soviet interests, which did have impacted their viewpoints and actions throughout the Crisis.

Thus, taking a step back in a crisis and acting more as observers rather than frontiers is important for several reasons. Firstly, mediators can maintain neutrality and impartiality (Dorn and Pauk 292). This is crucial in building trust and credibility with the conflicting parties. When mediators actively engage as frontiers, they may inadvertently be perceived as favoring one side over the other, compromising their ability to facilitate a fair and balanced resolution (Dorn and Pauk 293). Secondly, taking a backseat allows mediators to create a conducive environment for open and constructive dialogue between the conflicting parties (Dorn and Pauk 294). When mediators act as observers, they encourage the parties to communicate directly with each other, express their concerns, and explore potential solutions (Dorn and Pauk 295). This approach empowers the parties to take ownership of the process and find mutually acceptable outcomes. Thirdly, by refraining from dominating the negotiations, mediators enable the conflicting parties to actively shape the resolution. This promotes their sense of ownership, encourages creative problem-solving, and increases the likelihood of sustainable agreements (Malis 101). Mediators acting as frontiers may inadvertently limit the parties’ agency and hinder

their ability to find mutually acceptable solutions. Lastly, when mediators act more as observers, they support the development of conflict resolution skills within the conflicting parties (Malis 103). By allowing them to engage directly and take responsibility for finding solutions, mediators help build their capacity to address future disputes independently (Malis 105). This approach aligns with the public administration concept, which encourages long-term stability and reduces dependence on external mediation. His position inside the UN makes taking on a mediation role quite beneficial. He has the power and credibility to promote communication, encourage collaboration, and unite opposing parties in order to resolve conflicts amicably. He represents a neutral and well-respected international organization.

Impact and Legacy of the Crisis

The United Nations, especially U Thant, helped to reshape global perceptions of the US and USSR. Before the stand-off, various entities across the world held the Soviet Union in low regard compared to the United States. However, the U Thant's dealings with the Soviet Union resulted in a change in the balance of power in the world. The USSR gained more respect and recognition as a major player on the world stage (Malis 106). Global respect is crucial for nations and superpowers as it influences their standing and influence on the world stage. Respect is often tied to perceptions of power, capabilities, and diplomatic finesse (Malis 107). In the context of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the USSR's successful handling of the Crisis enhanced its global respect and recognition as a major player, altering the power dynamics of the Cold War era (Malis 108). "The world, as it now stands, without doubt, has been left with a greater respect for the strength and resolve of the Soviet Union (Library of Congress, n.p)." - President John F. Kennedy, acknowledging the USSR's handling of the Crisis and recognizing their altered position in shaping the course of the Cold War. It helped the Soviets gain diplomatic leverage, influence international affairs, and shape global narratives and agendas. Nonetheless, the Crisis emphasized the need for efficient communication and settlement procedures to prevent disagreements from growing into full-fledged wars (Malis 109). Lessons from the Crisis continue to influence diplomacy and world affairs today, reminding us of the value of communication, collaboration, and compromise in resolving crises and building peace.

Conclusion

The Cuban Missile Crisis was solved through diplomatic negotiations, compromises, and the instrumental role of the United Nations. The agreement between Nikita Khrushchev and the JFK administration played a vital role in helping to remove nuclear warheads from their neighboring allies, such as Cuba and Turkey, which was important in avoiding a disastrous conflict. Leaders from both countries recognize the dangers of nuclear war helped to make them desire to prevent such a crisis from happening again because it could have contributed to a great impact not only on the two nations but also on the globe. It is true that leaders took significant measures such as secret backchannels, correspondences, and deft discussions to establish a direct line of communication, which helped foster mutual respect and understanding.

It is fundamental that through U Thant, the United Nations played a significant role in enhancing the resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis by providing a platform for public administration and diplomatic administration. U Thant's is that it appeals to cooperation, dialogue, and diplomacy,



which helped to establish the foundation for communication between the Soviet Union and the US. Also, influential figures such as Adlai Stevenson and the United Nation Security Council worked towards rallying global condemnation of the Soviet Union's actions and creating diplomatic pressure for a peaceful resolution. As the mediator in peacemaking, the United Nations and its representative helped in the facilitation of a constructive and open environment for dialogue, thus making the parties involved in conflict take ownership of the resolution process.

In current society, it is clear that the lessons learned from the Cuban Missile Crisis (CMC) are relevant. For instance, it indicates that there is still the importance of effective communication, diplomatic negotiations, and the role of international organizations such as the United Nations in conflict resolution as one of the global challenges. Also, themes of cooperation, empathy, and understanding still hold essential role value in the current interconnected world. People can also think of new ways of resolving societal conflicts when they apply the ideas and lessons from the Cuban Missile Crisis. People may learn significant insights and ways to think creatively about conflict resolution in contemporary society by using the concepts and teachings from the discipline of Conflict Management and Resolution (CMR). This encourages a change towards proactive problem-solving, fostering comprehension, empathy, and collaboration, ultimately resulting in a social fabric that is more harmonious and inclusive. Generally, the scenario of the Cuban Missile Crisis is a reminder of the grave consequences of nuclear weapons, thus showing the need for peaceful coexistence in society.



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