

CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

Political changes that occurred in the twentieth century led to new order characterized by the political, economic and ideological confrontation between the two nuclear states, namely, the US and the Soviet Union. Moreover, there was the real threat of their clash, the consequences of which could be catastrophic. The events of the Caribbean crisis of 1962 for the first time brought the world to the possibility of an atomic catastrophe, presenting a new look at global issues of existence and established priorities. The lessons learned from the nuclear confrontation on the coast of Cuba become the starting point for the revision of American political strategies. Therefore, it is paramount to emphasize the actions of the presidential administration, especially the US President John F. Kennedy, as it played a decisive role in the successful outcome, and subsequently, based on the lessons learned, the administration predetermined the further development of the policy in foreign affairs.

The events of the issue took place more than 50 years ago. Nevertheless, these issues remain relevant even today. The contradictions between the Russian Federation and the US, as well as between North Korea and the global community are intensifying, confrontation and tension are growing. So, the Caribbean crisis could happen again in one form or another. Consequently, the global community must take steps to ensure security in this complex political environment. All in all, the lessons learned and solutions to the Caribbean crisis should shape the thinking of political leaders about the risks of atomic war, crisis confrontations, and diplomatic practices in general.

First of all, it is necessary to provide a short background, which will show why Cuba became the epicenter of the problem. The Cuban state for a long time was in full dependence on

the United States until 1957. Fidel Castro, who organized an armed uprising and gained power in Cuba struck the plans of Americans to develop their influence in Latin America. There was also a foreign policy blow to America's dominance on the island, as the new leader of the country established close ties with the USSR. All this has turned Cuba into one of the most pressing foreign policy problems for the Head of the State, and the Eisenhower office, as well as the Kennedy administration starting from 1961, have made constant attempts to overthrow the Castro regime, in particular, the well-known Bay of Pigs invasion which failed and heated the situation.¹

Furthermore, in the context of the confrontation with the Soviet Union, it is important to note the increased military presence of America in Europe, and missiles were placed in Turkey, close to the borders of the USSR. Accordingly, Cuba seemed an ideal argument in opposition and a security guarantor for Castro. In the end, this led to the active actions of the Soviets in placing warheads on Cuba.

The administration and the Pentagon, in turn, continuously carried out reconnaissance, which monitored all supplies to the island. Furthermore, the U-2 reconnaissance aircraft recorded the building of missile launchers in Cuba, which, according to American experts, could strike a retaliatory nuclear missile strike on many cities, including Washington and New York.² The reaction of the White House proved to be impetuous. The President immediately established the Executive Committee of the National Security Council, which included key officials.

However, the first meetings of the executive committee took place in a frankly aggressive

1

Howard Jones, *The Bay Of Pigs* (Oxford University Press, 2010). p. Xii.

2

Jan Goldman, "First Memorandum On Probable Soviet Missile Sites In Cuba", in *The Central Intelligence Agency: An Encyclopedia Of Covert Ops, Intelligence Gathering, And Spies* (ABC-CLIO, 2015), p. 514.

atmosphere. The tone was set by the military and CIA officials who called for a massive bombardment of Cuba, then invading the island and overthrowing the Castro government. Nevertheless, the first person who showed prudence was Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara.³ He stated that the bombing of missile installations would lead to the death of Soviet specialists. This will undoubtedly provoke Moscow's response. In this case, the US can lose control over the situation, and then the escalation of the conflict will lead to war. McNamara also believed that as a result of the bombing, not all Soviet missiles could be destroyed and that the survivors would be immediately released to US cities. The president also accepted this position. Gradually, most members of the executive committee agreed to the proposal to introduce a naval blockade around Cuba. However, military hysteria gradually developed in both political and public circles, which heated the atmosphere to such an extent that it was enough to happen to any collision at sea or in the air, and military operations could begin with unpredictable consequences.

Moreover, such a collision indeed happened. Destruction of the reconnaissance plane U-2 and the death of the pilot in the eastern part of Cuba was the culmination of the Caribbean crisis. This precedent could cause a random chain military response, that would lead to an escalation of the conflict, and then political leaders might not have stopped the domino chain. This day went down in history as a "Black Saturday," the day when humanity was closest to a nuclear war.⁴ Nevertheless, among the entire administration of the United States, it important to note the leader, John Kennedy, who realized that there would be no winners in the nuclear war. Kennedy decided to make a compromise, though the Executive Committee mostly supported the military

3

Alice L George, *Cuban Missile Crisis*. p. 131

4

Leonard Victor Scott, *Macmillan, Kennedy, And The Cuban Missile Crisis* (Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1999). p. 159

resolution of the conflict. Further, Kennedy and Khrushchev, with a long and nervous delay, but still exchanged messages in which they agreed to make mutual concessions. The US promised to stop pressure on Cuba and lift the blockade, and the USSR to take back its weapon. At the same time, the US agreed to make the same deal in Turkey soon. Thus, these events became a turning point in the nuclear race, and its end highlighted detente in tense relations, and this is the main consequence of the Kennedy administration's actions.

Further, as already noted, the significance of the president in this event is enormous. He resisted the pressure from the Soviet Union and demonstrated himself as a strong politician who indeed manages the actions of the country, and simultaneously preserves both its interests and common sense. However, in addition to these considerations, it is essential to add a number of conclusions made by the president's administration after the events of the Cuban crisis, which both pointed out the main mistakes, and submitted recommendations that largely predetermined the development of US political vectors in the future. A qualitatively new stage in the study of the complex and controversial conflict of the Cold War was marked in 1998 by the publication of a collection of documents of the US National Security Archive, edited by American researchers Lawrence Chang and Peter Kornbluh.⁵

Of particular interest are the declassified materials of the US State Department, which analyze the outcome of the hostile and its impact on the future vector of policy. They are represented, in particular, by the Closed Letter of the National Security Advisor Walt Rostow. Also, there was a memorandum by Arthur Schlesinger, Counselor of John Kennedy, who called his document very eloquently, namely, "Post Mortem on Cuba".⁶

5

Laurence Chang and Peter Kornbluh, *The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962* (New York: The New Press, 1998).

6

The analysis of these reports shows that the authors conclude weak American leadership in making important foreign policy decisions and the lack of quick reaction to the threat that has arisen. The primary attention was paid to the need for a more careful analysis of unforeseen circumstances, searching for alternative solutions to conflict resolution. This issue should be promoted by increasing the level of information support. Besides, the important role of communication systems for effective political planning was emphasized. This point is especially necessary for conducting secret operations. In particular, the example of ignorance of special services regarding the deployment of Soviet nuclear warheads in Cuba and the untimely transmission of information to Washington is very striking.⁷ Also, politicians raised the question of the need to create a direct line of communication between the US president and the Soviet leadership for more precise, concerted control in complex political situations.⁸ Indeed, communication between the political leaders took place with considerable delay, and this could at any time become a critical factor.

Also, the vectors of departure from nuclear policy were outlined. Rostow's document emphasized that the military power lies precisely in superiority at sea, as demonstrated by the navy during the quarantine of the coasts of Cuba, and that it should be the primary in the future.⁹ A special place was given to the important role of intelligence services in maintaining foreign policy stability. If several years ago, the work of intelligence was interpreted as a provocation,

Arthur Schlesinger, "Memorandum For The President, Post Mortem On Cuba", in *The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962*. Laurence Chang and Peter Kornbluh. (N.Y.: The New Press, 1998), p. 329-331.

7

Walt Rostow, "Some Lessons From Cuba, November 15, 1962", in *The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962*. Laurence Chang and Peter Kornbluh. (N.Y.: The New Press, 1998), p. 327.

8

Ibid. p. 323.

9

Ibid. p. 328.

the events in Cuba made the world look at its activities in a different way, helping to prevent violence. Thus, control and stability should be the main tasks of the US special services. Besides, the Ministry of Defense urged the US government to rely on the development of evolutionary technologies for analysis and data collection.¹⁰

Finally, the problem of the use of nuclear weapons was central to the reports of American specialists. The essence of it was that the US did not plan to use nuclear weapons. According to the deep conviction of Rostow, in the fall of 1962, the American government demonstrated its readiness to fight without the use of atomic weapons against an army armed with nuclear warheads.¹¹ Consequently, the issue about the limited use of nuclear weapons was raised and the priority of "non-nuclear" armed forces.¹²

Lessons received by the United States as a result of the Caribbean crisis, have determined a new direction for the development of American paradigm of foreign policy in the world. First, the US continued to develop military and political doctrines to raise the threshold of a possible Soviet-American nuclear conflict, reduce the risk of an unintended clash and the escalation of a conventional regional conflict involving the great powers in a nuclear war. In 1968, the American strategy of "flexible response" was placed in the center of NATO's fourth strategic concept, which showed the greater unity of allies around its leader.¹³ Secondly, the adversaries of confrontation have stepped up the negotiation process on arms control, in particular, the

¹⁰

Ibid. p. 323.

¹¹

Ibid. p. 319

¹²

Arthur Schlesinger, "Memorandum For The President..." p. 330.

¹³

Dr. Gregory W. Pedlow, "Overall Strategic Concept For The Defense Of The North Atlantic Treaty Organization Area", in *NATO Strategy Documents 1949-1969* (NATO Graphics Studio, 1969), p. 345.

limitation of missile defense systems and strategic offensive weapons. Thirdly, steps were taken to expand technical capabilities for direct dialogue between the countries in emergency situations. Thus, a direct hotline between Moscow and Washington was created, which worked in the mode of round-the-clock and allowed the leaders of both powers to communicate with each other.¹⁴ Thus, the foundations of the US-Soviet rapprochement were laid, which, with some adjustments, continues to this day.

Thus, the conclusions of American analysts and politicians made almost half a century ago, laid the foundation for the establishment of foreign policy strategies not only during the Cold War period but also determined the vector of development of military and political practices as a whole. Also, it should be noted the high role of diplomatic and not power scenarios for the development of conflicts, which were adopted by the Kennedy administration, albeit with some limitations. This fact is actual and at the present stage and shows that the prudence and well-being of civilians should always be above political interests, especially in matters of possible nuclear confrontation.

Bibliography

- Chang, Laurence, and Peter Kornbluh. *The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962*. New York: The New Press, 1998.
- George, Alice L. *Cuban Missile Crisis, The: The Threshold Of Nuclear War*. Routledge, 2013.
- Goldman, Jan. "First Memorandum On Probable Soviet Missile Sites In Cuba". In *The Central Intelligence Agency: An Encyclopedia Of Covert Ops, Intelligence Gathering, And Spies*, 514. ABC-CLIO, 2015.
- Jones, Howard. *The Bay Of Pigs*. Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Pedlow, Dr. Gregory W. "Overall Strategic Concept For The Defense Of The North Atlantic Treaty Organization Area". In *NATO Strategy Documents 1949-1969*, 345. NATO Graphics Studio, 1969.
- Rostow, Walt. "Some Lessons From Cuba, November 15, 1962". In *The Cuban Missile Crisis*, Lawrence Chang and Peter Kornbluh. 327. N.Y.: The New Press, 1998.
- Schlesinger, Arthur. "Memorandum For The President, Post Mortem On Cuba". In *The Cuban Missile Crisis*, Lawrence Chang and Peter Kornbluh. 329-331. N.Y.: The New Press, 1998.
- Scott, Leonard Victor. *Macmillan, Kennedy, And The Cuban Missile Crisis*. Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1999.
- Sterling, Christopher H. *Military Communications: From Ancient Times To The 21St Century*. ABC-CLIO Interactive, 2008.