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**THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS**

## The Cuban Missile Crisis

The Cuban Missile Crisis was one of the most terrifying events in the 20th century: the two largest powers in the world engaged in thirteen days of tense negotiation over the Soviet Union's placement of weapons in Cuba. The conventional story of the crisis is that it proved the merits of a democratic society: historians such as Schlesinger<sup>1</sup> and Hansen<sup>2</sup> attributed the resolution of the crisis to the ability of 'free societies' to make the world a better place. Communist nations were believed to have engaged in dubious nuclear diplomacy by placing warheads outside their borders, whilst capitalist nations were thought to take public interest into account, to be more transparent, and less likely to propagate fear. Against this view, I would argue that during the Cuban Missile Crisis both democracies and non-democracies became less democratic: societies like Australia and United States consulted citizens less often because of the atmosphere of crisis, whereas nations like the USSR and Cuba used propaganda and intimidation even more so than usual.

When President Kennedy spoke to the nation in a televised address to inform them about the nature of the Crisis, his speech created fear amongst the people in a way that reduced dissent. Notably, he reminded Americans of the disastrous World War that had just occurred in order to justify the range of pre-emptive responses the Government could make, peaceful or military<sup>3</sup>. Rather than being transparent with his citizens, Kennedy hid the hypocrisy of the American Government: he tellingly emphasised the Soviet's intrusion to the Americas<sup>4</sup> as the critical violation of the geostrategic agreement between the Cold War powers. This helped ignore his nation's identical actions in Eastern Europe<sup>5</sup>. America had located warheads in Turkey in the same clandestine fashion the Soviet Union operated in Cuba.

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *A Thousand Days* (New York: Harcourt, 1965).

<sup>2</sup> James H. Hansen, "Soviet Deception in the Cuban Missile Crisis" (PDF). *Learning from the Past*, CIA, September 15, 2010. <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/kent-csi/vol46no1/pdf/v46i1a06p.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> John F Kennedy, "TV-Radio Address of the President to the Nation", National Security Archive at George Washington University, 22/10/1962, [http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/nsa/cuba\\_mis\\_cri/621022%20Radio-TV%20Address%20of%20President.pdf](http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/621022%20Radio-TV%20Address%20of%20President.pdf), accessed 4/4/2017

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Benjamin Schwarz, The Real Cuban Missile Crisis, *The Atlantic*, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2013/01/the-real-cuban-missile-crisis/309190/>, accessed 4/4/2017

Similarly, the American media positioned the people to fear the enemy. They misleadingly identified Cuba as a regime that forces children to fight and desired the complete destruction of the United States<sup>6</sup>. Appendix A shows photo of a little boy with his parents: the caption reveals the infant wants to follow his father's footsteps by signing up to be an air force reservist. By using the rhetoric of a loving family, this article's purpose was to encourage the American citizens to enter the army. Recalling the more blunt "What did you Do during the Great War, Daddy?" posters, this image subtly invites men to set an example for their children. It is even possible that this image would have been supplied to the media by recruiters to help strengthen their army, which is hardly a sign of a democratic free press.

In Australia the government concealed its true motive for supporting the United States from the people thus reducing democratic accountability. Rather than seeking to make the world a better place by furthering the principle of democracy, their primary focus was self-protection. Australia was part of the ANZUS treaty with America, which stated they would reciprocal assistance if we were invaded. Tellingly, Australia did not want to condemn a superpower having a nuclear base in another country since, in the words of Prime Minister Menzies, Australia had "a distinct interest in preserving the right of powerful allies to put bases and offensive weapons" where they so choose<sup>7</sup>. Australian security officials were open to the possibility of America basing nuclear weapons in Australia to protect them against any potential Chinese hostility. The citizenry itself was critical of democratic debate, and many evinced a desire for protection<sup>8</sup>. Several letters to the editor condemned anti-American protests in Melbourne<sup>9</sup>. Ultimately, Australia claimed it was fighting to make a better, safer world--along typical lines of Cold War ideology--but really sought to defend its strategic position as a smaller power.

In communist societies, however, used propaganda and did not tolerate any dissent. Already authoritarian, they took the crisis as a pretext to keep their citizenry ignorant and pliant. In Cuba, the populace were initially not told of the crisis. A Cuban recalling the episode states that

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<sup>6</sup>Kasia Baldegg, Watch a 1962 Newsreel Reporting the Cuban Missile Crisis in Progress, The Atlantic, <http://www.theatlantic.com/video/index/263637/watch-a-1962-newsreel-reporting-the-cuban-missile-crisis-in-progress/>, accessed 27/3/2017

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<sup>8</sup> A. J. Pickering, CUBAN CRISIS: READERS' VIEWS - The Canberra Times, 27 Oct 1962, Trove, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/104298710?searchTerm=Cuban%20Missile%20Crisis&searchLimits=>, accessed 29/3/2017

<sup>9</sup> Canberra Times, "Watch On the Cuban Missile Crisis, Trove, 22/10/1962 <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/104298573?searchTerm=Cuban%20Crisis%20Menzies&searchLimits=l-decade=196|||l-year=1962|||sortBy=dateAsc>, accessed date 17/3/2017

unlike in America “Cuban kids never did cover drills for bombing because the secrecy maintained by Castro’s government about the situation kept the people from knowing what was going on”<sup>10</sup>. Eventually, however, the people had to be informed: Canas remembers: “All over the island, fed by Fidel’s fiery speeches, people were getting ready to fight<sup>11</sup>”. Some of these speeches went for 8 hours!<sup>12</sup> The fear people felt is highlighted by the fact that people were ready to do anything to avoid the US invading their country. People formed into militia, collected weapons from the government, and prepared to fight<sup>13</sup>.

In the USSR people were plunged into anxiety when learning the truth about the crisis. Initially, broadcasts withheld the gravity of the situation; when the reality was revealed the authorities blamed the United States in order to boost the USSR’s standing with the people<sup>14</sup>. Some Soviet citizens subtly “protested” for peace in Moscow by standing outside the Kremlin clothed in white<sup>15</sup>. Even though going against the Soviet government was difficult, the people desperately wanted a peaceful resolution. Tragically, the group was arrested and punished<sup>16</sup>. Khrushchev maintained on television that the Soviet Union had no desire to meddle in the Americas, however, by this time he had long taken a personal interest in the success of Castro and Cuban communism<sup>17</sup>. The relationship between Khrushchev and Castro was one of respect and not just a military alliance. Khrushchev even described Castro as the “new Lenin”, which is obviously one of the highest honours one could offer another person in the communist world<sup>18</sup>.

The conventional story that during the Cuban Missile Crisis nations served their citizens should was itself produced by governments for self-serving reasons. While liberal capitalist societies sought to blame ‘communist aggressors’. In reality, America was also engaging in hostile, secret

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<sup>10</sup> Rafael Lima, *Cuba During the Missile Crisis*, 2012, Air and Space Magazine, <http://www.airspacemag.com/military-aviation/cuba-during-the-missile-crisis-31990119/?all> accessed 15/3/2017

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>The Office of Historian, “The Cuban Missile Crisis”, The US State Department, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1961-1968/cuban-missile-crisis> accessed 2/4/2017

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Noam Chomsky, “Cuban Missile Crisis: How the US Played Russian Roulette with the World” The Guardian, 16/10/2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/oct/15/cuban-missile-crisis-russian-roulette> accessed 4/4/2017

<sup>15</sup> Sherry Nay, “The Cuban Missile Crisis: The Soviet View”, *Torch Magazine*, Fall 2015, <http://www.ncsociology.org/torchmagazine/v891/Nay.pdf> accessed 19/3/2017

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Brian Baggins, “Cuban History Missile Crisis”. *Marxist History: Cuba (1959 – present)*. Marxists Internet Archive. Retrieved May 7, 2010.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

nuclear policy. Those same communist nations merely used the crisis as a justification for further repression. In the end, to make a better world America and the Soviet Union in the end had to conciliate and sacrifice nuclear sites.

## APPENDIX A



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