

# A turning point in us and ussr relations history essay

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batub@glenelg.orgTurning Points in United States HistoryMutual Assured Destruction: A Turning Point in U. S. and U. S. S. R. RelationsAfter the German surrender of World War II on May 8, 1945, the most powerful nations in the world: France, Great Britain, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U. S. S. R.), and the United States of America (U. S. A.), decided to divide Germany and Berlin into four parts and govern them separately (Burns). However, in the spring of 1948, Joseph Stalin, the leader of the U. S. S. R. announced a blockade of the allied-controlled land in Berlin. In the midst of this crisis in Berlin, the United States began airdropping supplies into the affected regions and soon after joined Western Europe in a military alliance known as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). When Stalin called off the blockade in the following month, three of the allies: France, Great Britain, and the United States of America, worked together to create the Federal Republic of Germany, known commonly as West Germany, in order to rebuild the country and prevent further economic misery (Moser and Hahn). The east had no option but to respond with its own state soon afterwards, indirectly causing the United States and the U. S. S. R. to be political enemies for the next forty years. West Germany, comprised of the allied controlled territory, was governed primarily by the United States as it set up an independent democratic nation with its own government (Burns). The U. S. instituted capitalism within its section of Germany, ultimately leading to West Germany becoming a land of freedom and individuality. While this meant that there would be a large gap between the rich and the poor, there would also be freedom of speech and freedom of beliefs. On the other hand, East Germany, which was occupied by the U. S. S. R., instituted

communism, an " economic and social system in which all (or nearly all) property and resources are collectively owned by a classless society and not by individual citizens" (" Communism"). In essence, communism made sure that there were no very rich people and no very poor people. However, the Soviet Union's idea of communism also included a very strictly enforced form of censorship that severely limited and misguided people's knowledge of current events (Palmer). Naturally, the Soviet Union disagreed with the United States' capitalism, and the United States disagreed with the Soviet Union's communism. In an effort to contain communism from spreading further, the United States established the Marshall Plan shortly after the formation of West Germany, which gave money to certain countries in Europe so that they would be able to get back on their feet quickly and not be tempted to adopt the system of communism (" The Marshall Plan"). Through acts and doctrines similar to this, the two superpowers often competed against each other and stirred up propaganda in order to strike hatred and fear in the eyes of not only the other nation, but also other surrounding countries as well. The series of events that resulted in further escalations of the political and military tensions between the two nations are regarded today as the Cold War (" Cold War: A Brief History"). In essence, the Cold War can be best described as a war without battles in which miscommunications and assumptions almost led to the destruction of the world. For instance, in the Suez Crisis of 1956, the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) received messages that " unidentified aircraft were flying over Turkey and the Turkish air force was on alert." In reality, however, an official had made an assumption that was later

proved to be inaccurate as the " Turkish air force" was merely a flight of swans. Such events as this were common in the Cold War as presented in Scott Sagan's book, *The Limits of Safety*, in which he lists a total of twenty events where miscommunications and assumptions almost led to a nuclear response(Sagan). At the height of the Cold War was the Cuban Missile Crisis (" Height of the Cold War"). The Cuban Missile Crisis stands in history as one that nearly brought humanity to the brink of destruction and is known as perhaps the single greatest political battle the world has ever seen (Pereira). The Cuban Missile Crisis is a turning point in United States history, because it laid the foundation for a strengthened relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. It all started on October 15, 1962, when an American U-2 spy, flying over Cuba, " discovered nuclear missile sites under construction" (" Cold War: A Brief History"). As air surveillance was greatly increased, further photographic evidenced supported Soviet buildup of missiles on Cuba. President Kennedy was notified a day later and immediately called for a meeting to discuss what should be done against Cuba. Under the direction of Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, the Executive Committee of the National Security Council (ExComm) was formed. Over the next seven days, the ExComm committee would debate various strategies for dealing with the missile in Cuba, while Soviet diplomats would deny the existence of them. Throughout the ExComm meetings, many tactics were considered to deal with the missiles. The generals within the Security Council, specifically the generals hoping to redeem themselves for the failed Bay of Pigs invasion a year ago, proposed to invade Cuba and overthrow the government disengaging the

Soviet's ability to use the missiles. Another theory was to negotiate a deal with the soviets requiring them to dismantle her missiles in Cuba in exchange for the U. S. doing the same in Turkey and Italy. Lastly, a Naval blockade was proposed to stop the Soviet Union from shipping military equipment to Cuba (Kennedy and Schlesinger). When discussing these strategies President Kennedy and his advisers had to take into consideration how the Soviet Union and Cuba would react to decisions made by the United States. The initial response among most of the participants was that the missiles had to be bombed, but Kennedy was not convinced that this was the best route to take. Eventually, the majority of the committee favored a naval blockade of Cuba and Kennedy accepted their decision (Kennedy and Schlesinger). In a televised address on October 22, President Kennedy announced to the American public the discovery of the missile installations and proclaimed that the United States will " regard any nuclear missile launched from Cuba against any nation in the Western Hemisphere as an attack by the Soviet Union on the United States, requiring a full retaliatory response upon the Soviet Union" (Kennedy). Kennedy then imposed a strict quarantine on all Cuban-bound military equipped ships to prevent the arrival of more missiles. For several tense days, Soviet vessels on their way to Cuba avoided the quarantine zone, and Khrushchev and Kennedy communicated through diplomatic negotiation. Since it was not known what course the Soviet Union would choose to follow, the United States armed forces were prepared for all situations. For the first time, and only time in American history, certain U. S. military forces, such as the Strategic Air Command, were ordered to a second highest readiness state, just below nuclear war,

known as DEFCON 2. If the Soviet ships carrying weapons for Cuba did not turn back or refused to be searched, a war was likely to begin (Kennedy and Schlesinger). During the crisis, many letters were exchanged between the two sides. Khrushchev sent letters to Kennedy on October 23 and 24 indicating the preventative nature of the missiles in Cuba and the peaceful intentions of the Soviet Union. On October 26, Khrushchev sent Kennedy a long rambling letter seemingly proposing that the missile installations would be dismantled and personnel removed in exchange for a promise by the United States that they or their proxies would not invade Cuba. On October 27, the same day a U-2 aircraft was shoot down; another letter to Kennedy arrived from Khrushchev, suggesting that missile installations in Cuba would be dismantled if the United States removed their nuclear bases in Turkey. The American administration decided to ignore this second letter and to accept the offer outlined in the first letter. Khrushchev agreed and gave orders for the missiles to be dismantled and removed, thus ending the Cuban Missile Crisis. (Kennedy and Schlesinger). After the missile crisis on Cuba, the United States and Soviet Union realized just how dangerous the capabilities of their nuclear arsenals were. They discovered that their actions could sculpt the lives of millions, not only of the present, but also of future generations. This, in its self, was a turning point in their relations and mentality, and the steps that they took after the crisis, would ensure another nuclear weapons crisis would never take place. The enhancement in communications when the hotline was introduced was also a turning point, as it allowed the ability for the leaders of the two nations to communicate with each other directly, without travelling across the globe. Also the hotline

allowed the two sides to gain a degree of trust between each other, however small an amount of trust that was, the fact is it was still there, and was a huge improvement upon the capitalists and communists being sworn enemies (" Hotline established between Washington and Moscow"). Finally, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States of America, along with 113 other countries, agreed to sign the Limited Test Ban Treaty (LTBT) of 1963, a turning point in nuclear relations that is still utilized to this day. This treaty prohibited tests of nuclear devices to be conducted in the atmosphere, in outer space, and under water, although it still allowed nuclear testing to continue underground (Burr and Hector). In addition, at the first Strategic Arms Limitation Talks on May 1972, the U. S. A. and U. S. S. R. also agreed on limiting the number of missile systems that could be used to destroy incoming intercontinental ballistic missiles launched by the other superpower (" Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM Treaty)"). Apart from slowing and eventually ending the nuclear arms race, these two treaties also showed that the two superpowers in the world were willing to cooperate with each other. In conclusion, the Cuban Missile Crisis stands in history as the event that took the world to the brink of nuclear warfare. Yet even amongst the chaos, this crisis dramatically strengthened USA and USSR relations during the Cold War and is thus known as a turning point in American history. Its eventual ending marked the relaxation between the conflicting nations and formed an unusual respect between both Kennedy and Khrushchev, leading to improved relations within the two countries until the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics' collapse in 1991 (" Soviet Union And The United States").