

Cuban missile crisis sources questions



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1. Sources A and B tell us a lot about Kennedy's reaction to the U2 spy photos. In source A, President Kennedy asks his brother Robert, the author of the source, to come to the White House.

This shows that the President needed moral support, indicating that he was worried about what the U2 photos showed. Source B shows the range of the missiles. This must have been of great concern to Kennedy, because most of the USA, including Washington, was within range of long or short ranged missiles based on Cuba. Source B also shows that more Soviet missile-carrying ships were en route, which must have prompted Kennedy to consider what action he was going to take.

2. Kennedy knew that some kind of action was needed to reassure the public, and this is shown to be what the general feeling at the time in source C. To do nothing would mean the threat of missile attack would not be eliminated. It would also be very unpopular in the USA, especially as Kennedy was still considered by some to be 'soft' on communism, especially after Berlin. As it says in source C, 80 million Americans could be killed.

It also states that air strikes were being considered, but Kennedy must have turned this option down. I believe this is because Kennedy didn't want to provoke a war with Cuba and, more importantly, the USSR. An air strike also could not destroy the additional missiles being sent to Cuba by ship. In the end, Kennedy decided on a naval blockade of Cuba.

This made Kennedy appear to be decisive, and he wanted Americans to know this, as shown by source D. The main advantage of the blockade was that it would force the USSR to make the next move, although this also

meant the conflict was now with the USSR, as well as Cuba. The blockade would hopefully mean no more missiles could get into Cuba, unless the USSR decided to break the blockade with force, or by retaliating in Berlin, a sensitive area for both Khrushchev and Kennedy. The blockade did not destroy the threat of the missiles on Cuba, but it did stop more from getting there. The blockade could, if needed, be only a stepping-stone to more action, like an air strike or invasion. This is shown in source C, where it shows that US armed forces were put on alert, ready to do what was required.

3i. The sources give different reasons for the Cuban crisis. Source E suggests that the US didn't like communist influence in Cuba, and it gives the impression that the Russians were the victims in the crisis. It suggests that Cuba was another case of the 'containment' of communism, like the US did in Korea. This is because the writer was an important minister at the time, and it was published in the same year that communist control was collapsing in Russia. Source F is a letter from Khrushchev to Kennedy, written at the time of the crisis.

This source proposes that if Kennedy ends the blockade and doesn't invade Cuba, then Khrushchev would remove all weapons from Cuba. The source suggests that the crisis occurred not because of the missiles on Cuba, but because of the US response to this. This is the Soviet viewpoint of the crisis at the time, and it reflects how Khrushchev wanted to be seen by Kennedy. Both sources put the blame on the US.

3ii. Sources E and F are both written by Russians who were important at the time of the crisis. This means that both sources are biased towards a Soviet

viewpoint. Source E gives the reader the impression that the USSR was the victim in the crisis, because the writer was the Soviet Foreign Minister at the time.

The source is also less useful because it was not made at the time of the crisis; it was published when communist control was collapsing in Russia. Source F was written at the time of the crisis, but it is written by Khrushchev and also blames the US for the crisis. This is because it was a letter written to Kennedy, so it reflects how Khrushchev wanted to be seen. Both sources are of limited use, but they still provide insight into the crisis. In fact, tension had been building between the two superpowers for about a year, ever since Berlin.

The building of the Berlin wall had made both leaders seem weak. Khrushchev had always wanted total control of Berlin, but the fact that he had failed lost him some of his support. Kennedy seemed weak because he could do nothing to stop the building of the wall, despite his best efforts. After this both leaders tried to prove their strength, with more nuclear weapons tests and eventually the Cuban Missile crisis. Therefore, both sides are to blame for the crisis. Bad relations with the US meant that Cuba needed support, and it eventually turned to the USSR. In return, the USSR placed missiles on Cuba. This was retaliation for the US having missiles in Italy and Turkey, so again both sides are to blame.

These more important issues are not really talked about in the two sources.

4. The Cuban missile crisis was settled after thirteen days. Source G is from a

letter from President Kennedy to Khrushchev, agreeing that a solution is needed quickly.

Source H is the reply to Kennedy from Khrushchev, agreeing to stop missile base building on Cuba and also to return all nuclear weapons to the USSR. Letter writing was the main form of communication between the two leaders in the crisis, and the wording of the letters was very important. In these two letters, the vocabulary used gives an impression of civility and respect to the other leader. Source I is from a book written in 1980, and talks about how Kennedy had won. This is a biased view, as a US historian wrote the source.

It is because of this that the source is of certain use. Source I tells us that Kennedy won. This is not entirely true, as in reality the two leaders managed to come to an agreement to avoid nuclear war. Eventually, both leaders had what they wanted, there were no US missiles in Turkey, and no soviet missiles in Cuba. Both leaders were keen to avoid conflict, as it would be costly, impractical and unpopular, yet neither leader wanted to back. This was because if this happened the other side would then have the advantage, and the leaders would lose some of their reputation and power.

Reputations were already weakened after the events in Berlin, where both leaders had come out worse after the building of the Berlin wall. In the end, both sides managed to come to a mutual agreement. Although Kennedy may have appeared to triumph over communist Russia, as Source I tells us, this is not the case. Khrushchev lost the tactical advantage of missiles on Cuba, what Kennedy had wanted. However, three months later the US removed its missiles from Italy and Turkey, why Khrushchev had missiles placed on Cuba

in the first place. Both leaders were frightened of how close they had come to a nuclear war, as shown by Khrushchev's suggestion of *dî½tente* in source H.

This shows that the leaders didn't want another incident like the Cuban missile crisis; they didn't want the risk of war happening again. This is further shown by the fact that in 1963 a teleprinter link was set up between Washington and Moscow, allowing for more direct and speedy contact between the leaders of the US and the USSR. 5i. Source I talks about how Kennedy beat Khrushchev in the crisis, although it does admit that the US removed its missiles from Turkey and Italy three months later.

A US historian wrote the source, and it is not surprising that they should take the biased view that Kennedy won. Source J is from 'Khrushchev Remembers', and it takes the other biased view that Khrushchev beat Kennedy. It talks of how the crisis was a Soviet success as there was never a direct confrontation. Both sources take the view that their own country won the crisis, although the truth is somewhere between what the two sources said. 5ii.

Source 1 states that Kennedy and the US 'won' the Cuban Missile Crisis, and effectively beat the USSR. This is the opposite of the view taken in source J, which says that the Cuban missile crisis was a 'triumph of Soviet foreign policy'. The US historian has their view for a variety of reasons, the main one being that Khrushchev backed down. Khrushchev had the nuclear weapons removed from Cuba, and the missile installations were destroyed, in return for a US promise not to invade Cuba and the ending of the blockade.

This meant that the United States was no longer threatened by the possibility of missiles launched from Cuba. However, this could also be interpreted to mean that Khrushchev had made the worse of a bad situation and managed to end the blockade of Cuba and ensured that Cuba could not be invaded by the US in the future. Another reason for the view of the US winning is that the USSR tried its best not to start a war. An example of this is the fact that that Soviet ships didn't challenge the US blockade around Cuba. Some people considered this to mean that the US has strategic superiority over the USSR, and some may even say that Khrushchev was afraid of US retaliation if there was war between the two sides.

However, this argument could be turned around and used to support the view of Soviet victory. For Kennedy too was wary of starting war with the USSR. An argument for Soviet victory is that Castro was still in power after the crisis. The US response to the crisis had failed to remove Fidel Castro, the Cuban dictator who had nationalised many US businesses after he came to power. Cuba had once been a place where rich Americans went on holiday. Khrushchev still had an ally in a small island only 90 miles off the coast of Florida.

There was also a U2 spy plane shot down over Cuba, something the US could not retaliate for. All US missiles were removed from Turkey and Italy three months after the crisis. This could be further evidence of Soviet victory in the crisis, although it is actually an example of cooperation between the two superpowers, which occurred after the crisis. Both sources take the view that their own country won the crisis, although the real answer is in between.

Either view from the sources can be argued successfully with the reasons I suggested.