

MODERN HISTORY: *COLD WAR*

Trial HSC: To what extent did the Cuban Missile Crisis affect the development of the Cold War?

To a large extent the Cuban Missile Crisis impacted upon the development of the Cold War and the establishment of a “bipolar world” as Fitzgerald asserts. However it was one of the many factors and crises which during this period contributed to the international context of hostility and the threat of nuclear warfare. Ultimately the dichotomy of East and West relations and the antithesis of their ideological perspectives furthered the Cold War and the volatile nature of international relations during this period led to its development.

The Cuban Missile Crisis of 1963 was the closest occasion upon which the world drew closer to the outbreak of nuclear warfare. The placement of nuclear silos in Cuba by the Soviets’ leader Khrushchev was according to Deutscher “an unofficial declaration of war” upon the US, led at this time by John F. Kennedy, This severely damaged the USSR’s power in the world of communism and further developed the anti-communist sentiments of the west towards to the east. Although the relations between the US and the USSR remained cordiale the establishment of the ‘hotline’ of communications eased the tensions which been escalating to this point due to a range of pre-existing factors that had fuelled the melting pot of relations that epitomised the Cold War.

In the period following the Korean War, the arms and space race acted as a catalyse to the development of hostilities and the growing threat of the unclear warfare during this period of Cold War. The US policy of “Massive Retaliation: saw the US increase arms production by 300%, based on the premise that eh USSR had more nuclear weapons than the US. This nuclear stockpiling was according to Chomsky “based on a lack of empirical evidence” that there was a very limited threat of the USSR being able to match the US in terms of the size and capacity of their nuclear weapons. The development of the anti-ballistic missile and nuclear submarines for example, according to Isaac and Downing “produced the frightening prospect that a nuclear war could be won”. The Soviet Union in order to attain their own safety and to pose as a similar threat to what Sokolovsky asserted was “... the pre-emptive strike” of the US, the Soviets would embark upon reaching an arms parity with the US.

The threat of ‘mutually assured destruction’ led the Americans to develop a new policy of Flexible Response as a result of the USSR’s growing nuclear power. This arms race also fuelled the space race and during this period the constant threat of nuclear warfare saw that this competition of global proportions developed that the Cold War hostilities of this era, McCauley asserts for instance that it was “a competition on a global scale that epitomised the conflict between socialism and capitalism”, that the new race to space would mean as LBJ asserts “first in everything”. Thus the Cuban Missile Crisis was another occasion of the ‘flexing of muscle’ of global superpowers, a product of the arms and space race competitiveness and the lack of stability in the world due to the number of nuclear weapons.

Another factor contributing to the development of the Cold War was Eisenhower’s doctrine and the development of the policy of containment. Deutscher believes that “this left the USSR with little option than to build up its own armaments”, thus as with the arms race which eventuated into the Cuban Missile Crisis, the breakdown of Khrushchev’s “peaceful coexistence” contributed to the development of the Cold War and the other Cold War crises. The constant threat posed by each opposing power in this “two camp” world saw the constant struggles for the assertion of national security and dominance. Thus the foreign policies of each power, as well as the treaties and pacts made in the aftermath of these crises such as NATO and the Warsaw Pact also fuelled the Cold War, spilling over into the crises of the 1960’s.

The Berlin Wall in 1961 was a major contributing factor to the development of Cold War in this period, according to Fitzgerald “it stood as a silent reminder of the failure of US and Soviet

diplomacy". The establishment of the wall further divided the east and west, materialising Churchill's 'Iron Curtain'. To stop the flow of East Germans to the West, to save the disintegrating living standards and economy of the Eastern Bloc, the Soviets erected a barrier that no one could penetrate. This completely divided Germany and established the temperaments of the Soviet Union and the US.

It can be viewed that the wall was a provocative challenge to this west, should they engage the Soviets and appear to be the aggressors. The failure of the US to respond caused the Soviets to reinforce the Wall. According to Goddard, "this was the end of discussions over the division of Germany". The division would be permanent and the antithetical beliefs of the East and West would remain. This wall symbolised the breakdown of peace talks at this time and further enhanced that a nuclear war was a possible outcome of such hostility. Ultimately this contributed to the development of the Cold War as a pre-cursor to the Soviets' flexing of muscle in Cuba, posing as a nuclear threat to the US and challenging them on their home soil.

To Khrushchev, "Berlin is the testicles of the west", thus the failure of the US to reply to this provocations left the Soviets in a weak position which would ultimately explain their hardline approach to Czechoslovakia in 1968. The apparent westernisation of the Eastern Bloc under Dupnik led to the creation of the Brezhnev Doctrine and the permanent presence of Soviet tanks in the country. The Brezhnev Doctrine further led to the development of the Cold War as it outlined that the USSR would not tolerate Western elements to penetrate the 'Iron Curtain; and influence the Soviet control over these regions. Thus, like the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Soviet's demonstration of their power and willingness to fight did little to curb the growing fear of nuclear warfare on a global scale.

Chomsky further asserts that the retaliatory and provocative actions of the Cold War mainly fuelled the ideological struggle of each superpower. For example the U2 Spy Plane incident where a US aircraft was shot down in Soviet territory. Chomsky further concludes that the information which would have been revealed to the US would have demonstrated to Eisenhower the true state of the Soviet's nuclear weapons, indicating that the policy of Massive Retaliation and the nuclear stockpiling which led to these crises was an attempt of the US and later the Soviets to assert their own national security and pre-eminence in the world, thus they were motivated by the common threat which was posed.

Ultimately the Cuban Missile Crisis was highly significant in the development of the Cold War during this period as it was one of many demonstrations of the Soviet's growing nuclear weapons power as a result of the escalating arms race. The space race to the moon further epitomised the conflicting ideologies of the superpowers in their attempt to assert power in the post Korean War landscape. Treaties and alliances such as the Sino-Soviet agreement also contributed to what Isaac and Downing assert was the US's fear of the "Red tide of communism", thus these alliances cemented the Cold War's development in this period.

Ultimately a series of crises and the continual breakdown of peace negotiations within this context of suspicion and volatility developed the Cold War, thus the Cuban missile crisis was not the only event to lead to the increased tensions and the constant threat of nuclear war during the Cold War period.