On the Brink: How the Cuban Missile Crisis Set the Tone for Détente

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2/13/14

Since its birth in 1776, the United States has dealt with numerous crises that have had long-term consequences. However, few events, if any, have had the impact of the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. Despite the danger it posed, the Crisis was a crucial turning point in a series of achievements marking an easing of direct tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. The basic outline of the Missile Crisis is well-documented: Under the leadership of the Premier and First Secretary of the Communist Party, Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviets sent shipments of long-range missiles to Cuba, capable of hitting multiple high-civilian targets across the United States. Alarmingly, Cuba also received a series of Soviet nuclear weapons that could be carried by the missiles. When American reconnaissance aircraft captured evidence of missile sites in Cuba on October 14, the 13-day standoff ensued. Although many of President Kennedy’s advisors pushed for a more aggressive response, Kennedy elected to initiate a naval “quarantine,” or blockade, of Cuba. In the end, Kennedy and Khrushchev struck a deal, and the Soviets agreed to withdraw all offensive weapons from Cuba. Following the Missile Crisis, the United States changed course and actively sought peaceful accommodation with the Soviet Union. In the following months, the United States gained leverage in West Berlin, President Kennedy delivered his famous and conciliatory American University speech, and the Americans, Soviets, and British signed the Limited Test Ban Treaty. America’s new policy did not mean an end to proxy conflicts such as the Vietnam War. But the events immediately following the Missile Crisis demonstrated that the United States could engage with the Soviet Union directly and constructively. Between late 1962 to late 1979, even while limited proxy battles flared, the two superpowers never again came as close to the brink of war, and they gradually moved toward détente through acts such as the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks and the Non-Proliferation Treaty. For these reasons, the Cuban Missile Crisis directly resulted in a significant easing of tensions between the United States the Soviet Union up until late 1979.

Although the Cuban Missile Crisis was a sudden development, several events in the years leading up to the conflict foreshadowed an eventual showdown with the Soviets. The Cold War started roughly two years following the conclusion of World War II, and by the time Kennedy was elected in 1960, both the Soviet Union and the United States had built up a formidable nuclear arsenal. In 1959, Fidel Castro overthrew the Cuban government and soon cut off all ties with the United States after establishing a dictatorship. Over the next couple of years, American-Cuban relations continued to sour, as Castro became increasingly Communist and held the United States accountable for Cuba’s economic woes (Jebson 1). The rising tension between the two countries ultimately resulted in Kennedy authorizing a bold mission.

In April of 1961, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), under the orders of Kennedy, trained 1500 Cuban exiles to attack Cuba and oust Castro. The exiles landed at the Bay of Pigs on Cuba’s southern coast, but defeat was inevitable from the outset due to poor training and a strong opposing force of Cuban troops (2). Kennedy deemed the invasion a lost cause and he ordered American ships to gather any survivors. With approximately 100 exiles dead and over 1200 captured, Kennedy emerged from the Bay of Pigs debacle as the clear loser, and Castro publicly questioned his leadership. Moreover, having previously been economically dependent on the United States, Cuba proceeded to ally with the Soviet Union in order to maintain a functional economy (Croughwell and Phelps 1-2). Historian Mark Rathbone asserted that Kennedy poorly handled the situation in Cuba and that there were serious ramifications. “The Americans had shot themselves in the foot, deprived the USA of any economic influence in Cuba, and handed the Russians a golden opportunity” (Rathbone 1). Unfortunately for Kennedy, the Bay of Pigs failure proved to be only the first of his foreign policy errors in 1961.

In the summer of 1961, Kennedy headed to Vienna, Austria, for a summit with Khrushchev. Prior to the meeting, Kennedy’s advisors pleaded with him to reconsider, arguing that another official could take his place. Kennedy decided to go ahead anyway, and the result was disastrous. Khrushchev thoroughly dominated Kennedy and Khrushchev left the meeting believing that Kennedy was both weak and inexperienced (Thrall and Wilkins 1-2). Kennedy took no measures to conceal his unimpressive performance, telling the *New York Times*:

[The summit was] the roughest thing in my life...He just beat the hell out of me. I’ve got a terrible problem if [Khrushchev] thinks I’m inexperienced and have no guts. Until we remove those ideas we won’t get anywhere with him. (3)

Likely taking advantage of Kennedy’s apparent inexperience, Khrushchev soon took the offensive and ordered shipments of missiles and nuclear weapons to Cuba early in the fall of 1962.

American U-2 reconnaissance planes captured images of long-range missile launchers in various Cuban locations as well as over 40 nuclear weapons. Considering that Cuba was a mere 90 miles away from Florida, Kennedy quickly convened a group of advisors to consider potential counter-actions. During the early meetings, Kennedy was presented with several suggestions in dealing with the Soviets, ranging from doing nothing to a full-scale ground invasion of Cuba (Jebson 3-6). Initially, using the Air Force to take out launch sites was an attractive option; however, intelligence suggested that Cuba would still be able to launch nuclear missiles before all of the sites were destroyed. Also, the CIA was not certain whether it had located all the launch sites scattered across Cuba (Coleman 30). Although he was facing pressure on all sides to directly and forcefully engage with the Soviets and Cuba, Kennedy instead ordered a naval blockade of Cuba to prevent further shipments of Soviet missiles to Cuba. Kennedy attempted to resolve the situation in a peaceful manner, but the U.S. government was still placed on high alert, and Kennedy soon made it clear that he would not hesitate to use force if necessary.

On October 22, 1962, approximately a week into the crisis, Kennedy addressed the American public, affirming his willingness to take action against the Soviets:

It shall be the policy of this nation to 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. (Pont 1)

In the following days, aggressive actions by both sides nearly initiated a nuclear war. First, United States war ships forcibly boarded a Soviet merchant ship bound for Cuba. Soon after, an American U-2 plane was shot down while flying above Cuba. With the crisis quickly escalating, Kennedy and Khrushchev finally reached a resolution on October 28 after a flurry of messages between them. In exchange for the Soviet Union withdrawing all nuclear weapons from Cuba, the United States removed its Jupiter missiles from Turkey and vowed to leave Cuba alone (Jebson 3-5). The key element of this deal was that Khrushchev was not allowed to disclose the withdrawal of the missiles in Turkey, as Kennedy aimed to maintain domestic and foreign support. With the Turkey withdrawal concealed from the public, it was widely believed that Kennedy stood his ground against Khrushchev and that the United States removed all Soviet presence from the Western Hemisphere without making any concessions. As a result, Kennedy emerged from the crisis as a hero, and his political maneuverability was greatly expanded (Gerber and Wenger 9). While the Missile Crisis may have been limited to a small island in the Western Hemisphere, its effects significantly impacted Berlin on the other side of the world.

American involvement in Berlin dated back to the end of World War II, when Germany was forced to relinquish control over Berlin. The capital was split evenly between the United States, Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union (Coleman 97). The Soviet zone in Berlin soon became known as East Berlin, and in August 1961, the Soviet Union and East Germany made a border between East and West Berlin with barbed wire. The infamous Berlin Wall later replaced the makeshift boundary. Multiple United States presidents, including Kennedy, swore to protect West Berlin upon assuming office(171)**.** Due to Khrushchev’s hostile policies in Berlin, Kennedy’s promise was put to the test very early in his presidency.

Once in power in 1953, Khrushchev continually criticized Western presence in Berlin, and in the months leading up to the Cuban Missile Crisis, he took a considerably firmer stance regarding Berlin. He argued that Berlin was of no relevance to the United States, and that it was wrong to disturb the “normalization” of Berlin. By July of 1962, he formulated a plan to remove Western troops entirely from Berlin. In September of that same year, Khrushchev warned West German ambassador Hans Kroll that he intended to deal with the West Berlin situation for good by the end of November 1962. The United States government took note of Khrushchev’s words and began to anticipate an escalation in Berlin. On July 30, 1962, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy met with Soviet intelligence officer Georgi N. Bolshakov, urging the Soviet Union to delay action in West Berlin in exchange for reduced reconnaissance flights over Soviet shipping. Khrushchev rejected the offer and refused to back down in Berlin. National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy also feared an imminent showdown with the Soviets in West Berlin, and he believed that Khrushchev’s increasingly bold moves were in large part due to a lack of forceful response from the West in the past (172-176). In addition, given Khrushchev’s comments following the 1961 Vienna summit, his perception of Kennedy as a weak and inexperienced president was likely a factor in his decision to pursue a more aggressive agenda in Berlin.

By September of 1962, the situation in Berlin was arguably as dire as it had ever been, and the beginning of the Missile Crisis in October further complicated matters in Berlin. On September 4, Kennedy expressed his concerns over Berlin to a group of Congressional leaders: “I think Berlin is coming to some kind of a climax this fall, one way or another, before Christmas...I would say the biggest danger right now is for Berlin” (Coleman 177). A few hours later on the 4th, an American U-2 spy plane accidentally drifted towards the Soviet Union and the Soviets immediately shot it down. At that point, American-Soviet relations were quite delicate, as coinciding with this new development was the escalation of the Berlin conflict as well as preliminary reports regarding Soviet presence in Cuba. The next day, the Soviet Union declared that Western troops must be withdrawn from Berlin in due time, and by mid-October, with the crisis in Cuba in full throttle, Kennedy found himself in a very tricky position. Kennedy had vowed to defend West Berlin unconditionally, and therefore his options in dealing with Cuba were limited because the Soviets were capable of taking any action in West Berlin that the Americans took in Cuba (183-184). At the expense of his own legitimacy and the citizens of West Berlin, Kennedy could have turned his back on West Berlin and declared that protecting Americans was paramount. Instead, Kennedy reaffirmed his stance in an address to the public:

This latest Soviet threat*—*or any other threat which is made either independently or in response to our actions this week*—*must and will be met with determination. Any hostile move anywhere in the world against the safety and freedom of peoples to whom we are committed*—*including in particular the brave people of West Berlin*—* will be met by whatever action is needed. (188)

Thankfully for Kennedy, the Cuban Missile Crisis was peacefully resolved, and the United States was not forced to go to war over West Berlin.

Following the resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Berlin situation was now in the United States’ favor, and the alleviation of this conflict was one of several important events in establishing the subsequent years of détente. Prior to the Missile Crisis, West Berlin was “one of the most effective points of leverage against the United States” for the Soviets (170). After the crisis, however, the Americans gained the upper hand, because just as West Berlin faced a constant threat from the Soviet Union, Cuba, now clearly allied with the Soviets, faced the retaliation of the United States if the Soviets took action in Berlin. As Kennedy put it: “[The United States] now [has] a hostage in this hemisphere just as the Russians have had one for several years...Any action they take in Berlin we can take in Cuba” (191). The Cuban Missile Crisis was vital in easing the Berlin conflict, and following the Crisis, Khrushchev acknowledged that pursuing his agenda in West Berlin was now a “dead end” (191). Khrushchev intended to gain leverage in both Berlin and the Western Hemisphere by forcing the issue in Cuba; however, his plan backfired, as Cuba did not become a Communist stronghold and the United States now sat in an ideal position to oppose any Soviet action in Europe. As Khrushchev’s earlier volatile behavior demonstrated, West Berlin could have emerged as a battleground for years to come. Instead, the Missile Crisis completely defused the conflict, and there was never another showdown between the Americans and the Soviets there. Had America not taken Cuba as its “hostage,” West Berlin would have continued to be a constant threat for the United States and its allies, and a sustained period of détente would have been impossible. Following the neutralization of Berlin, Kennedy further used the Missile Crisis to his advantage in a powerful speech at American University.

Kennedy’s American University speech on June 10, 1963, was unlike any address delivered by an American president because it sympathized with the adversary. Kennedy praised Soviet citizens for advancements in science, math, industry, and space travel, and he applauded their “acts of courage” over the years amid trying circumstances. In addition, Kennedy sympathized with the Soviets, who suffered roughly 20 million deaths and mass destruction to their homeland (nearly a third of the Soviet Union was a wasteland) during World War II. Despite that the United States and the Soviet Union had been at odds with each other since the conclusion of World War II, Kennedy aimed to find common ground between the two nations in his address, recognizing their “mutual abhorrence” of war. While it may have seemed naïve of Kennedy to expect the Americans and Soviets to put their differences behind them, he was by no means pushing for an alliance or a friendship. Rather, Kennedy strived for “mutual tolerance,” arguing that Americans and Soviets don’t have to love each other; they merely have to coexist: “If we cannot now end our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity…we all inhabit this small planet, we all breathe the same air, we all cherish our

children’s future; and we are all mortal” (Kennedy AU speech). It was clear that Kennedy’s decision to speak and his conciliatory tone were directly related to the near nuclear disaster in Cuba just a few months earlier.

The recently resolved Missile Crisis was largely responsible for compelling Kennedy to speak at American University. Following the Crisis, Khrushchev came under heavy criticism both at home and abroad after emerging as the perceived loser of the dispute. As a result, Kennedy argued that peace should be established diplomatically, and he emphasized that the United States sought to avoid conflicts like the Cuban Missile Crisis that “bring an adversary to a choice of either a humiliating defeat or humiliation” (Kennedy AU speech). Also, during the crisis, the destructive nature of modern total war was nearly on display, so Kennedy used the speech to emphasize the necessity of disarmament. Kennedy argued that it was both absurd and alarming that one nuclear bomb had ten times the power of all of the combined explosives used by the Allied Forces during World War II. Additionally, Kennedy used his newfound prestige following his Missile Crisis “victory” to his advantage in preparing the American University speech. Historians Marcel Gerber and Andreas Wenger contended that Kennedy’s new, positive reputation impacted how he prepared the speech: “By completely bypassing the relevant departments, Kennedy clearly made use of his political prestige and room for maneuverability gained after the Cuban Missile Crisis (Gerber and Wenger 9). Typically, many pairs of eyes would look over Kennedy’s speech. However, after concealing the American withdrawal of Jupiter missiles in Turkey, Kennedy won considerable support, and with that support came expanded flexibility. Had Kennedy’s more militaristic advisors looked at the speech beforehand, the result could have been far different, and the speech likely would not have received the praise it did.

The immediate positive reaction to Kennedy’s speech around the world was very unusual, as even an adversary like the Soviet Union offered its praise. *The Manchester Guardian* called the address “one of the great state papers of American history,” and the Soviets uncharacteristically permitted the speech to be broadcast across the country despite their strict censorship of the press (Sorensen 1). Also, Soviet newspapers *Izvestia* and *Pravda* were given permission from the government to print the full text of the speech (Kimball 3). Even Kennedy’s greatest rival, Khrushchev, chimed in, calling Kennedy’s address “the greatest speech by an American president since [Franklin] Roosevelt[‘s presidency]” (Coleman 211). Khrushchev’s praise and the overall encouraging response in the Soviet Union enabled the two adversaries to make immediate progress.

Kennedy’s speech had several beneficial consequences in the short term and it set the tone for less strained relations between the Americans and the Soviets for the years to follow. After previously refusing to sign anything but a comprehensive test ban, Khrushchev was persuaded by Kennedy’s address to sign a limited test ban with the United States and Great Britain the next month (Kimball 3). Also, per Kennedy’s suggestion, the White House and the Kremlin in Moscow established a hotline connecting the two buildings less than a week after the speech in order to avoid miscommunications in the future (Sorensen 1-2). While Kennedy’s sudden death in November of 1963 prevented him from utilizing the hotline while in office, succeeding Cold War presidents effectively made use of it. For example, when President Johnson sent aircraft to the Mediterranean Sea during the 1967 Six Day War, Johnson contacted Soviet president Alexei Kosygin to avoid a potential confrontation with the Soviet fleet stationed at the Black Sea (Clavis 1). In the end, Kennedy’s speech demonstrated that the United States was capable of making progress with the Soviets diplomatically and it “ushered in a limited easing of tensions” between the two superpowers (Kimball 3). No longer did the two sides have to go to the brink of war to make progress, and just a few months after the speech, the Limited Test Ban Treaty marked a major breakthrough in Soviet-American affairs.

The Limited Test Ban Treaty became official on October 10, 1963, prohibiting nuclear testing underwater, in space, and in the atmosphere. But the United States and the Soviet Union had discussed a similar agreement for years beforehand. Talks of a test ban first came about in the 1950s when President Eisenhower feared that the Soviets were rapidly catching up with the Americans in nuclear and technological capability. Eisenhower began to back international protests opposing nuclear tests, and fear of the effects of nuclear testing on the environment became more prevalent worldwide. In 1960, representatives from the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union convened in Geneva to discuss a comprehensive test ban. The Americans and the British pushed for on-site inspection of nuclear facilities to ensure that each party complied; however, suspicion and lack of trust led the Soviets to believe that a test ban was not in their interests after all, as they accused the United States of pursuing inspections to merely gain the upper hand in spying (Randolph 2). An incident involving yet another American U-2 plane flying over the Soviet Union on May 1 proved to be the breaking point, and the Soviets officially backed out of the deal (Gerber and Wenger 2). In 1961, once Kennedy took office, talks regarding a test ban heated up again, but the same on-site testing provision prevented a potential treaty. In order to strike a deal, Kennedy would need to gain leverage on the Soviets somehow, and the Cuban Missile Crisis proved to be the perfect opportunity.

The result of the Cuban Missile Crisis directly led to the signing of the Limited Test Ban Treaty because it enhanced Kennedy’s room to negotiate and it forced both sides to realize the potential destruction of nuclear weapons. Prior to the Cuban Missile Crisis, Kennedy did not believe his reputation and policies were strong enough to negotiate with the Soviets. However, after emerging as the hero of the crisis, he no longer had to attempt to display his power in order to deal with the Soviets, and he now stood on relatively equal ground with Khrushchev. Furthermore, Kennedy gained credibility among his own NATO allies, who were impressed with his composure and leadership during the crisis (Gerber and Wenger 7-8). Historian David G. Coleman in particular noticed the Cuban Missile Crisis’ impact on Kennedy’s leadership abilities: “The John F. Kennedy of January 1963 was not the same as the John F. Kennedy who came in office in 1961. He appeared more sure-footed, more confident, more thoughtful, and more at ease with his presidency” (11). The Cuban Missile Crisis also led to the United States and the Soviet Union realizing that easing nuclear tension was essential in the long run. On the day the Crisis ended, Kennedy wrote to Khrushchev, recognizing the importance of taking measures to cut back on nuclear proliferation and testing:

We must devote urgent attention to the problem of disarmament, as it relates to the whole world and also to critical areas. Perhaps now, as we step back from danger, we can together make real progress in this vital field. I think we should give priority to questions relating to the proliferation of nuclear weapons...and to the great effort for a nuclear test ban...The United States will be prepared to discuss these questions urgently, and in a constructive spirit. (Kennedy Letter)

Soon after the crisis, Kennedy added that “it is insane that two men, sitting on opposite sides of the world, should be able to decide to bring an end to civilization” (JFK Library). The final result from Kennedy’s newfound maneuverability and the two nations’ joint realization of the harm that nuclear weapons cause was the Limited Test Ban, signed just a month after Kennedy’s American University address and a year after the Missile Crisis.

Although the treaty fell short of what Kennedy hoped to accomplish, the Test Ban was a landmark achievement and it set the precedent for further disarmament and testing treaties in the following years. The treaty did not prevent other countries from accumulating a nuclear arsenal and it did not hinder the nuclear buildup of the United States or the Soviet Union. However, even while bombs continued to explode underground, the practical and symbolic benefits of the treaty outweighed the drawbacks. First and foremost, atmospheric contamination, which was a major motivating force behind the treaty, was significantly reduced in the following years (Kimball and Wade 2-3). Moreover, in an era where instances of agreement between the Soviets and the Americans were quite rare, the Test Ban represented another case in which the world’s two most powerful countries put their differences aside and found common ground. The treaty also laid the groundwork for future agreements with the Soviets, including the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty and the 1996 Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty: “[The Limited Test Ban] served as a precedent for future nonproliferation and disarmament treaties and an example of bitter adversaries overcoming differences to pursue common interests” (5). Kennedy took great pride in signing the treaty, and he declared the importance of the agreement during the signing, saying: “We shall not regret that we have made this clear and honorable commitment to the cause of man’s survival” (Kennedy Signing Remarks). Ultimately, the test ban was, as Kennedy put it, “an important first step—a step toward peace—a step toward reason—a step away from war” (1).

The time period following the Missile Crisis was an era of détente that quickly escalated in 1979. Due to widespread fear about the “domino effect” of Communism—that it would spread from country to country if not contained—President Johnson ordered troops to Vietnam in 1965 to back South Vietnam and oppose the Northern Communist regime. Although the Americans and Soviets contested each other in Vietnam and although casualties were quite high, the threat of nuclear war was not nearly as high as it was during the Missile Crisis and the War took place on the other side of the world, so Vietnam was therefore a limited conflict. The United States and the Soviet Union also made great strides towards peace and disarmament after the Missile Crisis by signing the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty, which prevented the spread of nuclear weapons, and engaging in the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks, which also called for the reduction of nuclear buildup. In late 1979, however, tensions flared again when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and the United States increasingly moved away from détente. President Ronald Reagan, abandoning the conciliatory tone of Kennedy, referred to the Soviet Union as an “evil empire” in 1982 (Eagleton Institute of Politics 2). Moreover, the United States boycotted the 1980 Moscow Summer Olympics and the Soviets responded with a boycott of their own at the 1984 Los Angeles Summer Olympics. Lastly, the NATO exercise in 1963 from November 7-11, Able Archer 83, simulated a nuclear attack and caused the Soviets to go on high alert in anticipation of a real nuclear strike (CIA). The period of détente initiated by the Cuban Missile Crisis was essentially cast aside by 1979, and tensions between the Americans and the Soviets remained until the conclusion of the Cold War in 1991.

Following the near-disastrous Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, the United States and the Soviet Union began to grasp just how threatening nuclear warfare was to the world. President Kennedy immediately took the initiative in moving towards détente by neutralizing the West Berlin threat, delivering the American University speech, and signing the Limited Test Ban Treaty. Each of these events demonstrated that the Americans were now capable of effectively dealing with the Soviets diplomatically, and a period of limited tension between the two countries lasted until late 1979. It is impossible to know what the world would look like today had the American-Soviet conflict continued to escalate following the Missile Crisis. But given the lack of diplomacy and the dramatic nuclear proliferation at the time, it is reasonable to say that the planet earth would be unrecognizable today if there had not been an easing of tensions. Since the Missile Crisis nearly destroyed the planet, it is difficult to call it a blessing. However, without the Crisis, both sides would have continued to be ignorant in regards to the danger of nuclear warfare, and a dangerous trend of nuclear buildup would have lasted for years to come.

**Word Count: 4,471**

**Bibliography:**

**"A Cold War Conundrum: The 1983 Soviet War Scare." *Central Intelligence Agency*. Central Intelligence Agency, 07 July 2008. Web. 12 Feb. 2014.**

This extensive article compiled by the Central Intelligence Agency described several events in 1983 that caused widespread fear across the world. After working towards détente and remaining relatively peaceful since the Cuban Missile Crisis, the United States and the Soviet Union became increasingly hostile by the 1980s. This article was useful because it provided a comprehensive summary of the renewed tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union and because I used one of the events described, Able Archer 83, to support my argument.

**Boese, Wade, and Kimball, Daryl. "Limited test ban treaty turns 40." *Arms Control Today* Oct. 2003: 37+. *General OneFile*. Web. 21 Jan. 2014.**

This source discussed how the Limited Test Ban Treaty came about and it evaluated the treaty’s overall benefits and drawbacks. The article was quite useful because it had several quotes and examples that back up my argument that the LTBT was, in the end, a major turning point in establishing détente. The article explained how the treaty was significant symbolically as well as practically, as it demonstrated that even bitter rivals like the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. could find common ground.

**"Castro Says Cuban Missile Crisis Helped Generate Detente." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 17 Feb. 1985. Web. 12 Feb. 2014.**

This source was an article from 1985 describing a recent interview with Cuban dictator Fidel Castro. About 20 years earlier, Castro had played a major role in the Cold War, as his country took center stage in the dangerous Cuban Missile Crisis. In the interview, Castro continued to lay the blame on the United States and he acknowledged that the danger of the Missile Crisis was important in establishing détente. Although Castro I agreed with Castro’s take on détente, this source was overall not helpful because it did not offer very specific information and it did not include the entirety of the interview.

**Clavin, Tom. "There Never Was Such a Thing as a Red Phone in the White House."*Smithsonian*. N.p., 19 June 2013. Web. 09 Feb. 2014.**

In this article, author Tom Clavin outlined the history of the communication system between the United States and the Soviet Union. The piece included a section on the installation of the hotline between the White House and the Kremlin. Since the importance of the hotline was part of one of my main arguments, this source was helpful in the end. In the paper, I was to detail a particular instance (6 Day War) in which the hotline was vital in avoiding a potential conflict between the Americans and the Soviets.

**Coleman, David G. *The Fourteenth Day: JFK and the Aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis*. New York: W.W. Norton &, 2012. Print.**

This source has proven invaluable for my paper. In the book, Coleman highlighted that the danger of the Cuban Missile Crisis did not disappear after a deal was struck and he delved into the immediate aftermath of the crisis, focusing on October 1962-February 1963. Coleman expertly used the Kennedy tapes to detail what was happening behind closed doors during both the crisis and the aftermath of the crisis. Also, Coleman briefly discussed the impact of the American University speech and he comprehensively explained the correlation between West Berlin and Cuba during the crisis.

**Croughwell, Thomas J., and M. William Phelps. "Failures of the Presidents: JFK's Bay of Pigs Disaster." *History News Network*. George Mason University, n.d. Web. 08 Dec. 2013.**

This reading was in demonstrating Kennedy’s lack of political maneuverability prior to the Cuban Missile Crisis. Croughwell and Phelps provided a comprehensive summary of the Bay of Pigs debacle, highlighting multiple tactical mistakes by Kennedy, his administration, and the Central Intelligence Agency. The reading offered some disturbing details of the United States’ willingness to abandon the Cuban exiles in order to reduce the political ramifications. This source was very good for basic background information and for displaying how Kennedy was perceived as weak and “green” following this incident.

**Gerber, Marcel, and Andreas Wenger. "John F. Kennedy and the Limited Test Ban Treaty: A Case Study of Presidential Leadership." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 29.2 (1999): 460. *General OneFile*. Web. 11 Dec. 2013.t**

In this article, Gerber and Wenger provided a very thorough overview of the process of one of Kennedy’s greatest achievements: the Limited Test Ban Treaty, signed with the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union in 1963. This source further described the room to negotiate Kennedy established following the Cuban Missile Crisis and how he used this newfound maneuverability to take initiative and change US-USSR relations. The article explained how Khrushchev wouldn’t even consider signing such a deal with the U.S. before the crisis because he didn’t consider Kennedy a credible president, and Kennedy recognized that no progress would be made with the Soviets if he continues to be perceived this way. Overall, this source was quite useful.

**Hershberg, Jim. "The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962: Anatomy of a Controversy." *The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962: Anatomy of a Controversy*. The George Washington University, n.d. Web. 10 Dec. 2013.**

This source examined the complexity of the politics during the final resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Hershberg described how the Cuba for Turkey missile swap came into play, and how the two sides offered conflicting accounts of this deal. While Robert F. Kennedy claimed that he offered an “informal assurance” of the removal of the missiles in Turkey, Russian accounts countered that it was an “explicit promise.” Hershberg also explains how Kennedy carefully maneuvered the final deal to prevent public awareness of the withdrawal in Turkey. This reading will be useful in terms of setting the stage, as Kennedy’s actions regarding Turkey played a huge role in the aftermath of the crisis, which was explored in the paper.

**Jebson, Hugh. "The Cuban Missile Crisis." *Hindsight* Jan. 2004: 18+. *General OneFile*. Web. 23 Nov. 2013.**

In this article, history teacher Hugh Jebson gave an overall summary of the Cuban Missile Crisis with an emphasis on the build-up to the conflict. Jebson started by explaining Fidel Castro’s rise to power and how Americans were economically impacted by this development. By nationalizing the Cuban economy, Castro rid his country of any American influence, which had been prevalent during the rule of General Batista, Castro’s predecessor. Jebson cited this move as the origin of tensions between the United States and Cuba and he then discussed the Bay of Pigs disaster and how the Soviet Union eventually came into play. Finally, Jebson explained how the United States discovered missile sites in Cuba and he gave a brief summary of the 13-day crisis. While this source wasn’t particularly detailed, it was a great starting place for providing context and general information. Jebson effectively and concisely covered a very dense topic.

**Kennedy, John Fitzgerald. “A Strategy of Peace.” American University. Washington, D.C. 10 June 1963. Commencement Address.**

Kennedy’s speech at American University in 1963, titled “A Strategy of Peace”, has been a very helpful primary source because one of my body paragraphs discusses the impact of the speech. In the speech, Kennedy warned of the dangers of nuclear war and he urged Americans to find common ground with the Soviets. The speech was unprecedented in that it humanized and sympathized with the adversary, which few, if any, presidents had ever done. The speech also laid out the necessary first steps to attaining peace, including a hotline between the Kremlin and the White House and a test ban treaty. Overall, this was one of my most valuable sources.

**Kennedy, John Fitzgerald. “Inaugural Address.” United States Capitol. Washington, D.C. 20 January 1961. 1961 Inaugural Address.**

While Kennedy’s inaugural address is not essential to my argument, his line about never fearing to negotiate while never negotiating out of fear was useful in understanding his position when he took office. Khrushchev (along with the rest of the world) had seen Kennedy as an inexperienced and weak president prior to the crisis, so Kennedy therefore had no legitimacy in his desire to negotiate. Following the crisis, however, Kennedy now had political prestige and progress was quickly made.

**Kennedy, John Fitzgerald. Letter to Nikita Khrushchev. 28 Oct. 1962. MS. White House, Washington, D.C.**

This source was a letter from Kennedy to Khrushchev on the day the Missile Crisis was resolved. As opposed to criticizing his rival, Kennedy emphasized the necessity of taking steps to limit nuclear proliferation and testing in the future. Given the near-disastrous outcome of the Crisis, Kennedy recognized that the current path the two nations were on would be fatal in the end. This source was useful because it outlined the correlation between the Missile Crisis and the subsequent Limited Test Ban.

**Kennedy, John Fitzgerald. “Remarks at the Signing of the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.” White House Treaty Room. Washington, D.C. 7 October 1963.**

In this primary source, President Kennedy offered his remarks during the signing of the Limited

Test Ban Treaty in October of 1963. Although the treaty ultimately fell short of what Kennedy

had hoped to accomplish, he nonetheless remained upbeat and emphasized the importance of

striking a deal. This source was useful because it helped back my argument about the

significance of the Test Ban.

**Kimball, Darryl G. "JFK's American University Speech Echoes Through Time." *Arms Control Association*. N.p., n.d. Web. 05 Jan. 2014.**

One of my body paragraphs dealt with the impact of Kennedy’s American University speech in 1963, and this piece offered useful insight to support my argument. The article explained how Kennedy praised and sympathized with the people of the Soviet Union, which was quite uncharacteristic of American presidents at the time. Also unusual was the positive reception in the USSR following the speech, as even Khrushchev himself was impressed. The article also pointed out the speech’s key role in pushing for a test ban. In the end, Kimball hailed Kennedy’s speech as one of the greatest in American history. This source was very useful for discussing the legacy of the speech.

**McGill, David. "The Vietnam War." *Hindsight* Apr. 2006: 26+. *General OneFile*. Web. 12 Feb. 2014.**

Although the Vietnam War did not have a central role in my paper, it was part of my counterargument. This source was therefore helpful because it provided a general summary of the Vietnam War and it effectively painted a picture of the basics of the conflict. McGill started by describing the buildup to the War and he proceeded to make his way through the conflict. Finally, he explained why U.S. forces withdrew after eight years and he discussed the overall impact of the War.

**Pont, Jonathan. "Peace on the brink of war: after home bunkers and duck-and-cover drills, Americans were braced for war in the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. (times past)." *New York Times Upfront* 26 Nov. 2001: 20+. *General OneFile*. Web. 23 Nov. 2013.**

Initially, I considered writing about daily life in the United States during the Cuban Missile Crisis, so this article grabbed my attention. Pont discussed the initial frenzy in the US following Russia’s successful nuclear bomb test in 1949. What Pont called “civil defense” became part of daily life in America, as numerous private and public bomb shelters were established, people flocked to the stores to buy supplies, and people were educated about what to do during a nuclear disaster. Despite that the Cuban Missile Crisis was likely the closest the world came to World War III, Pont claimed that American daily life was considerably more relaxed during the crisis compared to the frenzy in the 1950s. The American government and the population soon learned that nothing could sufficiently protect them from a nuclear disaster, and they deemed that the only solution was to prevent one from occurring. Considering that this source did not deal with my topic, it did not come in handy; however, it was still informative to learn about the overall reaction from the public during the crisis in contrast to the first several years of US-USSR tensions.

**Randolph, Stephen. "The Limited Test Ban Treaty, 1963 - 1961–1968 - Milestones - Office of the Historian." *The Limited Test Ban Treaty, 1963 - 1961–1968 - Milestones - Office of the Historian*. U.S. Department of State Office of the Historian, n.d. Web. 04 Jan. 2014.**

This source offered a thorough summary of the process of the Limited Test Ban Treaty, which was signed in 1963. The article was a nice complement to the piece by Gerber and Wenger because it dealt mostly with the facts and timeline while Gerber and Wenger provided a little more analysis. The article discussed the early obstacles in signing the treaty, including the Soviet Union’s unwillingness to allow on-site inspection, fearing it was merely an attempt by the United States to gain the upper hand and spy on the Soviets. From there, the article explained how the Cuban Missile Crisis “catalyzed” the test ban treaty and how the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union put a comprehensive test ban aside and settled for a limited ban. This source was very useful as the Limited Test Ban was one of my main topics in the paper.

**Rathbone, Mark. "The Cuban missile crisis: who was to blame?" *Hindsight* Sept. 2010: 1+. *General OneFile*. Web. 23 Nov. 2013.**

Historian Mark Rathbone offered a viewpoint contrary to that of most Americans in this article. Following the Cuban Missile Crisis, President Kennedy emerged as a hero in the eyes of the American public and Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev was condemned. Rathbone contended that while Kennedy’s actions during the crisis itself were worthy of merit, his actions prior to the crisis were in large part responsible for the conflict. Specifically, Rathbone criticized Kennedy for deploying missiles in Turkey and attempting to assassinate Castro on several occasions (the most notable being the Bay of Pigs invasion). Rathbone also justified some of Khrushchev’s actions, explaining that missiles in Turkey were just as threatening to the Soviets as missiles in Cuba were to the Americans. The overarching message in this article was to have a balanced view when considering who is responsible for the crisis. This source was useful because it rejected the traditional, biased idea of Kennedy as a hero and Khrushchev as a villain and encouraged the reader to view the situation with an open mind.

**"Ronald Reagan and the End of the Cold War." *Eagleton Institute of Politics*. Rutgers University, n.d. Web. 12 Feb. 2014.**

This article talked about the Ronald Reagan’s presidency in the 1980s. In addition to discussing some of his domestic policies, the piece also mentioned his role in the end of the Cold War. The article did not go too in depth about Reagan involvement in the Cold War so it was not particularly useful.

**Sorensen, Theodore C. "JFK's strategy of peace." *World Policy Journal* 20.3 (2003): 2+. *General OneFile*. Web. 5 Jan. 2014**

This article was a little more in depth than the piece by Kimball and it fills in some of the gaps that Kimball didn’t cover. Similarly, Sorensen considered Kennedy’s American University speech one of the greatest. Sorensen also described the international reaction to the speech in places such as Great Britain and the Soviet Union. Moreover, Sorensen explained how Kennedy admirably chose to lead by example and denounce war and nuclear testing. All in all, this article was a nice complement to Kimball’s piece, and together they provided the basis for my argument on the speech.

**Stein, Janice G., and Richard N. Lebow. "Reagan and the Russians." *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, n.d. Web. 12 Feb. 2014.**

This article discussed the presidency of Ronald Reagan with a focus on his dealings with the Soviet Union during the Cold War. While many claimed that Reagan should have been credited with ending the Cold War, Stein and Lebow argued he merely inflamed the conflict. They explained that Reagan further alienated the Soviet Union by acts such as calling it “an evil empire.” This article was not important to my main argument but it did fit in nicely with my aftermath paragraph on the 1980s.

**"The Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) at a Glance." *Arms Control Association*. N.p., n.d. Web. 12 Feb. 2014.**

The Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty was not crucial to my argument. However, it was one of the examples I used that demonstrated the era of détente following the Cuban Missile Crisis. This article offered a very basic summary of the agreement, which called for preventing the spread of nuclear weapons. Moreover, nuclear superpowers, including the United States and the Soviet Union, were forced to vow that they would work towards disarmament in the future. This article was slightly helpful in the end but it was by no means essential to my paper.

**Thrall, Nathan, and Jesse James Wilkins. "Kennedy talked, Khrushchev triumphed; Failed diplomacy." *International Herald Tribune*23 May 2008: 6. *General Business ASAP*. Web. 8 Dec. 2013.**

In this relatively brief *New York Times* article, Thrall and Wilkins detailed the first meeting between President Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev at the Vienna Summit in June 1961. Kennedy’s inaugural message of never negotiating out of fear while never fearing to negotiate was noted, and they considered this belief the biggest factor in Kennedy’s decision to meet with Khrushchev, despite numerous warnings from his advisors. Thrall and Wilkins explain how Kennedy was thoroughly pushed around and dominated at this meeting and how Khrushchev exited the meeting “elated” due to Kennedy’s apparent weakness and inexperience. Ultimately, this first impression of Kennedy emboldened Khrushchev and factored into his decision to move nuclear missiles into Cuba. This source was helpful in setting the stage for the paper, as part of what I will be arguing is that Kennedy’s “victory” during the crisis provided him with political maneuverability that he certainly didn’t possess prior to the crisis.

**Bibliographic Reflection**

When the Junior Thesis was first introduced in class four months ago, I was not feeling very upbeat, and for good reason. I had listened to the various complaints of last year’s juniors and I knew it would be a very long journey. And a long journey it was. I remember my pessimism during the early stages of research, as I thought there was no chance I would come up with a satisfactory paper. Now, however, after countless hours of work, I am m happy to say that I am pleased with the final outcome.

Ever since middle school, the 20th century had captivated my attention far more than other periods in United States history. So, going into the thesis, I had always assumed that my topic would involve the 1900s. My enrollment in Close-Up last year was ultimately the inspiration behind my topic. During class, we discussed the Cold War in depth, and one of the events we focused on was the Cuban Missile Crisis. Prior to that class, I had very limited knowledge on the Crisis, and I was shocked to discover just how close the world had come to nuclear annihilation in 1962. After narrowing down my potential thesis topics, I began to read everything I could on the Crisis, ranging from encyclopedias to scholarly articles. This research prompted several questions I could potentially explore, and it took months to finally narrow down my topic to the Crisis’ impact on the consequent years of détente.

Throughout the process, my stepdad was someone I could rely on for assistance. Aside from being an author, he has a very thorough understanding of United States history and he, too, has an interest in the Cold War. We had several conversations prior to my topic selection, and once I decided to research the Missile Crisis, he offered some guidance every now and then.

I conducted my research using a variety of scholarly sources. The Minutemen Library database was a very helpful resource in finding authentic and reliable articles on various subtopics within my topic. Often, when I was stuck on something, I would explore the database for a while to see what I came up with. The Cuban Missile Crisis exhibition at the Kennedy Library was also a useful resource for the project. The exhibit features recordings and documents outlining the 13-day standoff and it is set up in a way that makes it easy to understand. The exhibit also included primary source documents that I used to support my arguments. In terms of general statistics and facts, government websites, such as the CIA website and the State Department website, we quite helpful. Moreover, one book outlining the immediate aftermath of the crisis, *The Fourteenth Day*, was very useful because provided an in-depth description of multiple aftermath events that transpired. A couple of these events, including the “neutralization” of Berlin and the American University speech, were central to my argument.

Overall, the most difficult process for me was compiling the detailed outline because of the abundance of information I had. I honestly didn’t know where to start with the outline, and it was a very frustrating and time-consuming experience. However, after completing the outline, the rough draft was not too laborious because all of my information was in one place and it was put together fairly well. I wouldn’t go as far to say that I enjoyed the writing the rough outline, but it was certainly less stressful than writing the outline. I arrived at the final draft by studying the feedback I received and doing more research. I realized that I needed stronger evidence to make my argument more convincing, so I did a lot of digging online. Also, I went through my entire rough draft and cut words and passages that were unnecessary. In the end, it took a lot of fine-tuning and more hours than I wanted, but I completed the final draft and I was very pleased with the result. Given how much of a burden the paper has been these last few months, I am very relieved and satisfied that the process is finally over.

process was fun? What was not fun at all? How did you arrive at the final

draft?