

Behavioral Logic of Ussr and Usa in the Cuban Missile Crisis: Idea and Interest Perspectives

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Abstract: This article reviews and explains the behavioral logic of the Soviet Union and the United States in the Cuban Missile Crisis from the perspectives of thoughts and profits. Through the study of the administrative idea and interest pursuit of the two countries, the author further discusses the behavior logic of USSR and USA in the final step of the crisis, which is ending the game with shaking hands. Combined with the analysis on structural dynamics of the chicken game, the article concludes that the confrontation between great powers is irrational and risky. A “chicken game” would force both sides to constantly hover on the edge of danger, and the consequences of exerting extreme pressure are unpredictable, making not only the other side, but also oneself, or even the whole world unsafe. In the era of globalization, countries, especially major countries, should actively promote the establishment of more positive international relations. While dealing with international conflicts, all countries should learn to remain calm and view international relations from a long-term strategic perspective, keeping the disagreements among different countries under control.

1. Introduction

After World War II, the Soviet Union and the United States, representing the two opposing camps, relying on each huge military strength, launched a worldwide struggle for the sphere of influence. To maintain the sphere of influence for a long time required the consideration of many factors such as economic cost and military projection ability; actually, the two camps had already reached the limit of expansion, which was also the fundamental reason why both USSR and USA finally fell into the mire of war. At that time, the Soviet Union deploying missiles in Cuba undoubtedly caused a great crisis to the United States. So once getting know the real situation, the U.S. immediately exerted pressure and started confrontation with USSR at all costs. This was a severe game. The Cuban Missile Crisis, the most intense direct confrontation during the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, almost brought all mankind into the abyss of nuclear war. Fortunately, the crisis was eventually averted when the Soviet missiles were withdrawn from Cuba.

2. Behavior Logical of USSR's Deployment of Missiles in Cuba

2.1 From the Perspective of Administrative Concepts of the Soviet Leader and Its Leading Group

Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev's personal ruling philosophy played an important role in influencing the deployment of Soviet missiles in Cuba. After Khrushchev came to power, he always regarded the Soviet Union as an excellent example in the socialist camp. In addition to his own strong characteristics, the vigorous development of the national-liberation movement in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and the growth of the Soviet Union and socialist forces also brought Khrushchev strong confidence. In 1958, Khrushchev created the Berlin Crisis again, claiming that Berlin was "a malignant tumor" which needed to be surgically operated on, and he asked the Western powers should withdraw their troops from Berlin within six months.[1] In a word, Khrushchev had serious disposition defects in his diplomatic activities, especially his feisty and moody governing style, which caused his negative administrative ideas and also some serious impacts on the diplomatic activities of the Soviet Union. And it was Khrushchev's concept of governing that led him to mis-underestimate the United States' determination to retaliate so then to begin shipping missiles and bombers to Cuba, which culminated a strategic rivalry that had once been intense with the United States during the cold war.

The Soviet Union provoked a dispute with the United States in Cuba not only because of the views of Khrushchev alone, but also because of the views of the entire Soviet leading group. The victory of the Cuban Revolution and the Bay of Pigs Invasion made the Soviet leading group realized that as the dominant force in the socialist camp, it was obliged for USSR to further help Cuba stabilize its revolutionary achievements, support Cuba's economic development, and turn Cuba into an important "pawn" in its rivalry with the United States. At the same time, in order to protect Cuba, several Soviet officials considered that the deployment of missiles in Cuba was necessary, and that they could easily lose Cuba if some decisive measures were not taken to protect it.[2] It was this kind of thinking that accelerated the Soviet Union's determined pace of deploying missiles and bombers in Cuba.

2.2 From the Perspective of the State Interests and Its Global Strategy Goals

The influence of ideas is inevitably significant, but it is also crucial to analyze the behavior logic of the Soviet Union from the perspective of interests. From the perspective of direct interest, Cuban military value was quite obvious. Once the Soviet Union deployed missiles in Cuba, for the United States, its early warning time of incoming missiles would be greatly reduced, from 15 to 2-3 minutes.[3] As a result, on that occasion when there was a huge gap in military and economic power between the two superpowers in the world, the Soviet Union could make up for its inadequacy of strategic forces if it set down missiles in Cuba, because its strategic threat to the United States would be doubling. More possibly, it would affect other countries' perceptions of Soviet power and the strategic balance between Western camp and socialist camp, which, to some extent, enhanced the competitive advantage of the Soviet Union in its strategic struggle with the United States. At the same time, the Soviet Union could put more pressure on the United States by placing missiles in Cuba, in order to force the U.S. to make concessions on issues that the two sides had not made an agreement yet for a long time, such as the Berlin issue and Treaty of Versailles.

3. Behavior Logic Analysis of the United STATES' Exerting Extreme Stress Against the Soviet Union

3.1 From the Perspective the NATION's Idea/Ideology

Cuba, which had turned to be dependent on Soviet Union and the socialist camp, had been a huge trouble for the United States in a long time. The more they slice it, the redder it gets".[4] Out of the hostility to socialism, Cuba's allegiance to the Soviet Union was unacceptable for and strongly opposed by the United States. The U.S.'s view at the time was quite clear and firm, which was that "Soviet power in the Western Hemisphere was not negotiable".[5] While the occurrence of the crisis exactly gave the U.S. an opportunity to completely solve the Cuban issue.

3.2 From the Perspective of Safety Interests

The Soviet Union's deployment of missiles in Cuba brought great threat and challenge to the United States. The Cuba missiles fundamentally altered the complexion of the nuclear rivalry between the U.S. and USSR, which up to that point had been dominated by the Americans. At a critical moment that could lead to radical changes in the world pattern, the United States had to worry that if it adopted the appeasement policy to the Soviet threat this once, more threats from socialist camp might follow in the near future. The behavior of the Soviet Union hid unimaginable danger, threatening the U.S.'s safety interests which is the foundation of the nation's permanence. Thus, in such a crisis, the United States had to make resolute and strong action rather than ignore it.

4. Reasons for the Eventual Compromise between Ussr and Usa

As a result, USA repeatedly made negotiations with USSR and made rational decisions, though it was incensed many times by Khrushchev's provocative act; while Khrushchev also repeatedly made compromises and concessions at the same time. In general, the two sides stabilized at the extreme level, and fortunately, there was no outbreak of a nuclear war. While thinking about the reason for the two great powers' eventual compromise, the ideas and interests are still vital analysis perspectives.

4.1 From the Perspective of the Decision MAKERS' Ideas

In USSR's side, Khrushchev's repeated concessions during the crisis were the result of his own ideas. On the morning of October 27, the Kremlin received an urgent letter announcing a possible American air strike and invasion of Cuba within 24 to 72 hours.[6] Also, some related military intelligence vitally troubled Khrushchev and Soviet military. They were afraid that if USA air stroke or invaded Cuba, the Soviet military would have to launch an unprecedented nuclear holocaust with the United States. At that time, the affair had already backfired, and the escalation forced Khrushchev to make concessions.[7]

As for Kennedy, his personal ideas played a significant role in preventing a nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union. Although the U.S. military had been ready for fighting and also noticed that the Soviet Union's deployment of missiles in Cuba gave the United States a rare opportunity to attack Cuba and topple the Castro regime, Kennedy realized this kind of action would risk too much. As an experienced leader, Kennedy showed his excellent prudence at that crucial time. He drew on his knowledge of history to reiterate his belief in not going to war and to analyze the huge military risk of attacking Cuba. Robert Kennedy, President Kennedy's twin brother, then attorney general, once mentioned that "[d]uring the [Cuban] crisis, President Kennedy spent more time trying to determine the effect of particular course of action on Khrushchev or the Russians than on any other phase of what he was doing." [8] Kennedy's choice of blockade was certainly wise, because the blockade was the first step in military action.

Meanwhile, the blockade, on the one hand, would not provoke the Soviet Union to much; on the other hand, if Khrushchev unimpressed and still did not withdraw the missile, the United States would take tougher measures, which not only enabled the United States to skillfully shift from strategic passivity to strategic initiative, but also provided an opportunity to ease its tense relationship with the Soviet Union.[9] At each stage in the crisis, Kennedy gave his opponent some time to reflect and react. It also could be seen from the countermeasures he had drawn up that Kennedy was always careful and never led to bridges being burned or relationships severed. Hence, guided by the idea of thinking about not only his own country, but also other countries, Kennedy displayed his prudence and reason during making political decisions. Embracing the idea of mutual tolerance and harmony, Kennedy made great contributions to prevent a terrible nuclear war.

4.2 From the Perspective of National Interests

Both USSR and USA's efforts to avoid a nuclear war certainly had their interests in mind. The destructive consequences of nuclear war in both sides made the United States and the Soviet Union do not choose to cross the death line of the Cold War. According to intelligence estimates, the Soviet Union had about half the Soviet forces deployed in Cuba, with potentially catastrophic consequences that would kill more than 80 million Americans.[10] Hence, if some actions of USA caused USSR's powerful military to counterattack, it would cause serious damage to the interests of USA itself. At the same time, for the Soviet Union, it could not defeat the United States because of the huge gap in their nuclear powers. The ratio of nuclear forces between USA and USSR was 4 to 1 (294:75).[11] The gap was stark, and the Soviet Union was also aware of its economic and military weakness relative to the United States; if it really developed a nuclear war with the United States, it would certainly be heavy losses for the Soviet Union. All up, it was based on their own interests on security, military and many other fields that both USA and USSR decided to take a step back at an important juncture, avoiding a nuclear war.

5. Lessons of the Cuban Missile Crisis

In this game, USSR and USA are on a collision course. Conflict is the worst outcome; while the defection of one side and the compromise of the other seem to achieve a Nash equilibrium, but in fact this would risk setting off a new cycle of confrontation because the game between USSR (or we say Russia nowadays) and USA, two major countries in the world, must always keep repeating. Therefore, it is the mutual compromise that is the best solution for this game. From the Cuban Missile Crisis or this kind of Chicken games, there are generally two lessons. Firstly, even nuclear powers or hegemony cannot do whatever they want, especially when both sides in the fight are nuclear powers. A country should not threaten the national security and core interests of other countries for the sake of its own unilateral interests, otherwise it may trigger counteractions from the other side at any cost. And the consequences of extreme confrontation are unimaginable and could bring the disaster of destruction to all mankind. Hence, while making foreign policies, the country must be cautious, farsighted, and able to comprehensively evaluate the overall political situation. Secondly, in international conflicts, constant confrontation between countries cannot solve disagreements and the key issue; instead, negotiation and consultation are the best way to resolve conflicts and disputes, so as to avoid further deterioration of the situation.

6. Conclusion

Influenced by the ideas (involved in a certain country, national leader or leading group's concepts) and interests (involved in safety, economy, military interests, or global strategy goals),

USSR and USA started and also ended the Cuban Missile Crisis. 13 days later, a nuclear war was averted successfully, which must be one of the great blessings in the human history. Nowadays, it is true that more and more people are living in peace, However, many of the contradictions among countries, especially among the major ones, are sharp and their relations are complicated. Games of chicken, like the Cuban Missile Crisis, continue to play out frequently between major powers nowadays, and all these are dangerous moves. The leaders of the countries involved need to remember the nuclear-holocaust shadow that the Cuban Missile Crisis had cast on the world, and to try to achieve a balance among different ideas and interests of each country, promoting global governance reform and keeping major global disagreements or conflicts under control. It is truly hard, but that is what we are making efforts to do.

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