The Short-term Effects Of The Cuban Missile Crisis On The Cold War

Identification and Evaluation of Sources

In my essay I will be discussing: “What were the short-term effects of the Cuban Missile Crisis on the Cold War”. I will be looking at the outcome from the main leaders Kennedy, Khrushchev and Castro’s point of view and will bring up two of the main agreements between the Soviet Union and the US. To guide me, I have used different sources, including “The Cold War- A History Through Documents” by Edward H. Judge and John W. Langdon and JFK Library. These sources were rich with the information I was searching for which means a great deal of my research relies on them being truthful. This is the reason for their investigation.

“The Cold War” is a secondary source containing primary sources. It consists of various documents recorded at the time of the Cold war but also contains secondary source information between the documents. JFK Library is a secondary source in tribute to John F Kennedy. The website contains aspects of JFK’s life and discusses his failures and successes. It is organized by the JFK Library and museum located in Boston and has given me valuable information about the life of John F. Kennedy and his involvement in the Cold War.

“The Cold War- A History Through Documents” (1999):

The Cold War- A History Through Documents was written in 1999 by John Langdon and Edward Judge. Langdon is an ex- soldier who served in the U.S. Army Reserve for six years during the Cold War who later began teaching modern history. He was president of the New York State Association of European Historians in 1997 and has received several awards and titles.[footnoteRef:1] Judge got his Ph.D. in history in 1975 from the University of Michigan and is specialized in The Cold War and Russia. Judge has also received numerous awards for his achievements and passion for educating.[footnoteRef:2] The fact that the origin of the source are two authors that are well educated gives the source a great value. Both men were born in the mid-1940s meaning they grew up during the cold war and experienced it first-hand. They were not however, politicians or worked with politics in any way. They gain a lot of their knowledge from secondary sources, giving a limitation to the contents of the book which are not official documents. The purpose of the source is solely to educate. The authors are both professors with a passion for history and want with this book to give others a broader knowledge of what happened between the different leaders during the Cold War. There is not much room for bias in the content as it mainly contains primary source information in the form of documents. That means that the authors’ perspectives are not enhanced, giving the content a great value and trustworthiness.

JFK Library:

JFK Library is a website run by the library and museum dedicated to President John F Kennedy. This website was used in my investigation to for example research the nuclear test ban treaty. The article does not reveal its specific author which could be viewed as a limitation of the origin

as we do not know where it comes from. However, director of the website, Alan Price is a value to the origin of the source as he has a well-educated and trusted background. Due to his background being so trustworthy, we can assume that the articles on his webpage are also.[footnoteRef:3] The purpose of this specific part of the website is to inform the public about the treaty and educate them on the difficulties and successes that followed regarding it. This is a value as the purpose is to educate people which most likely means they provide them with accurate, trustworthy information, instead of an opinion. It can however also be a limitation. The website is run and administered by Americans which could possibly make the content biased, when referring to American successes and failures of the nuclear test ban treaty. Although the website is based on facts, a slight overstatement or understatement of events or achievements could easily be added. A great value of the content is that the treaty is described in detail and gives a clear perspective of what happened during negotiations. This allows the reader to fully comprehend the significance of it.

Investigation

Never has the world been closer to nuclear war as it was 13 days in October 1962. The Soviet Union and the US, both great nations, challenged each other immensely and almost let the rest of the world pay the price. The world held its breath as negotiations were made and threats eventually withdrawn from both sides, but although the battle had been fought and the guns put down for the time being, the “war” between the two nations was far from over. All conflicts have consequences, big or small. There are consequences that affect a situation straight away or in the years just after the event, and there are long-term consequences.

When the crisis had been settled, both sides saw themselves as victorious in one way or another. They returned home claiming victory, a devastating crisis had been avoided and it was all thanks to them. The nations now also had more faith in their leaders and learned to trust and respect them. Both the American President John F Kennedy and the Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev realized how close to nuclear war they had been and felt the great need to reduce hostilities and tensions between the superpowers. The ban of nuclear testing had already been negotiated in May 1955 and testing was suspended from November 1958 to September 1961 while negotiations were made, and decisions taken.[footnoteRef:4] President Kennedy believed that if nuclear weapons continued being tested, more countries would acquire them and learn to use them. He therefore agreed and supported the ban. Khrushchev was harder to convince however. He wanted to continue with the testing and refused to back down. In June 1963, after the crisis, negotiations were once again opened. The need for a test ban was now greater than ever, not just to secure the safety of the people and avoid nuclear war but also to save the earth from poisoning from the toxins[footnoteRef:5] Letters and negotiations were sent back and forth and after only 12 days a ban for nuclear testing under the water, in space and in the atmosphere was put in place.[footnoteRef:6] The treaty was officially signed in Moscow on August 3rd, 1963 by the US Secretary, Soviet Foreign Minister and Foreign Secretary.[footnoteRef:7] It was not however signed by France who also possessed nuclear weapons.[footnoteRef:8] This new arrangement with a new mood of negotiation was an important short- term consequence of the crisis, in an attempt to preserve peace. [4: https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/jfk-in-history/nuclear-test-ban-treaty] [5: Judge, E. H., & Langdon, J. W. (1999). pg. 124] [6: https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/jfk-in-history/nuclear-test-ban-treaty] [7: https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/jfk-in-history/nuclear-test-ban-treaty] [8: Judge, E. H., & Langdon, J. W. (1999). pg. 128]

To increase communication and reduce the risk of a conflict even further, the superpowers also agreed to establish a hotline between Washington and Moscow[footnoteRef:9]. The former style of communication had been very inefficient and might have been a cause for the provocation of both leaders during the crisis. With the hotline, Kennedy and Khrushchev could be connected in seconds by just picking up a phone. This was intended to be used only in emergencies and was meant to help ensure confusion and misinterpretation would not aggravate or interfere, should another crisis occur[footnoteRef:10]. Another step towards world peace had been achieved in the aftermath of the crisis. [9: https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/hotline-established-between-washington-and-moscow] [10: Phillips, S., In Collier, M., & In Lewis, E. (2001). pg. 114]

For Kennedy, the outcome of the crisis was perceived as a great success. The people had begun questioning Kennedys authority and capability of running the country. He had had difficulties with failures such as the Bay of Pigs in 1961[footnoteRef:11] and was blamed for causing trouble with Cuba, therefore causing the crisis[footnoteRef:12]. When the conflict was over, many applauded Kennedy and praised the way he saved them. Kennedy had the option to attack the Soviets right away which most definitely would have led to nuclear war, but he handled things in a calm manner which relaxed the tensions for a while. The US had now however irritated their communistic neighbor and promised not to invade Cuba, making their many attempts at removing Castro from power meaningless.[footnoteRef:13] [11: https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/jfk-in-history/the-bay-of-pigs] [12: https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/heroesvillains/g2/] [13: https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/jfk-in-history/cuban-missile-crisis]

When negotiations had been made and the missiles removed from Cuba, Khrushchev was seen as a coward mainly by his own people who were disappointed in him. Although he had helped prevent a nuclear disaster, Khrushchev was the man who had backed down and abandoned Cuba which made the USSR also seem like cowards. Even if he wanted it to seem like a victory, Soviet officials saw otherwise and forced him into retirement just two years after the crisis as he was seen unfit to lead the Soviet Union due to his reckless decision-making.[footnoteRef:14][footnoteRef:15] He had however achieved more than the people were led to believe. It was not until 1968 the US public was made aware that the end of the crisis had made Kennedy remove US missiles from Turkey, facing the USSR. This information made the crisis a bigger victory for the Soviets than they had initially thought.[footnoteRef:16] [14: https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/us-history/postwarera/1960s-america/a/the-cuban-missile-crisis] [15: http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/khrushchev_nikita.shtml] [16: Phillips, S., In Collier, M., & In Lewis, E. (2001). pg.113]

Fidel Castro, the leader of Cuba, was very unhappy regarding the handling of the crisis. Kennedy and Khrushchev negotiated over Castro’s head and never let him have any say in the discussions at all.[footnoteRef:17] Although the crisis concerned him and his country, he had no say in the outcome. When Khrushchev then backed down and removed the missiles from Cuba, Castro felt even more betrayed as he wanted Khrushchev to fire the missiles and attack the US.[footnoteRef:18] When all was settled, one could argue that Castro had gained something as well. Kennedy agreed to leave Cuba alone and not attempt to invade them any longer. [17: https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/castro-and-cold-war/] [18: https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/castro-and-cold-war/]

The Cuban Missile Crisis made the whole world hold its breath. It was a situation that could have ended much different from what happened, and we should be grateful that it did not. The

crisis was a big wake up call for many and brought several consequences with it. If the leaders could not learn to cooperate it had now been shown that disaster could strike.

The outcome of the crisis can be summarized by stating that the different leaders all won in different ways, although that was not the initial perspective. Hopefully the world will learn from its mistakes and realize that we are united as human beings. Kennedy, Khrushchev and Castro may have felt differently about the outcome of the crisis. They all however achieved to prevent a nuclear war which is an outstanding outcome no matter what they themselves believed. Cooperation and communication are important, which they have perfectly well demonstrated.

Reflection

Historians around the world use many techniques to acquire information they need to recall issues from the past. Gaining information on the past is a difficulty as many obstacles stand in the way of finding trustworthy sources of information containing reliable artifacts. Examples of this can be as follows:

Biased sources and information are big issues that historians face. Many historians might sit down for interviews with people who either lived through the event being investigated or people who have primary source information. Although what these sources say may be true, there most probably are cases of bias within their stories. These biased perspectives or opinions may not always be obvious which will create a false image of the investigated event. Situations may also have been interpreted differently by different people making the same story of an event very different depending on who the historian questions.

It can be hard for historians to select relevant sources for their investigations. How do they know what they find out is important for the progress or outcome of the event they are studying? Looking through old documents can be very exciting, but which ones are important enough to be brought up in history books? Historians must be careful with what they emphasize in their studies, avoiding any unnecessary, irrelevant details. Some details of events may lack sources, making it impossible for historians to even discover them, also causing an issue.

If we look at this specific study, there were some difficulties here as well with acquiring information. I was lucky enough to find great sources with primary information. There are however difficulties with these primary sources as well. They can, just like interviews and other statements be biased and one sided. Fortunately, referring to A History Through Documents views of not one but two of the world leaders views and letters which gives us a proper perspective of what respective side believed. I had a hard time knowing what relevant consequences of the crisis were and therefore what should be brought up. Perhaps further consequences exist that are not documented and therefore unreachable.

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Books

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