

featurette

WHY THE CUBAN BLOCKADE?

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Note: The writer does not claim originality for all views contained herein. This effort is a result of discussions with Professors Davy, Baird, Pocklington, and Linton of the Department of Political Economy. The final phrasing and conclusions must, however, be the writer's responsibility.

"Therefore, in the defense of our own security and the security of the entire western hemisphere . . ." President Kennedy with these words initiated action to prevent the build-up of Soviet missile bases in Cuba.

This action, in blunt terminology, is a naval blockade of Cuba to attempt to prevent Russian missile build-up on the Caribbean Island.

It is wise to explore the possible basis for this drastic

U.S. action. The reason given by President Kennedy for his "brinkmanship" was that the arms build-up on Cuba no longer was defensive but had become offensive. As such Cuba posed a strategic military threat to U.S. security. This view appears superficially plausible but is subject to several weaknesses.

FAITH IN TOYS

First, it has been stated time and again by both sides that existing war weapons could offer massive retaliation. Either military experts are over-zealous in their faith in their toys or Cuba militarily is non-strategic. (One must not however overlook the possibility that the imperfection of nuclear weapons could give the USSR an advantage in being located so close to the United States.)

Second, the professed suddenness of the realization by the United States of the "offensive" weapon buildup is tenuous. The United

States has stated publicly that it has been aware for some time that Soviet arms were being deployed in Cuba.

All of this presupposes that in modern warfare the offense-defense distinction can still be made.

NO NICER TARGET

Third, Cuba defensively is poorly located from the Soviet point of view. If American defenses were so oriented, no nicer target than Cuba could exist. One must not neglect however the possibility of American vulnerability from Cuba; a threat her defenses are not primarily designed to meet.

The above incomplete reasoning suggests more complex and vital reasons for the drastic nature of Kennedy's action. Consider these possibilities. First from a strategic point of view Cuba may be insignificant, but from a national and international political standpoint the opposite may be true.

Both the United States and

the Soviet Union are vitally concerned with international prestige. By building Cuban missile bases the USSR has again tested the sometimes spongy American line.

In retaliation Kennedy decided to draw a hard line. The long espoused American "hold the line" policy was tested in a place where the Soviets could become involved only with the United States—not directly with other Western powers, as would have been the case in Berlin.

Second, there is some feeling that other Western powers—possibly West Germany—were questioning the right of the United States to lead the free world when she dealt so gingerly with the Cuban issue.

PUSHED AROUND

Third, a major power must retain some degree of self-respect. The spectre of the great United States of America being pushed around by any insignificant island—though admittedly under Soviet direction—is a hard pill to swallow.

Fourth, Soviet pressure in Cuba inviting United States action could do two things: relieve the pressure of world opinion against the Soviets in other trouble areas, and give them a strong bargaining position,

for example, an East German peace treaty.

The Kennedy administration's apparent lack of action in the Cuban case has been singled out as a major issue in the congressional elections by the Republicans and some conservative Democrats. That public irritation about Cuba is running high is not questioned.

MEET THE THREAT

Thus, politically, some action was necessary. A blockade was the least that Kennedy could do in demonstrating concretely that he intended to meet the threat.

The fact that 36 hours elapsed between the president's speech and the implementation of the blockade suggests that some hope was held that a solution could be found in the United Nations before action was necessary.

The by-passing of the United Nations may be explained by strong election pressure on the home front.

Cuba has always been a special problem to the United States. To Kennedy it is a particularly soft spot in view of an earlier abortive invasion. Americans—and mankind—are on the line.



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