

# **The Cuban Missile Crisis: A Case of Deterrence or Compellence?**

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## Introduction

The Cuban missile crisis is without doubt one of the most-tense moments of the Cold War. The attempt by the Soviets to deploy nuclear weapons on Cuban soil triggered one of the most dangerous crises of that time. According to George and Smoke (1974, p. 447), the United States and the Soviet Union have never been closer to a military conflict that could have led to nuclear destruction.

There was a long run-up, months prior to the crisis as a missile gap that was favouring the United States emerged and the idea of missile deployment was being discussed within the Soviet leadership. Since Khrushchev personally overplayed the Soviet hand on missiles he had a particular reason to outweigh this gap. Meanwhile, Cuban-American relations were also quite tense. The United States was frustrated by the Bay of Pigs (1961) fiasco but had by no means given up on its intentions to overthrow Castro's regime. There had been no actual decision in Washington to attack Cuba at that time but there were plans directing towards overthrowing the Cuban regime. This, amongst other circumstances, led to the Cuban and Soviet assumption that an attack from the United States on Cuba was not unimaginable. The Cubans sought Soviet assistance to prevent or to meet an American attack. Because of this, the idea came up to deploy missiles on Cuba. In this way the strategic balance would be more in favour for the Soviet Union and it would serve as a deterrent to an American attack on Cuba (Garthoff, 1992, pp. 42-43). As the decision was made, missiles left their Soviet ports and went for Cuba. These events led to what is now known as the Cuban missile crisis.

Luckily it didn't come to an actual nuclear war but it did become an interesting matrix of discussion about the causes, origin, and the progress of the event. A specific subject of interest here is the use of force to make a state comply to another state's will. According to Schelling (1966, p. 3) it is namely "the threat or damage, or more the damage to come, that can make someone yield or comply". This use of force elaborates itself further in the distinction between deterrence and compellence.

Deterrence means that nuclear weapons are used to restrain an opponent from launching an attack (Merrill & Peleg, 1984, p. 21). Or, as Huth & Russett (1984, p. 498) describe it: "the threat to use force as a response as a way of preventing the first use of force by someone else". Much has been written about deterrence theory and it has also been one of the most influential thoughts within the American study of International Relations. Especially during the Cold War, deterrence theory became even more influential and it is hard to imagine that deterrence theory could have grown so rapidly if it wasn't for the Cold War (Jervis, 1979, p. 290).

On the other side, there is compellence theory. Compellence means that (nuclear) weapons or violence are employed or are threatened to be used in order to secure some political gain. Instead of convincing the other party to refrain from action, the nuclear capability is used to compel it to make the other party do something. It is a more active form of influence (Merrill & Peleg, 1984, p. 22).

There has been much debate about these concepts in relation to the Cuban missile crisis. Several authors argue that this is a deterrence case while others claim that one must see it as compellence. Still, there is not much comparative work about this topic. Therefore, the following research question is posed: Is the Cuban missile crisis (1962) a case of deterrence or compellence?

This research is relevant because in a system of states, the use of force generally discriminates between peace and war. The grey zone that is in between those two concepts, the situation wherein the threat of violence -more than its mere application – is the critical variable is the situation where international politics often takes place. There has been ongoing research for decades but the linkage between deterrence and compellence remains largely unexplored (Sperandei, 2006, p. 253). This linkage between the two concepts can be quite interesting since Schelling (1966, pp. 80) claims that the Cuban missile crisis is a good example of the fluidity that sets in once passive deterrence had failed. Also, the fact that there is not much comparative work about this topic makes the research relevant because in this way it can be investigated which assumptions and characteristics can be used before calling something a deterrence or compellence case.

## **Methodology**

For this thesis, two different models will be used as the basis for this analysis. These models are the deterrence game model and the compellence game model, as shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2. First, both models will be explained and after that the arguments of two articles will be put next to the model. These two articles are just for the sake of the argument as in the analysis other articles will be used to expand the argument. Both of these models are formal models. This means that they can only explain the outcome of a specific event or situation. There is deliberately chosen for the option to leave out the preferences and utilities of both players, as well as the bottom-subgame and top-subgame. This is because it otherwise would be game theory instead of a formal model.

### *Deterrence Game Model and Compellence Game Model*

The deterrence game model has two players, the attacker (player 1) and the defender (player 2). Usually, if these models are applied to the Cuban missile crisis, player 1 is the Soviet Union and player 2 is the United States. But as will be discussed later, this doesn't always have to be this way. Within this game there are three possible outcomes, namely preserving the status quo, unilateral destruction and mutual destruction. Player 1 has two options in this situation, attacking or doing nothing. Doing nothing will mean that the status quo is preserved. If player 1 decides to attack it will either cause unilateral destruction or mutual destruction. Important the note that the essence of deterrence is that there is a possibility of a credible strike back. This means that if the Soviet-Union decides to attack both players will suffer. Equally important to note is that with deterrence the threat is in the hands of player 2. This is because player 2 has the option to act upon the threat or not.

The compellence game model also has two players, the persuader (player 1) and the opponent (player 2). If these models are applied to the Cuban missile crisis, player 1 is the United States and player 2 is the Soviet Union. Within this game there are also three possible outcomes, namely preserving the status quo, a new status quo or a military conflict. Again, player 1 has two options, attacking or doing nothing. In this case, doing nothing will mean that the status quo is preserved and attacking will either lead to a new status quo or a military conflict. Within the compellence game the threat is in the hands of player 1. The difference here is that, as mentioned before, in the deterrence game model player 1 is the Soviet-Union and in the compellence game model player 1 is the United States.

### *Deterrence*

As for the deterrence game model, the chapter from George and Smoke (1974) about the Cuban missile crisis will be used. In this article it is argued that that the Cuban missile crisis is a deterrence case. In late august 1962 U2-flights over Cuba obtained photographic verification of surface-to-air missiles (SAMs). It was proof that the Soviet Union had plans to deploy (nuclear) weapons on Cuba.

### Deterrence Game

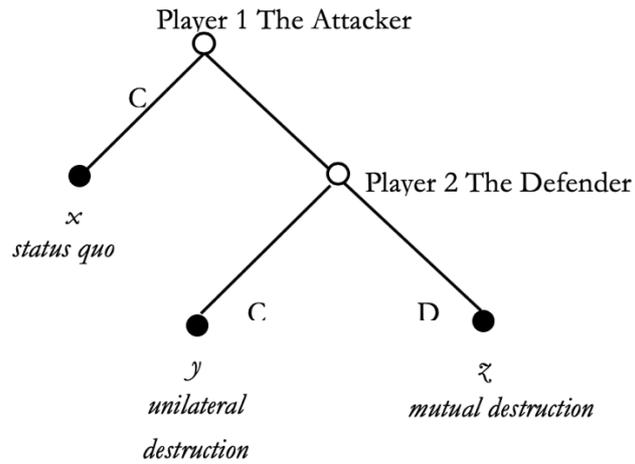


Figure 1: Deterrence Game Model

(Pellikaan, 2019)

### Compellence Game

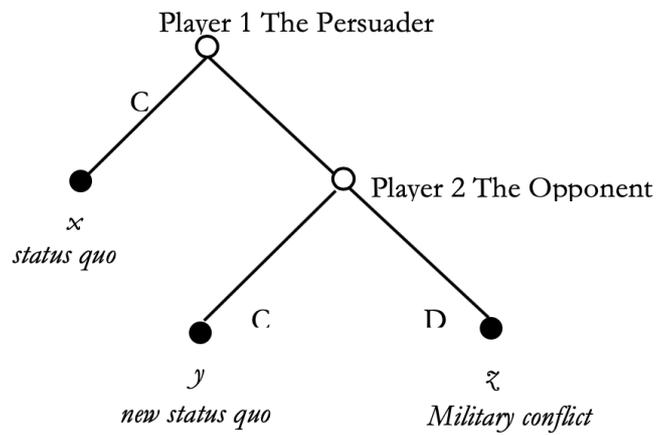


Figure 2: Compellence Game Model

(Pellikaan, 2019).

This situation can be seen, according to George and Smoke's argumentation, as the status quo and the start of the Cuban missile crisis. As a response, the Soviet Union had the option of doing nothing and preserve the status quo. The other option was to take the threats stated by the United States government seriously and not deploy any offensive missiles on Cuba. When the United States discovered the SAMs the government responded with a firm statement that every deployment of missiles on Cuba would lead to rapid military response. Public speeches by President Kennedy stated that the danger in Cuba was being exaggerated. He issued these statements more to calm the American people than to actually warn Soviet-Union leaders.

According to George and Smoke, this is an important misunderstanding. The Soviet Union leaders thought these statements were deterrent because they believed that the President said it out of political motive. They didn't really expect to become a real confrontation until the missiles were in place. Besides, the first missiles were already leaving their Russian port when Kennedy made his first statement. The deployment had reached its own momentum and it was too late for Khrushchev to turn back now. The actual efforts by the US government to reinforce deterrence had no effect, except possibly to speed up the already rapid schedule for bringing the Medium Range Ballistic Missiles (MRBMs) to operational status.

Another important misunderstanding is that the United States government didn't really think that the deployment of missiles would be an acceptable risk for the Soviet Union. So instead of thinking of a well-informed reaction they thought of a reaction out of routine procedures. This all led to the fact that the Soviet Union kept shipping missiles to Cuba and that the United States kept threatening with big and rapid military response. Both of them tried to have a deterrent effect on the other, George and Smoke see it as a deterrence fail that the United States could not prevent the missiles from being deployed on Cuba.

In order to understand whether this is a case of deterrence or not it is important to take a closer look to the deterrence game model. Following George and Smoke's argumentation, player 1 is the Soviet Union and player 2 is the United States. Instead of doing nothing the Soviet Union decided to continue with deploying missiles to Cuba. As discussed before the United States gave a counterreaction by threatening with military deployment. The fact that the Soviet Union was shipping missiles can be seen as the attack from the attacker to the defender. Because of the fact there was so much miscommunication this attack almost led to multilateral destruction. It was up to the United States whether to act upon it or not. Important to note is that, according to George and Smoke, the Cuban missile crisis is unique in the sense that the deterrence took the form of a force deployment instead of an actual military attack.

Still it is hard to reconcile the deterrence game model with the arguments from George and Smoke. One aspect of a deterrent threat is that the initiator only acts if a certain, earlier stated line is crossed. If the Soviet Union is still player 1 in the model there was not a deterrent threat stated by them against the United States. There is no specific statement where the Soviet Union claims to act if the United States crosses a certain line.

They were already shipping the missiles. As a reaction to the missile discovery, Kennedy decided to issue a naval quarantine. If one follows the logic of the deterrence game model this should have led to unilateral or multilateral destruction and both didn't happen. Also, one of the assumptions of the models, as will be discussed later, is that the missile deployment on Cuban soil is the status quo. These means that following George and Smoke's argumentation it cannot possibly be a deterrence case because they see the missile deployment as the deterrent threat.

Also, if player 1 is changed to the United States instead of the Soviet Union it is still hard to reconcile the arguments from George and Smoke with the model. If the United States would be player one and the threat of military deployment would have been seen as the attack on the defender, it is still hard to argue that this is a deterrence case. This is because of the fact that the Soviet Union kept shipping missiles to Cuba despite the several threats issued by President Kennedy. This would, again, following the logic of the deterrence game model, lead to either unilateral or multilateral destruction and both did not happen. The result of the Cuban missile crisis is that Khrushchev decided to remove the missiles from Cuba. This can be seen as a new status quo which can't be explained by the deterrence game model.

### *Compellence*

The other model used in this thesis is the compellence game model. Compellence can be seen as a threat so that the opponent gives up something they desire or you want them to act in a specific manner. As for this model a chapter from Pfundstein (2016) will be used. In this chapter they state that the Cuban missile crisis can be seen as a compellence case instead of a deterrence. First it is important to note that the status quo is slightly different from the one in the deterrence game. Here the status quo is that the Soviet Union is already shipping nuclear missiles to Cuba and they intend to install them on the island. Since the United States is player 1 in this game they have the option to do something about this status quo or not.

Following the compellence game model, the persuader has to issue a threat against the opponent. In this case it is the United States that issued a compelling threat against the Soviet Union. According to Pfundstein, this threat consisted of two different components. First there was the threat of a quarantine and second there was a secret meeting where Robert Kennedy stated that the Soviet Union had twenty-four hours to remove the missiles, or else the United States would launch an invasion on the island.

In Pfundstein's chapter (2016), the *costly compellence theory* comes forward as the best explanation for the Cuban missile crisis. The costly compellence theory suggests that the threat issued by the United States against the Soviet Union would be ultimately credible and effective if issuing and executing these threats were costly for the United States. The fact that Khrushchev decided to comply with the demands from the United States were out of fear that the crisis would spiral out of control. Devastation would follow if the Soviet Union would have failed to comply.

Because of the fact that the United States was willing to issue a compellent military threat in such a dangerous situation showed how strongly committed the United States was to obtaining its demands from the Soviet Union. Of course, Khrushchev was also concerned about the costs for his own country in the event that United States executed its threats. But the fact that executing this threat would be very costly for the United States as well in the sense of money, lives, military troops etc. convinced Khrushchev that they were committed to achieving its demands and therefore he decided to comply.

As discussed before, within the compellence game the threat is in the hands of player 1, the United States. Once the threat was issued the Soviet Union had the option to comply or to not. Not complying would lead to a devastating nuclear conflict where complying would lead to a new status quo. Following the argumentation of Pfundstein it can be concluded that they chose the latter option. This shows us that the compellence game can show the right outcome of the Cuban missile crisis.

When applying the deterrence game model and compellence game model the method of a comparative case study will be used. There are several reasons why a comparative method is chosen over other methods and approaches. One of them is that comparative analysis can be used to test hypotheses or existing theories. In the context of this thesis the hypotheses that the Cuban missile crisis is a case of deterrence and that it is a case of compellence will be tested. The use of comparative analysis can be also very useful when there is only a small-N. For this thesis only two cases will be used, which can be seen as a small-N. In practical terms, theory also plays an important role in comparative analysis. The researcher engages in a constant dialogue between the cases and relevant theories (Berg-Schlosser, De Meur, Ragin, Rihoux, 2012). All this combined, the deterrence and compellence game models in combination with the comparative case study are assumed as the best way to answer this research question.

## **Theoretical framework**

Before heading to the analysis, it is important to discuss the main theoretical base about this topic. Different authors have written about the Cuban missile crisis and some argue it is a case of deterrence while others claim it is a compellence case. First, the deterrence arguments will be discussed and after that the compellence arguments.

### *Deterrence*

There are several goals where nuclear weapons can be used for and one of them is deterrence. Schelling (1966, pp. 69-72) mentions several characteristics of deterrence. Deterrence usually involves setting the stage. This can be by an announcement (drawing a so-called red line), by incurring the obligation and then, by waiting. The overt act is up to the opponent, they can decide whether to respond or not. Another characteristic is that the deterrent threat only changes the consequences if the act in question (to one to be deterred) is then taken. Deterrence is also indefinite in its timing. A player can wait as long as they want to, as long as the other players does not cross the red line that has been drawn. A deterrent position, the status quo, in territory, or in more figurative terms can often be surveyed and noted and is therefore quite specific. And the last characteristic is that the objective is often communicated by the very preparations that make the threat credible.

During the Cold War many state officials and scholars saw nuclear weapons as an essential feature for maintaining international security because they were a means of deterrence. According to several authors, the Cuban missile crisis was the closest the world came to a nuclear war. Even though it didn't lead to an actual war, Glenn (2017) still argues that the crisis can be seen as a deterrence failure. He claims that if one wants to understand this deterrence failure one should look at the month prior to October 1962. Three main factors are important namely the red line that was drawn, if the associated threat included the use of nuclear weapons, and if the opponent crossed this red line.

The fact that the United States had Jupiter missiles in Turkey put the Soviet Union at a big strategic disadvantage. In order to balance this disadvantage, Khrushchev asked for approval from Fidel Castro to deploy nuclear weapons on Cuba. After the Bay of Pigs invasion Khrushchev was afraid that the United States was planning another invasion. The only way to deter this was, in his opinion, to place nuclear weapons. In May 1962 it was decided that several nuclear weapons would be shipped to Cuba. The United States was aware about the fact that the Soviets were shipping something to Cuba but they didn't know what it was exactly. On 13 September, President Kennedy stated that if Cuba would become a base for offensive weapons with significant capacity then America would do whatever they ought to be necessary to protect their own security and that of its allies. This statement was the red line that must not be crossed. When Khrushchev made the decision to allow the ships with the nuclear weapons to leave for Cuba, this red line was crossed and US deterrence had failed.

According to Glenn (2017, p. 14), “the central issue for the failure of nuclear deterrence in the crisis is Kennedy’s lack of credibility and his inclination to avoid nuclear war that was clear in his covert dialogue with Khrushchev”. In other words, the reason why US nuclear deterrence policy lacked credibility is because Kennedy explicitly mentioned that he would probably never use them.

Another author who claims that the Cuban missile crisis can be seen as deterrence is Rajagopalan (2000, pp. 442 – 448). Even though according to his argumentation the crisis can be seen as a deterrence success. The Soviets created a missile gap in their favour by exaggerating their nuclear performances. At first Kennedy believed this to be true but soon it came out that no such gap existed. The United States had nuclear superiority over the Soviet Union. Despite the fact that the United States enjoyed local and strategic superiority, and despite the strong sentiments among Kennedy’s advisors in favour of bombing the Cuban missile sites, the US was deterred from going to war. For the Soviet Union it was more logical to restrain from undertaking action since they were in a less favourable situation. What deterred the US is the fact that they knew that some Soviet retaliation would take place. The Soviet Union would have definitely suffered more, but the fact that the US wouldn’t come out of this situation unhurt was enough create a deterrent effect.

According to Sagan (1993, pp. 53-54), the likelihood of a nuclear war was actually remote during the crisis, and so much less likely than many people believed at that time. But the consensus about why people assume this nuclear war was more unlikely than assumed is based on a contrasting set of assumptions. On one side there were people who thought that Khrushchev was deterred by the US nuclear superiority. Even if the US would have had stopped Soviet ships on the quarantine line, launched an airstrike against the missiles, or invaded Cuba the Soviets Union would not have used nuclear force. On the other hand, people argue that Kennedy was deterred by even the significantly inferior Soviet nuclear arsenal that he would not have taken any risk of nuclear war by attacking Cuba. A small nuclear deterrent on Cuba’s side was a powerful deterrent to the United States. This argument corresponds with the before mentioned argument from Rajagopalan.

Two other authors who argue that the Cuban Missile Crisis is a deterrence case are George and Smoke (1974). But since their arguments have already been extensively discussed in the previous chapter they won’t be mentioned any further here.

## *Compellence*

Nuclear weapons can be used for several more or less distinct purposes. One of them is discussed above, namely deterrence, but the other purpose, compellence, also deserves closer scrutiny. Schelling (1966, pp. 69-72) also mentions several characteristics of compellence. Compellence usually involves initiating an action that can become harmless only if the opponent responds. The first step is up to the player that issues the compellent threat. This threat has to be definite so it means that there has to be a deadline. A compellent advance has to be projected as to the destination and this destination can be unclear in intent as well as in its momentum. If a compellent threat is issued it only communicates the general direction of compliance, and assurances are a critical part of the definition of the compellent threat.

According to Schelling (1966, pp. 80-85), the Cuban missile crisis is a good example of the fluidity that sets in once passive deterrence has failed. First, Kennedy made verbal threats against the installation of weapons in Cuba but as discussed before, these threats lacked credibility. The red line that was stated by the United States was crossed by the Soviet Union and by the time Kennedy was determined to resist he was no longer in a deterrent position. This meant that he needed to get involved in compellence. A new problem arose, namely that Kennedy needed to find an action that would communicate the threat and one that would promise damage if the Russians did not comply but also a minimum amount of damage if they complied quickly enough. The action that was assumed to be the best one was a naval quarantine. Once the quarantine was in place, the Navy was in a position to wait and it was up to the Russians to decide whether to continue or not. Another characteristic of compellence, arising in this situation is that the act of compliance is more recognizable as submission under duress than when an act is withheld in the case of a deterrent threat. Compliance is less likely to be something that one was going to do anyways. The Russians cannot claim that they were about to remove the missiles on Cuba anyways and that the US naval quarantine, the President's statements and the threats of more violent actions had no effect at all.

According to Horelick and Rush (1966, pp. 150 - 152), there are several explanations for the fact that Khrushchev changed course and decided to withdraw the strategic missiles and bombers from Cuba, all of them relating to the compellent threat issued by President Kennedy. This compellent threat was, as discussed before by other authors as well, the US naval quarantine at Cuba. At first, the Soviet leaders hoped to present the United States with a *fait accompli* in Cuba. But as it turned out, the United States already instituted the quarantine and demanded the removal of the missiles. The US government was able to present the Soviet Union with its own *fait accompli*, namely the quarantine. This quarantine was the first measure that was designed to prevent a further build up but also to secure the removal of the weapons that were on the island already.

It was also less than the direct application of violence but far more than a threat. Once this quarantine was in effect it was up to Khrushchev up to decide whether to risk a military confrontation or not.

In dealing with this quarantine, the Soviet leaders had three choices. All of them were unpleasant and one was even quite dangerous. The first option was to submit to the quarantine by permitting their vessels to be stopped, searched, and if smuggled war was aboard, seized. The second option was to avoid a showdown by keeping their ships out of the quarantine area. The third and last option was the actual use of force and ignore the quarantine. The prospect of success for the last option was very poor and besides from that, the Soviet Union had nothing to gain by raising the conflict to higher levels of social violence. When the quarantine was effective the United States succeeded in gaining support from several countries in Latin America. This made the likelihood of success for the Soviet Union much less to use diplomatic means to bear for the lifting of the quarantine. Another reason mentioned by Horelick and Rush is that the fact that the United States confronted the Soviet Union directly while ignoring Castro also compelled the Soviet Union to determine their course of action quickly. It basically removed any base for the Soviet Union to involve the United States in negotiations with the Cuban government. This argument coincides with the last point that is made about the crisis, namely the speed and evident resolution with which the US government acted must have certainly influenced Khrushchev. If Khrushchev decided to gamble any further, it would have probably led to an actual conflict and maybe even a general war. So eventually, option number two was considered the most-safe and so that is what the Soviet Union did.

Another author who argues that the Cuban missile crisis is a compulsion case is Pfundstein (2016). But since these arguments have been extensively discussed in the previous chapter as well they won't be mentioned any further over here

## **Analysis**

As described in the methodology section, the deterrence game model and the compellence game model will be used in order to verify whether the Cuban missile crisis can be seen as a case of deterrence or compellence. Before applying these models, it is essential to construct a clear timeline of what happened during the run up to the crisis, and especially the crisis itself. The beginning point of this analysis will be the moment where strategic offensive missiles were placed on Cuban soil. This moment is chosen because it is also the status quo point in both models.

### *Timeline*

Long before the crisis, Soviet arms had been sent to Cuba. Even though there was a small decrease in shipments in the beginning of 1962, in July that same year these shipments became even more frequent than before. These ships carried different loads of military equipment, namely Medium-Range Ballistic Missiles (MRBM), Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missiles, IL 28s, Surface-to-air Missiles (SAMs), cruise missiles, KOMAR guided missile patrol boats, MIG-21 aircraft, and Soviet personnel. The first Soviet strategic offensive missile reached Cuban soil in September that same year. Several U2 reconnaissance-flights flew over the island during that period but none of them discovered the Cuban missile sites. One of the reasons is that these flights didn't cover the areas where the missile sites were located.

On 14 October 1962, the missiles were discovered by the United States and two days later on October 16, President Kennedy learned about the Soviet missile placement on Cuba. The days following the discovery were difficult since the US government had to figure out a response. The Executive Committee on National Security (ExCom) as well as Air Force experts within the government were discussing the options, a blockade or an air strike. Even though members of ExCom strongly favoured an air strike, the final option became the blockade. (Allison, 1971, pp. 103-124). On October 22 Kennedy announced the American blockade of arm shipments to Cuba. In his speech he warned that any hostile act at other points of the globe would meet with equal American determination (Wohlstetter, 1965, p. 14). Another part of his speech was that he declared a "strict quarantine of all offensive military shipment to Cuba" (Allison, 1971, p. 118). Two days later, on 24 October the American quarantine became effective. The world was waiting tensely for the first encounters between Russian freighters and American destroyers as the Russians might try to break the blockade. Eventually, twenty-five ships of the that were on their way to Cuba twelve turned around on 25 October (Pachter, 1963, p. 43-44). 27 October must have been the most frustrating day of the crisis. Other than promised before, the Soviets wanted the removal of missiles in Turkey in exchange for Cuba. There wasn't much time to consider this option since only moments later the news came out that the Soviet SAMs on Cuba had become operational because they shot down an American U2-flight.

Before this happened, the US firmly stated to retaliate when something like this would happen but now that the time had come to implement this decision the President reconsidered. Luckily it didn't come to an actual conflict as on 28 October Khrushchev announced the withdrawal of the missiles "that the US describes as offensive" (Allison, 1971, p. 119 – 132).

### *Deterrence*

Now that a clear and brief timeline has been established, the arguments from the different authors that have been mentioned in the theoretical framework can be analysed. The first author to be discussed is Glenn (2017), who argues that the Cuban missile crisis is a case of deterrence failure. Based on his interpretation of Kennedy's statement on 13 September 1962 it can be assumed that the United States is player 1 in this situation and the Soviet Union is player 2. This is because Glenn (2017, p. 13) says that Kennedy reinforced deterrence and that he states a well-defined red line where the implicit threat of nuclear weapons and its consequences is clearly communicated. The United States is the player issuing the deterrent threat, and these threats are Kennedy's speeches on 4 and 13 September 1962. Now it was up to Khrushchev whether to act upon it or not.

The outcome of the Cuban missile crisis can't be explained if one lays Glenn's arguments next to the deterrence game model. Let's assume, for the sake of the argument, that the status quo is the fact that there are, at that moment, no nuclear weapons on Cuban soil. American intel-specialists gather information that the Soviets might want to ship offensive nuclear weapons to Cuba. In his attempt to deter the Soviets, Kennedy states an implicit threat of the use of nuclear weapons and its consequences. These statements can be seen as the deterrent threat in the model. This puts the next step of action in the hands of Khrushchev who still decides to continue with the shipment of offensive nuclear weapons to Cuba, despite the potential consequences. The fact that Khrushchev decided to continue is, in Glenn's opinion, deterrence failure. If one lays these arguments next to the deterrence game model, the outcome can't be explained. Since Glenn explicitly speaks about deterrence failure the outcome of this situation should be unilateral or multilateral destruction, and both didn't happen. Also, one of the assumptions of the model is that the placement of nuclear weapons on Cuban soil is the status quo. This doesn't match Glenn's argument since he sees the placement of these weapons as something the Soviets did despite the deterrent statements from Kennedy.

Rajagopalan (2000) also argues that the crisis is a deterrence case but in contradiction to Glenn he sees it as a deterrence success. According to him it was the United States that was deterred from going to war. Following this argumentation one can logically assume that, different from Glenn's argumentation, player 1 is the Soviet Union and player 2 is the United States. The deterrent threat in this case is the fact that the Soviet Union is placing missiles on Cuban soil and that the United States had the option whether to act upon it or not. What, according to Rajagopalan, deterred the United States was the fact that they knew that retaliation would take place.

They knew they wouldn't come out of this situation unhurt. And it was more logical for the Soviet to restrain from undertaking action since they were in a less favourable situation. This all led to the fact that Khrushchev decided to withdraw the missiles. If these arguments are put next to the deterrence game it can be assumed that they hardly coincide. If the placement of missiles is seen as the deterrent threat than it was up to the United States to come up with a reaction. As stated in the timeline, on October 24 1962 the US naval quarantine became effective. So, it is logical to assume that they did respond to the deterrent threat. According to the model, this would have meant either unilateral or multilateral destruction, and both didn't happen. And once again, the assumption that the status quo is the missile placement on Cuban soil causes that Rajagopalan's arguments don't coincide with the deterrence game model.

Even though much has been written about how close the world was to a nuclear war, not all authors agree. Sagan (1993, pp. 53-54) argues that the likelihood of an actual conflict was much less likely than people believed at that time. Both countries were deterred by each other's nuclear power. Even though the United States possessed far more nuclear power, the fact that the Soviet Union might hurt the United States had enough deterrent effect.

Now it is important to put Sagan's arguments next to the deterrence game model. First, the situation will be discussed from the US perspective. This will mean that the United States is player 1, because they are the one issuing the deterrent threat by the means of their nuclear arsenal. The Soviet Union is player 2 because they are one with the power whether to act upon this threat or not. Since the Soviet Union knew that the United States possessed nuclear superiority they decided to withdraw the missiles from Cuba. This argument also goes the other way around if one looks at the perspective of the Soviet Union. If they are player 1 and the United States player 2 they were also afraid of the Soviet nuclear capability even though it was far less than their own. So, if the missile placement is seen as the status quo, both countries nuclear capabilities as the deterrent threat and the missile withdrawal as the outcome it would be logical to assume that the arguments coincide with the model. Before coming to a final conclusion, it is important to analyse this argument a bit deeper.

According to Schelling (1966, pp. 69-72), deterrence and therefore also deterrent threats have several characteristics. These characteristics have been mentioned in the theoretical framework, but for now two of them are specifically important. Deterrence involves setting the stage. This means that there is an announcement that presents a certain obligation. This obligation can be seen as a red line that must not be crossed (also described by Glenn, 2017). The deterrent threat only takes place if the opponent crosses the line. If these characteristics are placed next to Sagan's arguments several problems arise. First of all, Sagan never mentions a specific deterrent threat issued by one of the two players. This means, if one follows Sagan's argumentation, that there was no red line which means both players had nothing to act upon.

Sagan's arguments might explain the process and the outcome of the crisis at first sight but if one takes a closer look at the characteristics of deterrence and a deterrence threat these arguments might not seem so logical at all.

### *Compellence*

One author who claims that the Cuban missile crisis can be seen as a compellence case is Schelling (1966, pp. 80-82). If the arguments made by Schelling are placed next to the compellence game model some similarities can be observed. One of the assumptions of the compellence game model is that the missile placement on Cuban soil can be seen as the status quo. Since it was the United States that was not happy with this new situation and they are the ones to undertake action, they can be seen as player 1 and the Soviet Union as player 2. Because the missiles were placed on Cuba it was up to the US government to come up with an action that could prevent any further action by the Soviet Union. The best option of action turned out to be the naval quarantine of Cuba. This action is the compellent threat that is issued. Now it is up to the Soviet Union to think about a reaction. Their reaction could either lead to a new status quo or a military conflict. According to Schelling, American interference was a given fact because of the declaration of the quarantine and the dispatch of the navy but the Soviets still had to opportunity to turn around. They decided that the diplomatic costs of turning the ships around proved not to be too prohibitive. This is the part where one can see that compellence can be a dangerous game to play. Kennedy was clear about the consequences of the Soviet Union not removing the missiles. At first the Soviets were not too enthusiastic about the removal of the missiles, which could lead to a military conflict. But eventually, Khrushchev decided that the missiles had to be removed and a new status quo emerged.

Besides from the arguments that are about the course and events of the crisis, Schelling also mentions some qualities of a compellent threat, as mentioned in the theoretical framework, that match the compellence game model and this specific event. First of all, Schelling states that a compellent threat usually involves an action that can become harmless if the opponent responds. In the case of the Cuban missile crisis, this threat is the US quarantine. There also has to be a deadline (which is not the case with a deterrent threat). The quarantine can't be there forever. The Soviets had to act quickly otherwise the quarantine could become harmful. Assurances are also a critical part of the compellent threat. When one starts something that has to be stopped later (the quarantine in this case), it is important that one knows their aims and that they communicate them clearly. One has to let the other party know what will satisfy them. A compellent threat also usually communicates the general direction of compliance. "In his October 22 speech announcing the American blockade of arms shipments to Cuba, Kennedy warned that any hostile acts at other points on the globe would meet with equal determination and he called upon Khrushchev to abandon this course of world domination" (Wohlstetter & Wohlstetter, 1965, p. 14).

This speech by Kennedy meets several characteristics of a compellent threat. It is clearly communicated what the Americans would like to see, but only the general direction of compliance is explained here.

Two other authors who argue that the Cuban missile crisis is a compellence case are Horelick and Rush (1966, pp. 150-152). Because the United States is the one issuing the compellent threat, they can be seen as player 1 in this situation, and the Soviet Union player 2. This coincides with the characteristic of a compellent threat as stated by Schelling (1966), namely that the first step is up to the side that makes the compellent threat. Also, by the statement from Horelick and Rush that it was up to Khrushchev to decide whether a military conflict was worth the risk it is logical to assume that the Soviet Union is player 2 in this situation. The status quo is the fact that the Soviets placed missiles on Cuban soil, where they hoped to present the United States with a *fait accompli*. But since these missiles were discovered before they became fully operational the United States decided to undertake their own measures. The first of these measures was the quarantine in Cuba. This can be seen as the compellent threat in the model. With this threat the United States wanted to make clear they didn't accept the missile placement. As discussed before, the Soviet Union had several options on how to respond to this quarantine. Option number 1, permitting their vessels to be stopped, option number 2, keeping their ships out of the quarantine area and option number 3, the actual use of force and ignoring the quarantine. If one lays these options next to the compellence game model, it is logical to assume that Khrushchev went for option number 2 and that the outcome was the emerging of a new status quo. In the theoretical framework, several reasons are discussed that caused Khrushchev to choose to withdraw the missiles. As they have been discussed extensively they won't be mentioned any further in this chapter. Still, it is important to mention that these reasons contributed to the fact that Khrushchev chose to withdraw the missiles and that henceforth a new status quo emerged.

## Conclusion

This thesis was about the question whether the Cuban missile crisis can be seen as a case of deterrence or compellence. In order to find an answer to this question the deterrence game model and the compellence game model have been used next to arguments from different authors.

The authors who argue that the crisis can be seen as a deterrence case differ in their opinion about whether it is a deterrence failure or a deterrence success. There is also an ongoing discussion about how close the United States and the Soviet Union actually were to a nuclear war. Nevertheless, none of the arguments from the deterrence authors can explain the outcome of the Cuban missile crisis if put next to the deterrence game model. All the authors had different arguments for their case. But there were two overall, recurring defects why they couldn't explain the outcome of the crisis. First of all, one of the assumptions of the model is that the missile placement can be seen as the status quo. This missile placement is often seen as the deterrent threat but this doesn't coincide with the model. Also, the outcome of the crisis, namely the missile removal can't be explained by the model since its neither the same status quo, unilateral or multilateral destruction.

As for compellence there was more unanimity in the arguments. The fact that Kennedy decided to issue a naval quarantine as a response to the missile discovery is seen as the compellent threat by all the authors that are mentioned in this thesis who argue that the Cuban missile crisis is a compellence case. Also, the speech by Kennedy where he announces the blockade and states that any hostile acts at other points of the globe would meet with equal determination meet several characteristics of a compellent threat. The outcome of the crisis can also be explained by the means of the compellence game model and the arguments stated by the different compellence authors. After the compellent threat it was up to Khrushchev whether it was worth the risk of a military confrontation. Eventually, he decided to remove the missiles and a new status quo emerged. This is, amongst others, because of the fact that Khrushchev didn't want to risk a military conflict because of the high price he was going to need to pay in terms of money, lives, troops etc.

All this arguments and information taken into consideration, the answer to the research question is that the Cuban missile crisis can be seen as a compellence case. The compellence game model was capable of explaining the outcome of the crisis, and the model also corresponded with the timeline that had been established in the beginning of the analysis.

## **Discussion**

The conclusion of this thesis is that the Cuban missile crisis can be seen as a case of compellence. Before coming to this conclusion, it has been mentioned that certain assumptions were taken into consideration. One of the most important assumptions was that the status quo was the missile placement on Cuban soil. This is an interesting topic to discuss. The deterrence game model and the compellence game model are two ways of defining the concepts deterrence and compellence and they were the main focus in this thesis. This doesn't mean that these models are the only way to define the concepts of deterrence and compellence. In this thesis, characteristics of both concepts, as stated by Schelling (1966), also came forward. These characteristics coincided with both of the models so they were only used for supporting the argument. So, it is important to note that these models are just one way of defining the concepts.

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