

Session 5

Spring 2022

JFK, the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Alliance for Progress

1. The generational change from Ike to JFK, and what it entailed
 - The 1960 election and the first televised presidential debates
 - JFK attacked Nixon from the Right on foreign policy
 - The Cuban Revolution as an emerging issue in US politics
2. The Bay of Pigs April 1961 failed invasion of Cuba as a turning point
 - Only a couple of months after JFK's inauguration, and he saw himself as being forced to go along with it, against his judgment
 - A thoroughly botched operation, that led Kennedy to a deep distrust of the intelligence agencies + of so-called government experts
3. The Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962
 - The closest the world has been to nuclear war
 - Striking parallels with current Ukraine crisis
 - The deployment of Soviet missiles on Cuban soil
4. Discovering the evidence and deciding what to do about it
 - The Bay of Pigs as a "trial run" and forewarning
 - This time, JFK took charge of matters himself
 - "Excomm" and 13 days
 - Chance of nuclear war : between one and three and even
5. Why were missiles in Cuba different from missiles near Moscow?
 - A difference in nature of military threat, but also affecting US credibility in the Western Hemisphere
 - Kennedy vs Khrushchev, with much at stake
 - Hardliners were ready to go for broke
6. Graham Allison's book , *Essence of Decision : Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (1971) examines the crisis at some length
 - The Unitary, Rational Actor Model (Model I)
 - The Organizational Model (Model II)
 - The Bureaucratic Politics Model (Model III) ("Where you stand, depends on where you sit")
7. The choices facing JFK : doing nothing, aerial bombing, naval blockade
 - Doing nothing would have been politically devastating
 - Bombing Cuba meant risking nuclear war
 - A naval blockade as a compromise solution was what the US went for
8. That approach ended up saving the day :
 - The USSR withdrew the missiles, and the US "won"
 - The curious case of the US missiles in Turkey at the time

which the US described as “defensive”, whereas the Soviet ones in Cuba were “offensive”

- The agreement to eventually withdraw those as well
- And JFK’s public commitment not to invade Cuba

9. The parallels between 1962 and 2022, Cuba and Ukraine

- Much as the US has its own “backyard”, Russia has its “near abroad”
- Yet, to this day, the US does not accept that a hostile power allied to a rival superpower should be allowed to exist 90 miles from Florida
- Thus the Cuban embargo, alive and well 60 years later, and the insistence on the Monroe Doctrine



10. On Ukraine, Sec. of State Blinken : “We can’t go back to a world of spheres of influence”, thus insisting in Ukraine’s right to join NATO

- Yet, if Cuba and Venezuela were to accept further Russian military deployments , that would be considered “an aggressive action”
- The irony of insisting in the US’s sphere of influence while denying Russia one of its own.

11. If US is serious about replacing spheres of influence with a “rules based international order”, in which small states can decide their own fate, free of great power coercion, a good place to start would be in the Americas.

- Instead, US main concern in the Americas seems to be about so-called External State Actors, ESAs (China, Russia, Iran), that is, external to the US sphere of influence.

12. Cuban Revolution showed what LA underdevelopment might trigger

- The market by itself had no solutions, contra Eisenhower’s approach
- Enter modernization theory, and JFK’s Harvard advisors
- Walt Rostow’s *Stages of Growth* and the way forward
- Building on *Operación Panamericana*, the Alliance for Progress

13. Getting ahead of violent revolutions by promoting peaceful ones

- President Eduardo Frei (1964-1970) and his Christian Democratic party in Chile as a prototype (thus his 1967 piece in *Foreign Affairs*, “The Alliance that Lost its Way”)

- Yet, LBJ in the presidency , the White House lost interest in L. America

14. Quite apart from the merits of modernization theory itself, it made a lot of sense to upgrade and modernize Latin American governments, economies and social structures, still an ongoing process

- A developmentalist approach to US-Latin American relations not replicated since