

12-22-2021

## **Ukraine crisis, 1962 Cuban missile crisis share disturbing similarities**

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### **Citation of this paper:**

simpson, erika vg Prof., "Ukraine crisis, 1962 Cuban missile crisis share disturbing similarities" (2021).

*Political Science Publications*. 188.

<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/politicalsciencepub/188>

ukraine-crisis-1962-cuban-missile-crisis-share-disturbing-similarities

## GLOBAL

# Ukraine crisis, 1962 Cuban missile crisis share disturbing similarities

By [ERIKA SIMPSON](#) DECEMBER 22, 2021

Now with tensions at their worst since the Cold War ended three decades ago, Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov says Russia may be forced to deploy intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Europe in response to what it sees as NATO's plans to do the same.



A Canadian military training instructor demonstrates a magazine loading technique to Ukrainian soldiers during Operation Unifier in Starychi, Ukraine in 2017. NATO continues to send more forces including members of the Canadian Armed Forces to Operation Reassurance in Central and Eastern Europe in order to signal its willingness to deter and reinforce NATO's collective defence, writes Erika Simpson. *Photograph courtesy of the Department of National Defence*

The Bay of Pigs fiasco taught U.S. President John F. Kennedy to be more skeptical of the advice that came to him from the experts, [reported one of Kennedy's closest aides later](#); however, Kennedy set up an Executive Committee of the National Security Council (Excomm) to guide his decision-making during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. U.S. President Joseph Biden forebodingly [ignored the sage advice of military brass](#) on the crisis in Afghanistan including the advice of Defense Secretary LLOYD Austin III, and pulled the U.S. troops out by his own deadline of Aug. 30, 2021, contrary to the advice of many to undertake [conditions-based negotiations](#), rather than a time-based approach to withdrawal.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken has appeared [bullish](#) on Russia and Ukraine after the NATO Foreign Ministers meeting in Riga, Latvia on Dec. 1; but Kennedy himself encouraged hawkish Excomm adviser General Maxwell Taylor to declare bellicose threats [in favour](#) of conducting a nuclear air strike, while behind the scenes, Kennedy's own brother Robert Kennedy counselled [enormous restraint during the entire crisis](#).

Sixty years later, the [nuclear taboo](#)—a normative inhibition against the first use of nuclear weapons—has emerged. It stems from a sense of revulsion associated with such destructive weapons, and [new findings](#) that support the view that even a medium-scale nuclear war could bring about a global nuclear winter. The U.S. decision to deploy intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Europe, close to Russian borders “[poses a great danger and threat to us](#)” says Russian President Vladimir Putin who claims that the arms race between Russia and the U.S. is intensifying, following Washington's withdrawal from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and the Open Skies Treaty.

Russia finalized its [withdrawal from the Open Skies Treaty](#) on Dec. 18. President Putin often complains about NATO activity near Russia's borders, and he claimed that Russian forces could closely observe the USS Mount Whitney navy command ship “[through binoculars or in the crosshairs of its...defense systems](#).” The USS Mount Whitney recently joined another U.S. warship, the USS Porter in the Black Sea to [enhance collaboration](#) between U.S. and NATO forces at sea.

On Russia's troop build-up near Ukraine, NATO's Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg is stressing “[there will be a high price to pay](#)” for any further Russian aggression against Ukraine, following a two-day meeting of foreign ministers in Riga. Ukraine is *not* one of NATO's 30 official allies, but Georgia and Ukraine are among NATO's “[closest partners](#),” according to Stoltenberg at the meeting of the North Atlantic Council Foreign Ministers' Session with Georgia and Ukraine. After NATO's foreign ministers met in Riga to consider how they should deal with Russia's troop buildup near Ukraine and how to deter a repeat of the 2014 Russian occupation and annexation of Crimea, the [President of Ukraine](#) and the [Prime Minister of Georgia](#) visited NATO headquarters on Dec. 15 to 16.

NATO continues to send more forces [including members of the Canadian Armed Forces](#) to Operation Reassurance in Central and Eastern Europe in order to signal its willingness to deter and reinforce NATO's collective defence. After the meeting in Riga, [Blinken](#) and [Biden](#) told the world press that

the U.S. would respond with a range of high-impact economic sanctions, as well as additional efforts to strengthen alliance defences on NATO's eastern flank.

President Biden and President Putin held a [video call on Dec. 7](#) to quell the crisis. If war is somehow averted until the winter is over, might Putin agree to lower the number of Russian troops, if the U.S. agrees to withdraw its tactical nuclear missiles aimed at Russia? [Under NATO arrangements](#) shrouded in secrecy, Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Turkey host up to 150 U.S. B61 nuclear gravity bombs on their territories. These countries, except for Turkey, provide their own dual-capable aircraft for the delivery of nuclear weapons in times of war.

The secret agreement and [real outcome](#) in 1962 was that the U.S. agreed to withdraw its Jupiter missiles from Turkey in exchange for Russian withdrawal of its tactical nuclear missiles from Cuba. Now with tensions at their worst since the Cold War ended three decades ago, Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov says Russia may be forced to deploy [intermediate-range nuclear](#) missiles in Europe in response to what it sees as NATO's plans to do the same.

Last June's Russian incident with a British destroyer off Crimea led to [more tensions](#) between NATO and Moscow. NATO bureaucrats in Brussels could have deemphasized the conflict by conducting fewer [Black Sea drills](#) involving thousands of troops and dozens of ships. More transparency and new thinking about how to ameliorate conflict including more peaceful visions of [NATO by 2030](#) are needed. As one of NATO's longest-serving leaders since 2014, Stoltenberg's term was extended by two years later than planned until September 2022, but he remains focused on [military readiness, increasing defence spending and investing in major equipment and new technology in cyberspace and outer space](#).

In Washington, Democrats are weak and divided—as are Republicans—but both parties tossed out bipartisan provisions in their rush to pass a bill that will increase the U.S. defence budget to [\\$768 billion U.S. dollars a year](#). Americans seem united in their intent to remain the most militarily-powerful nation on earth, despite the United States' decaying infrastructure, lack of free medical care, and the onslaught of a pandemic that has surpassed [800,000 total deaths](#).

Taken altogether, the consequences of military escalation over Ukraine will be far worse for humankind and earth's species because of the nature of warfare and technology in this century.

Military satellites in space's vulnerable atmospheric zone combined with complete reliance on military communication by computer mean that the former Cold War's bipolar system is now dangerously multipolar and quickly uncontrollable.

Decisions by third parties, like China and the U.K.'s decisions to increase their nuclear warhead stockpile caps, can [defy logic](#) and imply that previously-classic solutions derived from two-player [game theory](#) and the Cuban missile crisis—like a new telephone hotline between Kennedy and Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev—or the timely exchange of typewritten letters—have had to be jettisoned in favour of digital communications delivered at lightning speed.

Now threats to annihilate can be hurled, in seconds, using [Twitter](#); judged in minutes to be so [“newsworthy”](#) as not to be taken off the internet; and then distributed scant hours later on digital tablets all around the world. In 1962, Cuba's Fidel [Castro schemed](#) for weeks that U.S. intelligence would not notice the movement of a hundred ships, nor the installation of 42 ICBM's and 44 anti-aircraft weapons, nor even the deployment of 40,000 Soviet soldiers; while Kennedy and the ExCom decided to quarantine the Caribbean island after a week's deliberations.

Instead of engaging in days and weeks of intrigue and speculation, the international community can quarantine using a global travel ban [within hours](#) many important countries, like South Africa, over fears of the coronavirus variant. This century's lessons from Russia's landmark [2007 cyber attack](#) on Estonia's government and banking infrastructure; North Korea's attempts in 2014-15 to conduct [hacking cyberwarfare](#) against Google and Sony; and the abrupt [crash of Afghanistan's economy](#) since the Taliban seized power in 2021 are strong indicators that emerging cyberwarfare capabilities combined with tight global interconnectedness will rapidly complicate the Ukrainian missile crisis in 2022.

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*The Hill Times*

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