

Essence of Decision and the Cuban Missile Crisis Book Analysis

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This report is based on the book *Essence of Decision Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* written by Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow in 1971. This book is published by Pearson, an imprint of Addison Wesley Longman, Inc.

Introduction of the Authors

Graham T. Allison is famous for his book *Remaking Foreign Policy: The Organizational Connection*. He is a professor of political science at Harvard, John F. Kennedy School of Government, and has been a lead analyst of national security and defense policy, as well as an interest in nuclear programs.

Phillip David Zelikow is an American author, researcher, and History professor at the University of Virginia. His famous book is *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft*. His areas of expertise are history public policy, and nuclear program studies.

Summary

In this book, three frames of reference help the reader to dig deeply into the analysis of [foreign policy](#). The beauty of this book lies in the concept that it encourages the reader to decide himself and provide his analysis on critical decision-making issues. There are three theories on the crisis: the Rational Actor, [Organizational Behavior](#), and Government Politics and how they relate to the Cuban Missile Crisis. Allison and Zelikow explain that the full analysis of the crisis is still unexplained, however, by using three different theories they try to explain possible reasons behind the crisis and justify the steps taken as solutions by governments.

This book helps us understand the government policies from foreign to domestic levels. Looking at government decisions as rational, organizational, or political is necessary to entirely understand the decisions Kennedy and Khrushchev made. This book justifies that even while making a collective decision the leader's thoughts and the way they have made that decision are contradictory, because of personal factors like background and interests, and it comprehends how and why foreign policies are made. It also justifies why rational choices are sometimes inevitable when making critical judgments. When applied to foreign policy, the organizational and government policy model gives us a hint of what problems miscommunication, personal disagreement because of interest, and slight misunderstanding can create. Overall, the book has helped us collect information and proof in support of Allison and Zelikow's three models, and it gives us a lot of evidence on why the United States opted

for blockade as an option.

The book presents three explanatory models that explain the possible approach used by American and Russian presidents related to the Cuban Missile Crisis, and we will discuss all these models one by one. The first explanatory model is named “The Rational Actor Model” (RAM), an explanation of states’ political decisions in response to the crisis. The RAM analysis explains that the actions taken were intended and these actions were reasonable according to the present conditions. The second model is the Organizational model of the foreign policy. In this model, it is suggested that governments do not have a unique identity, they are part of a big union that has their governance (Allison & Zelikow, 1999, p. 143). This model explains the actions made by US governance are the activities of organizations like the CIA. The third model is the Government politics model or Bureaucratic model, which describes that the actions taken by state officials are a blend of their thoughts, ideas, and opinions which may conflict with each other but collectively decide the course of action of government policies (Allison & Zelikow, 1999, p. 257). In this case, a group of people who belong to different organizations and are mutually involved in the decision-making process finally becomes the state’s decision. People in charge of state responsibilities like the Secretary of Defense or the Foreign Minister make arguments based on their experience.

Research

In this research, we will take into account the authors’ analysis and try to conclude the possible causes of the Cuban missile crisis. Several reasons are suggested to be a cause of the Cuban missile crisis. According to Stephan J. Cimbala, it is possible that Russia wanted to balance the nuclear sovereignty gap between the USA and Russia, for this reason, it may be possible that Russia wanted to install missiles in Cuba (Cimbala, p.199), and wanted to restrict America in further sending troops to Cuba. This reason has also been given by Bruce J. Allen and James G. Blight, that Russia wanted to increase Cuban nuclear stability by installing missiles in Cuba to stop the USA from proceeding further in Cuba (Allyn et al., p.138). Khrushchev also believed that installing missiles in Cuba would protect Cuba’s nuclear stability.

In response, the USA installed its missile program in Turkey and pointed at Russia to send a message to Khrushchev because of his missile program in Cuba. Khrushchev’s exact intentions about his missile program cannot be judged but it has a claim of many authors that it was just a race for power with the USA, and his motive was to boost national prestige that if the USA could deploy missiles in Turkey, they could also deploy missiles in Cuba. There is an indication that President Khrushchev could have other reasons for his missile deployment.

Bernstein and Barton have claimed that Kennedy had already decided to remove his missiles from Turkey and it is possible that Khrushchev wanted to test America’s reaction in case of war. The University of Westminster professor, Peter Catterall describes that Kennedy was planning to remove his missiles from Turkey, but as Russia started his Missile program in Cuba, He ordered the National

Security Council to solve this matter by either negotiation, trade, or war. The NSC took the third option and restarted the nuclear programs in Turkey. President Khrushchev had already decided to withdraw his weapons from Cuba, but with a reaction from America and ExComm, he tried to cover up his decision by suggesting a weapon withdrawal from both sides. (Catterall, pp.11).

After a continuous exchange of threats and warnings the issues finally settled when Kennedy sent a letter to Khrushchev that if he withdrew weapons from Cuba, America would not attack Cuba and would revoke his weapons from Turkey. Khrushchev accepted the offer of peace and finally ended the crisis after severe tension from both sides. This agreement was possible because of Kennedy's intelligent decision to achieve peace with Russia and choose to withdraw weapons from Turkey (Cimbala, Vol 9). Kennedy thought of long-term relations with Russia and began to look at the decision in favor of both countries. However, the nuclear tension still existed between both countries for two decades, and they continued their competition by developing new strategies.

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