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Cuban Missile Crisis

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Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviet Union

In 1962, U.S. President John F. Kennedy, inaugurated less than two years earlier, was being forced to make a tough decision. The U.S. and the Soviet Union were battling for leadership in global politics and security. The U.S. was superior to the Soviet Union in terms of economic power and also had overwhelmingly greater nuclear capability. However, the Soviet Union also had sufficient nuclear capability to decimate all of the major cities in the U.S., and was superior to the U.S. in terms of conventional (non-nuclear) military power deployed in Europe. The Soviet Union had been pursuing a policy of geographically expanding its influence and had also been active in defending the structures in the allied countries it had placed under its influence. For example, in 1956 when a people's uprising against the government occurred in one of its allied countries, Hungary, the Soviet Union immediately sent its forces to suppress the unrest. Meanwhile, the U.S. had also been busy expanding its sphere of influence, and had been interfering in domestic power struggles in places such as Central and South America, East Asia, and Africa through operations of its intelligence agency. It is safe to say that the U.S. and the Soviet Union had been competing with each other to acquire allied countries on a global scale.

Issues surrounding the governing of Berlin symbolized the stand-off between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. After World War II, Germany was divided into western and eastern parts. The U.S., Great Britain, and France had their militaries stationed in West Germany while the Soviet Union had its military stationed in East Germany. Although Berlin, the former capital, was located inside East Germany, it was controlled by the militaries of all four nations, and was also divided into western and eastern parts. The military forces of the U.S., Great Britain, and France were stationed in West Berlin, located approximately 150 km east of the boundary between the two Germanies, in effect forming a detached West German territory. As for transportation between West Berlin and West Germany, the only allowed means were three railways and three highways, none of which had exits along the way,

This case study was prepared by Professor Atsuomi Obayashi of the Graduate School of Business Administration, Keio Universitysolely for use in class discussions.

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