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BLOCKADE PROCLAIMED

By Walter Lippmann

It is Wednesday morning as I am writing this article, and the President's proclamation of a selective blockade has just gone into effect. We are now waiting for the other shoe to drop. There are a number of Soviet and Communist bloc ships on their way to Cuba. One in particular is presumed to be carrying contraband. There has as yet been no contact between these ships and our forces and we do not know what orders Moscow has given to the ships captains.

For the present, all depends upon these orders. As of the present moment we do not know whether the orders are to turn away from Cuba, to proceed and submit to search, or to proceed and to refuse to submit to search.

Until we do know, we can only speculate as to whether the Soviets will engage themselves at sea on the way to Cuba, will submit to the blockade and retaliate elsewhere, or will limit themselves to violent statements without violent action. There are those, for whose judgment I have profound respect, who think that it is now too late for this country to influence the decisions of the Soviet Union and that the President is now irretrievably committed to a course which can end only with a total blockade or an invasion of Cuba.

They may be right. But I have lived through two world wars, and in both of them, once we were engaged, we made the same tragic mistake. We suspended diplomacy when the guns began to shoot. In both wars as the result we achieved a great victory but we could not make peace. There is a mood in this country today which could easily cause us to make the same mistake again. We must in honor attempt to avoid it.

I see danger of this mistake in the fact that when the President saw Mr. Gromyko on Thursday, and had the evidence of the missile build-up in Cuba, he refrained from confronting Mr. Gromyko with this evidence. This was to suspend diplomacy. If it had not been suspended the President would have shown Mr. Gromyko the pictures, and told him privately about the policy which in a few days he intended to announce publicly. This would have made it more likely that Moscow would order the ships not to push on to Cuba. But if such diplomatic action did not change the orders, if Mr. Khrushchev persisted in spite of it, the President's public speech would have been stronger. For it would not have been subject to the criticism that a great power had issued an ultimatum to another great power without first attempting to negotiate the issue. By confronting Mr. Gromyko privately, the President would have given Mr. Khrushchev what all wise statesmen give their adversaries--the chance to save face.

There is, I know, no use crying over spilt milk. But I am making the point because there is still so much milk that can be spilt.

We have, we must note, made two separate demands. One is that no more "offensive weapons" shall be brought into Cuba. On this demand, we shall soon have a show-down. Considering the unanimity of the other American states, considering the strategic weakness of the Soviet Union in this hemisphere, there is reason to hope that the quarantine of Cuba will work, though we must expect retaliation elsewhere.

But the President had laid down a second demand which is that the missile installations already in Cuba be dismantled and removed. How this is to be done, is a very great question, even supposing that there is no shooting conflict at sea. And it is here, I believe, that diplomacy must not abdicate.

There are three ways to get rid of the missiles already in Cuba. One is to invade and occupy Cuba. The second way is to institute a total blockade, particularly of oil shipments, which would in a few months ruin the Cuban economy. The third way is to try, I repeat to try, to negotiate a face-saving agreement.

I hasten to say at once that I am not talking about and do not believe in a "Cuba-Berlin" horse trade. Cuba and Berlin are wholly different cases. Berlin is not an American missile base, it is not a base for any kind of offensive action, as Cuba is by way of becoming.

The only place that is truly comparable with Cuba is Turkey. This is the only place where there are strategic weapons right on the frontier of the Soviet Union. There are none in Norway, there are none in Iran, there are none in Pakistan. There are some in Italy. But Italy is not on the frontier of the Soviet Union.

There is another important similarity between Cuba and Turkey. The Soviet missile base in Cuba, like the U. S. - NATO base in Turkey, is of little military value. The Soviet military base in Cuba is defenseless, and the base in Turkey is all but obsolete. The two bases could be dismantled without altering the world balance of power.

If, as the first concrete step in the disarmament we've talked so much about, there could be an agreement to remove offensive weapons from fringe countries, it would not mean, of course, that Turkey would cease to be under the protection of NATO. Norway does not have strategic weapons on her soil and she is still an allied nation. Great Britain, which is a pillar of NATO, is actually liquidating U. S. missile and bomber bases on her own soil in accordance with Western strategic doctrine.

For all these reasons I say that an agreement of this sort may be doable and that there may exist a way out of the tyranny of automatic and uncontrollable events.