

'An unexpected turn of events', from Le Monde (30 October 1962)

Caption: On 30 October 1962, the French daily newspaper Le Monde comments on the outcome of the Cuban missile crisis between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. BEUVE-MÉRY, Hubert. 30.10.1962, n° 5 531. Paris: Le Monde. "Un dénouement inespéré", p. 1.

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An unexpected turn of events

The Cuban crisis was resolved much more quickly than many optimists dared hope. Twenty-four hours after suggesting a kind of exchange between Russian missiles deployed in Cuba's bases and American missiles deployed in Turkey, Mr Khrushchev purely and simply bowed to Mr Kennedy's terms and conditions. Mr Khrushchev did so in such a good-hearted way that one is left with the feeling he had no choice. But the President of the United States had the wisdom to rise above his victory; instead of celebrating the success of his tough stance, he merely saluted the Soviet leader's 'statesman-like gesture' and pledged not to invade Cuba.

However, serious difficulties persist. Mr Fidel Castro's tone on Sunday stood in stark contrast with that of Mr Khrushchev. Mr Castro found he had little choice but to yield to the decisions taken by the world powers who had reached a settlement with little input from him. In response, Mr Castro may, if he so desires, hamper the movement of UN personnel on Cuban soil, but he would garner far more sympathy by heeding the lesson of the current crisis and choosing the path of non-engagement, as Belgrade and Cairo are advising him to do, rather than appealing to Soviet protection, which in the end proved more dangerous than effective.

We are entitled to think that Moscow will seek political revenge by emphasising the peaceful nature of its actions and by raising in the UN the issue of foreign bases. But it is unlikely that the Americans will go along with such posturing now that Mr Khrushchev has backed down, although they had sidelined him even before he capitulated. In addition, for the first time in its history, the USSR has agreed to the establishment of international controls by the UN. The authority of the UN and of its Secretary-General, on whom Mr Khrushchev called to act as mediator, has been significantly reinforced. And the West will now be able to raise the issue of arms control and disarmament with greater insistence.

Now that the crisis is behind us, mankind is all the more aware of the terrible dangers threatening us. We may now hope that those who, for so long, have believed in the possibility of arms control and disarmament will once again speak out. However, we have yet to discover what has happened in the Kremlin in recent days and to what extent Mr Khrushchev's position has been weakened by his about-turn and the concessions he has had to make.