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Vienna Summit of 1961 and Its Impact on the World Order

It is apparent that the 1960s were a time when the world reached a boiling point. More specifically, the period known as the Cold War was defined by the open rivalry between two global superpowers: the Soviet Union and the United States. In the context of such global opposition, both sides tried to find a means of deescalating the conflict, seeking various agreements and engaging in summits. In fact, one can say that the Vienna Summit, taking place in 1961, was a turning point in the Cold War, having both adverse and positive outcomes. As a result, even though the Vienna Summit resulted in the increased tension between the United States and the Soviet Union in occupied Germany as well as in Cuba, it eventually led to the emergence of international organizations like the United Nations—a primary international entity that has played a significant role in deescalating the confrontation between the superpowers, leading to the end of the Cold War era.

When referencing the events that led to the Vienna Summit, one cannot avoid mentioning the fact that there were previous attempts to ease the tension between the Soviet Union and the United States. More specifically, in 1955, the two major powers engaged in the Geneva Summit. However, such a meeting had no positive outcomes for the international community. While seeking deescalation, in reality, before 1961, the tensions steadily rose, reaching their climax

when Nikita S. Khrushchev, the Soviet Party chief and head of government, started the second Berlin Crisis—initiated since 1958. His decision to build a wall around the western sector was an unprecedented act of separation between two superpowers (Bischof et al. 3). It was the time when John F. Kennedy, the 35th President of the United States, attempted to confront his primary opponent directly. In fact, the President wanted to do so because Khrushchev saw the American leader as weak and inexperienced (AFP). Therefore, one can say that the Summit was a chance for the United States to show the Soviet Union that the nation was bound to give a firm response to any acts of aggression the Soviet leaders intended to initiate.

Going further, the Vienna Summit that was held on June 3-4, 1961, was an excellent chance for Kennedy to prove Khrushchev that the United States had a viable response to the political rivalry that held the world hostage for years. During the two-day summit, the American leader proposed the two opponents to meet for an informal exchange of views concerning the events that the world witnessed at that time (Glass). More specifically, while referring to the report issued after the Summit, Kennedy first expressed his appreciation that Mr. Khrushchev presented his view on the matter in a frank manner. However, when speaking about crucial issues, it was noted that the American leader intended not only to address the legal situation occurring around the conflict, but also to explore the practical facts that affected the security of both nations and the world overall (Sampson). As a result, one can say that while the Summit was formally labeled as a communication between two superpowers, in reality, it was a confrontation between Kennedy and Khrushchev—something that would decide the fate of future generations.

Perhaps the most significant matter is to discuss the outcomes of the Vienna Summit of 1961. In fact, experts often argue whether the consequences of the meeting between Kennedy

and Khrushchev had more benefits than adverse effects. Some indicate that the Vienna Summit was the turning point in the Cold War: the time when both parties understood the reality of possible nuclear confrontation, thus seeing that particular measures should be enacted to prevent it (AFP). On another side, two months after the Summit, the Berlin Wall was erected. Moreover, in the same year, namely 1962, the Cuban Missile Crisis occurred—an event that was defined as the moment when the entire world was on the brink of nuclear war (AFP). Moreover, while supporting the point that the Summit led the world closer to open military confrontation, one should refer to the fact that immediately after the event, Kennedy won congressional approval for increasing defense spending to 3.25 billion dollars, the tripling of draft calls, and the calling-up of reserves. As a reaction for such actions, the Soviet Union resumed its infamous above-ground nuclear tests (Glass). While following such a thread, one can think that the Vienna Summit had a mostly negative impact on the world order, namely because the global community witnessed confronting superpowers growing their military strength—perhaps anticipating open combat. However, when exploring the less visible outcomes of the Summit, it becomes apparent that in the long run, the meeting in Vienna had more benefits than downsides.

More specifically, the Vienna Summit of 1961 planted a seed from which major international organizations germinated. Even though the United Nations was established immediately after the Second World War, it was in 1961 when its role was revisited in terms of managing global affairs. A little-known fact is that during the Vienna Summit itself, Mr. Khrushchev urged President Kennedy to sign a unilateral peace treaty, as well as proposed a particular resolution to the relevant-at-that-time Berlin question. He offered the United States a chance to explore the position of the Soviet Union on the matter discussed, and proposed to "return to this question at a later date, if it [the United States] wished to do so" (Sampson).

Therefore, it is apparent that in light of the tendency for escalation, crucial decisions were made to ensure that the Cold War would someday come to an end.

Considering everything above, one can say that the Vienna Summit of 1961 had both its downsides and upsides. However, even though after the meeting, the world witnessed the erection of the Berlin Wall as well as the emergence of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Summit offered the global community enough grounds for building further relations of agreement and cooperation. The new global world of international organizations eventually made the world a safer place. In fact, regarding modern realities, one can see that often, the international community has a decisive voice when it comes to deescalating numerous global conflicts. As a result, the case of the Vienna Summit of 1961 shows that while evaluating a particular historical event, one should consider both short- and long-term consequences, thus making it possible to have an objective view of the situation.

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