

The Cold War

Cuban Missile Crisis

The Cuban Missile Crisis occurred in 1962 when the Soviet Union began to install nuclear missiles in [Cuba](#). The United States refused to allow this and, after thirteen tense days and many secret negotiations, the Soviet Union agreed to remove the missiles.

This is perhaps the closest that the United States and the Soviet Union came to nuclear war during the Cold war.



President Kennedy during crisis
Source: Harvard Film Archive

Leading up to the Crisis

Prior to the crisis the United States had attempted to overthrow [Fidel Castro](#) and the current government of Cuba with the Bay of Pigs invasion. The invasion failed, but it served as a warning to Fidel Castro. Also, the United States had installed several nuclear missile sites in [Turkey](#) and Italy with the range to strike Moscow, the capital of the Soviet Union.

As a result, the Soviet Union felt they needed missile sites that could strike at the United States. At the same time the Cuban government wanted protection from the United States. They decided to work together and have the Soviet Union put nuclear missiles in Cuba that could strike most any portion of the USA.

How the Crisis Began

On October 14, 1962 an American U-2 spy plane flying over Cuba captured pictures of long range Soviet missiles in Cuba. This was a crisis like never before. These missiles could reach any point of the United States with nuclear warheads causing mass destruction.

[President Kennedy](#) called a meeting with his main security advisors. They considered a number of options from diplomacy to a full scale attack and invasion on Cuba. The Joint Chiefs of Staff voted to invade. They felt this was the only viable option. However, Kennedy was concerned that this would start World War III between the US and the Soviet Union. He opted to set up a naval blockade.

Blockade

Kennedy announced his plan on October 22, 1962. He showed the world the missile bases and said that the United States would be putting Cuba under "quarantine". This meant that no offensive weapons would be allowed to enter Cuba. He also said that any attack on the US from Cuba would be considered an act of war from the Soviet Union.

Over the next several days the crisis became more intense. The Soviet Union said they would not back down. By the 24th, Kennedy believed the US would have to invade Cuba.

Negotiations

Although the Soviet Union was publicly saying they would never back down, they were secretly negotiating with the United States. Eventually the two sides reached an agreement. The Soviet Union would remove the missiles from Cuba as long as the United States agreed to never invade Cuba again. In secret, the US also had to agree to remove their nuclear missiles from Turkey and Italy. The crisis was over.

Results of the Crisis

The crisis was President Kennedy's greatest moment. After the Bay of Pigs failure and the Berlin Wall, his leadership had come into question. The world could feel confident in the leader of the United States again.

Interesting Facts About the Cuban Missile Crisis

- The Soviet Union leader at the time, Chairman Nikita Khrushchev, thought that Kennedy was weak because of his decisions at the Bay of Pigs as well as the Berlin Wall. He thought Kennedy would back down and eventually allow the missiles.
- After the crisis a Washington DC to Moscow hotline was established between the president and the leader of Soviet Union.
- The Cuban leader, Fidel Castro, was not happy as he was left out of the negotiations between Kennedy and Khrushchev.
- Not everyone in the US was happy about the outcome. General Curtis LeMay called it the worst defeat in US history.
- Khrushchev wrote a personal letter to President Kennedy during the crisis asking that they come to an agreement in order to avoid war.

Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962: Quiz

1) Who was the leader of the Soviet Union during the Cuban Missile Crisis?

- Mikhail Gorbachev
- Leonid Brezhnev
- Nikita Khrushchev
- Fidel Castro
- Joseph Stalin

2) In what country did the Soviet Union put nuclear missile sites that could hit any target within the United States?

- Guatemala
- Mexico
- Italy
- Turkey
- Cuba

3) Who was president of the United States during the Cuban Missile Crisis?

- Dwight Eisenhower
- John F. Kennedy
- Bill Clinton
- George Bush
- Gerald Ford

4) How did the United States discover that nuclear missiles were being installed into Cuba?

- They decoded a secret message from Fidel Castro
- US spies in Russia found out
- Cuban exiles smuggled secret documents into the United States
- With help from the United Kingdom spy network
- Pictures from a U-2 spy plane

5) What did the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the United States want to do when they discovered the missiles?

- Launch a full invasion and takeover of Cuba
 - Negotiate with the Soviet Union
 - Establish a blockade
 - Go to the United Nations for help
 - None of the above
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6) What event prior to the Cuban Missile Crisis caused Fidel Castro to look to the Soviet Union for military help?

- Vietnam War
- Building of the Berlin Wall
- Suez Crisis
- Bay of Pigs invasion
- Korean War

7) What actions did the United States first take when they discovered the missiles?

- They attacked Cuba in full force
- They formed a blockade against any weapons entering Cuba
- They asked the United Nations for help
- They started negotiations with Fidel Castro
- They tried to pay Cuba to remove the missiles

8) What did the US agree to do in order to get the Soviet Union to remove the missiles?

- Never to invade Cuba again
- Remove nuclear missiles from Turkey
- Remove nuclear missiles from Italy
- All of the above
- None of the above

9) What leader was left out of the negotiations?

- President Kennedy
- Nikita Khrushchev
- Fidel Castro
- All of the above
- None of the above

10) True or false: Everyone considered the resolution of the negotiations to be a great victory for the United States.

- TRUE
- FALSE
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