

The Cuban Missile Crisis, October 1962

By U.S. State Department, adapted by Newsela staff on 11.30.16

Word Count **583**

Level **590L**



TOP: A briefing is given to President John F. Kennedy (center) at the Cape Canaveral Missile Test Annex in Florida, September 11, 1962, at the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Also seen are Vice President Lyndon Johnson (second from left) and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara (second from right). Photo: NASA. BOTTOM: Distances of major cities from Cuba from a newspaper during the crisis. Map courtesy of Getty Images.

Editor's Note: The United States and the Soviet Union were partners in World War II. But in 1947, they became enemies in a Cold War. This was not a "hot" war where guns were fired at each other. It was a "cold" war filled with angry words. The Soviet Union was communist. People there did not own property. The United States was a democracy. People had more rights. The Soviet Union wanted to control other countries. America wanted to stop them. Both countries wanted more control in Latin America. This led to a showdown in Cuba.

Nuclear missiles in Cuba

The Cuban Missile Crisis happened in October 1962. The United States and the Soviet Union moved very close to a nuclear war.

In April 1962, Cubans from the U.S. attacked Cuba at the Bay of Pigs. They wanted to drive Fidel Castro from power. They failed. In July, the leader of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev, told Castro he would put nuclear missiles in Cuba. This could stop new attacks by America. On October 14, a U.S. spy plane was flying above Cuba. It took pictures of cannons that could fire nuclear missiles. The pictures were brought to the White House the next day. This began the Cuban Missile Crisis.

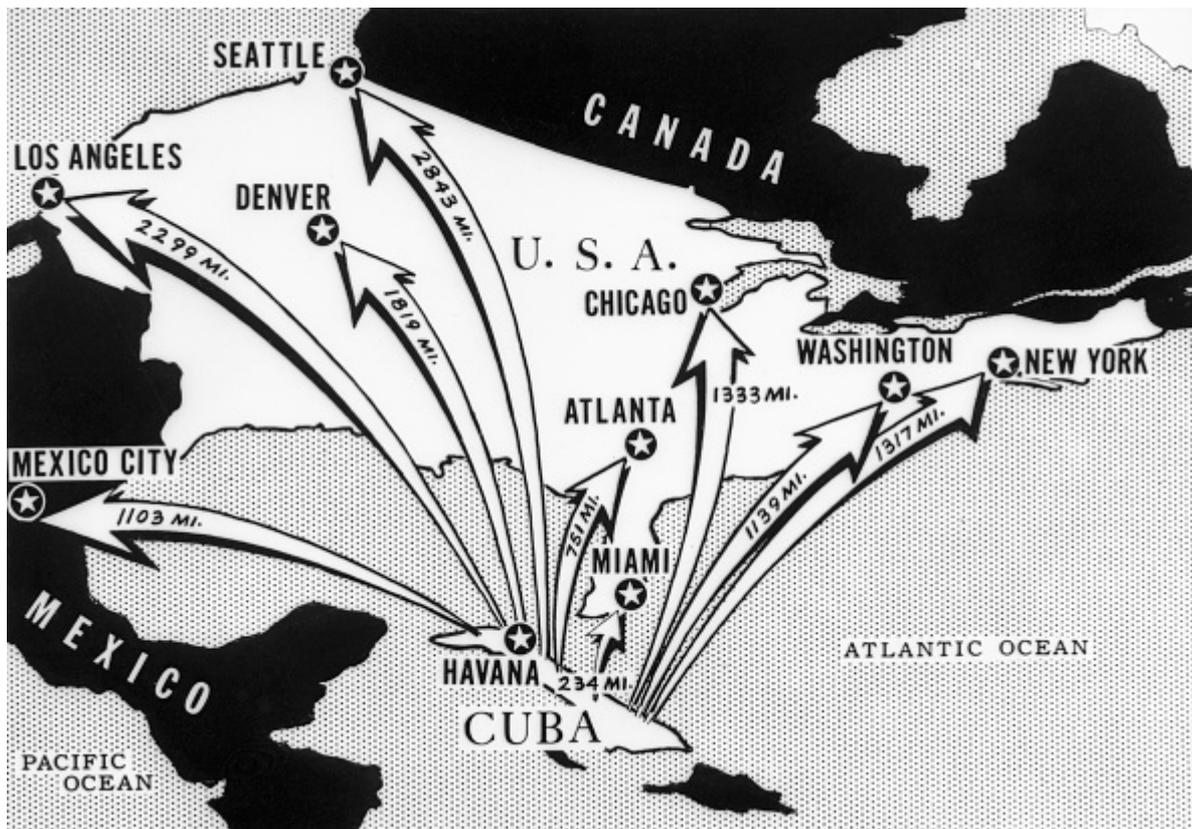
President Kennedy had meetings

President Kennedy had meetings at the White House. Some of his advisers wanted to bomb the missiles. Others just wanted to give Cuba and the Soviet Union a warning. The president decided to stop Soviet ships that were bringing weapons to Cuba.

On October 22, Kennedy sent a letter to Khrushchev. He wanted all Soviet weapons taken out of Cuba.

He spoke of dangers

The president went on television that evening. He spoke of the dangers that could happen.



On October 24, Khrushchev answered Kennedy. He said that Soviet ships would keep coming to Cuba. But on October 24 and 25, some ships turned back. Meanwhile, more U-2 flights over Cuba showed the Soviet missiles were ready to be used. The U.S. was moving closer to war.

Khrushchev sent Kennedy a message

On October 26, there was some surprising news. A TV reporter said he met with a Soviet spy. The spy said the missiles would be taken out of Cuba. But the United States had to promise not to attack Cuba again. That night Khrushchev sent Kennedy a message. He wrote that he was worried about nuclear war. Khrushchev did not want a war to start.

One more time

But the next day, Khrushchev sent another message. Now he said the U.S. had to take missiles out of Turkey. The U.S. had weapons in Turkey, near the USSR. That same day a U.S. spy plane was shot down over Cuba. The pilot was killed. The U.S. was ready to attack Cuba. That night Kennedy decided to write to Khrushchev one more time. He promised not to attack Cuba. He told him to take the missiles back to the Soviet Union.

And the U.S. said missiles would be taken out of Turkey.

The crisis ended

The next morning was October 28, 1962. The crisis ended. Missiles went back to the Soviet Union. U.S. missiles were taken out of Turkey in April 1963.

Two other good things happened. First, a telephone line between the president and the Soviet leader was set. If there were problems in the future they could call each other. It was called the "Hotline." Second, the two countries started talking about making fewer nuclear weapons.

Quiz

- 1 Which statement BEST states a main idea of the entire article?
- (A) The United States wanted to end Fidel Castro's control of Cuba.
 - (B) The United States and the Soviet Union came close to a nuclear war.
 - (C) President Kennedy warned the country of the dangers of nuclear war.
 - (D) President Kennedy used a special phone line to talk to the Soviet leader.

- 2 Read the paragraph from the section "President Kennedy had meetings."

President Kennedy had meetings at the White House. Some of his advisers wanted to bomb the missiles. Others just wanted to give Cuba and the Soviet Union a warning. The president decided to stop Soviet ships that were bringing weapons to Cuba.

What is this paragraph MAINLY about?

- (A) why some of Kennedy's advisers disagreed with him
 - (B) why the United States should stop Soviet ships
 - (C) what plans Kennedy had to choose between
 - (D) how presidents often do not agree with advisers
- 3 Why did the Soviet leader put missiles in Cuba?
- (A) to protect Cuba from future attacks by the United States
 - (B) to stop the United States from attacking the Soviet Union
 - (C) to launch missiles into the United States and start a war
 - (D) to make the United States take their missiles out of Turkey
- 4 According to the article, what is TRUE about President Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev?
- (A) they worked together a lot to support world peace
 - (B) they thought that nuclear weapons would always be necessary
 - (C) they wanted to remove Fidel Castro from power
 - (D) they wanted to avoid nuclear war

Answer Key

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