

# The Cuban Missile Crisis, October 1962

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

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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 fought together against Germany during World War II. But in 1947, they became enemies in a Cold War. This was not a "hot" war where weapons were fired at each other. It was a "cold" war filled with angry words. The Soviet Union was communist. People there did not have many rights. The United States was a democracy. Its people had more rights. Under Soviet communism, the government owned everything. The United States did not allow the government to own everything. These two countries started competing for more control and power in countries all over the world. They each wanted more power in Latin America, which included Cuba.*

## Secret agreement with Fidel Castro

The Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962 brought the United States and the Soviet Union very close to 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, but they failed. After that, Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev reached a secret agreement with Fidel Castro. The Soviet Union would put nuclear missiles in Cuba to stop any future attacks by the U.S. In September, the United States discovered that Soviet weapons were being brought into Cuba. On September 4, 1962, President Kennedy warned the Soviet Union to stop what it was doing. Five weeks later, a U.S. spy plane was flying above Cuba. It took pictures clearly showing nuclear missile sites were being built. The pictures were brought to the White House the next day. This began the Cuban Missile Crisis.

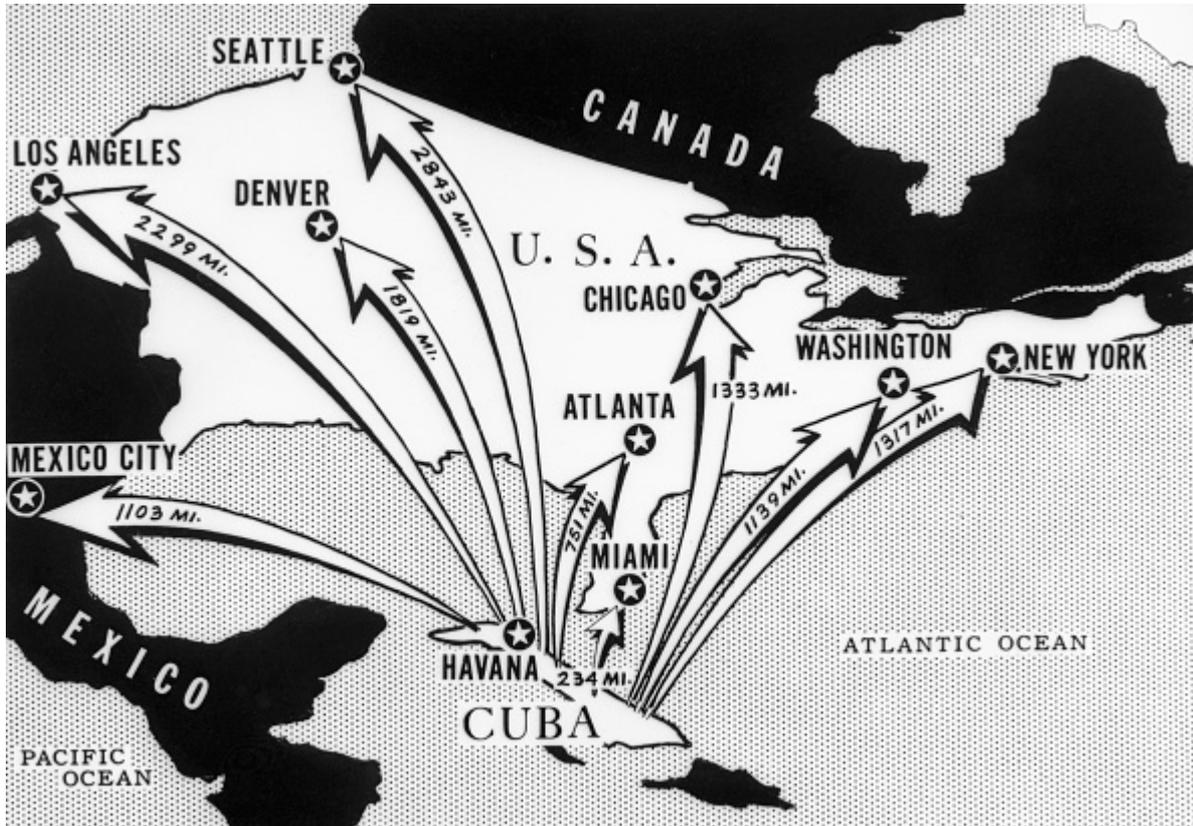
### **Meetings at the White House**

President Kennedy had meetings at the White House. Some of his advisers wanted air strikes to destroy the missile sites. Others just wanted to send warnings to Cuba and the Soviet Union. The president ordered that Soviet ships would not be allowed to bring weapons to Cuba.

On October 22, Kennedy sent a letter to Khrushchev demanding that all Soviet weapons be taken out of Cuba.

### **Dangers that could lie ahead**

The president also went on television that evening. He spoke of the dangers that could lie ahead. The U.S. got ready to block Soviet ships from entering Cuba and made plans for a military strike on Cuba.



On October 24, Khrushchev answered Kennedy. He said that Soviet ships would keep coming to Cuba. However, on October 24 and 25, some Soviet ships turned back from entering Cuba. Others were stopped by U.S. Navy ships and searched, but no weapons were found. Meanwhile, more spy plane flights over Cuba showed the Soviet missile sites were almost ready. The U.S. was moving closer to war.

### **A Soviet agent told him**

On October 26, the U.S. got some surprising information. An ABC News reporter told the White House that a Soviet agent told him that the Soviets would remove their missiles from Cuba if the United States promised not to invade the island. That night Khrushchev sent Kennedy a message. He wrote of his worries about nuclear war. It sounded like the solution the reporter had been told of.

### **U.S. spy plane shot down**

However, the next day, October 27, Khrushchev sent another message. Now he demanded the U.S. must remove U.S. missiles from Turkey. Those missiles were close to the Soviet Union. That same day a U.S. spy plane was shot down over Cuba. The pilot was killed. The U.S. started to get ready to attack Cuba. That night Kennedy decided to write to Khrushchev one more time. He promised not to attack Cuba if the missiles were taken back to the Soviet Union.

And the United States said it would remove the missiles from Turkey.

The next morning, October 28, Khrushchev announced that Soviet missiles would be removed from Cuba.

### **Soviets removed their weapons**

The crisis was over. The Soviets removed their weapons from Cuba and U.S. missiles were removed from Turkey in 1963.

Two other good things happened. First, a telephone line between the president and the Soviet leader was set up to help talk about future problems. It was called the "Hotline." Second, the two countries started talking about making fewer nuclear weapons.

## Quiz

- 1 Which statement BEST expresses the main idea of the article?
  - (A) The United States wanted to drive Fidel Castro from power and attacked Cuba at the Bay of Pigs.
  - (B) The United States and the Soviet Union almost came to a nuclear war over nuclear missiles in Cuba and Turkey.
  - (C) The Cuban Missile Crisis began when a United States spy plane discovered that nuclear missiles were being built in Cuba.
  - (D) The United States refused to remove missiles in Turkey and threatened to bomb missiles being built in Cuba.
  
- 2 Which sentence from the article is MOST important to include in its summary?
  - (A) The Soviet Union would put nuclear missiles in Cuba to stop any future attacks by the United States.
  - (B) Some of his advisers wanted air strikes to destroy the missile sites.
  - (C) However, on October 24 and 25, some Soviet ships turned back from entering Cuba.
  - (D) The United States got ready to block Soviet ships from entering Cuba and made plans for a military strike on Cuba.
  
- 3 Based on the article, how would a telephone line between Nikita Khrushchev and President Kennedy be helpful?
  - (A) they could tell each other about their plans to build new missile sites
  - (B) they could share secrets about nuclear weapons privately
  - (C) they would not have to write long letters to each other anymore
  - (D) they could communicate about problems clearly and quickly
  
- 4 According to the article, why did Nikita Khrushchev want President Kennedy to remove missiles from Turkey?
  - (A) so Turkey would be safe from a nuclear attack from the United States.
  - (B) so the United States would lose power in Europe and the Middle East
  - (C) so the United States could not launch nuclear missiles into the Soviet Union
  - (D) so there would no longer be nuclear weapons in the world

## Answer Key

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