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The Cuban Missile Crisis: Leadership on the Brink

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DALLAS 1963



Historical Context

- Cold War Tensions
 - Berlin
 - Bay of Pigs
 - American missile locations in Europe
- American/Cuban relations
 - Fidel Castro takes power, 1959
 - Fall 1960 Khrushchev pledges to defend Cuba from United States

Courtesy National Archives



October 14, 1962

- American U-2 spy plane flyover of Cuba photographs Russian missile installations in Cuba
 - Intermediate range missiles with potential to strike any major city on the East Coast and in the Midwest
 - One of many flights over Cuba – Maj. Richard Heyser



October 15, 1962

- CIA analysts spot launchers, missiles and transport trucks
 - Evidence Soviets are building launch sites capable of striking the United States



October 16

- 9:00 a.m. Mc Bundy George, National Security Advisor, informs President of Soviet missiles in Cuba
- President Kennedy meets with advisors to discuss response options

United States. Department of Defense. Department of Defense Cuban Missile Crisis Briefing Materials. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston



Two Perspectives

Joint Chiefs of Staff

- Castro regime was a danger to Western Hemisphere and needed to be removed
- Best position the United States to fight a war

President Kennedy

- Select the strategy that was least likely to start a war
- Concerned about provoking Soviets to respond in kind

Response Options Presented

- Air attack on Soviet missile sites
- Continued surveillance and diplomacy with Fidel Castro and Nikita Khrushchev
- Naval quarantine to prevent reinforcements



Cecil Stoughton. White House Photographs. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum. Boston.

Discussion and Decision

- Directions
 - Breaking into small groups, discuss the three options presented to President Kennedy by the Joint Chiefs.
 - What are the pros and cons of each option?
 - Create a list of possible responses from the Soviets for each option.
 - As a group decide which option you will choose and why.
- Discussion Time: 5 minutes
- After discussion time, each group will share their group's decision and rationale.



President Kennedy's Decision

- Conduct a naval quarantine
 - Deliberately not called a blockade
- Provided time to negotiate a missile withdrawal

October 18-19

- October 18 Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko visits Kennedy
 - Aid to Cuba is only for defensive purposes
 - Kennedy does not reveal knowledge of missiles
- October 19
 - Kennedy leaves for campaign appearances in Ohio and Illinois



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October 20-22

- October 20
 - Kennedy makes the decision to move forward with the quarantine
- October 22
 - Kennedy calls former Presidents Hoover, Truman and Eisenhower
 - EX-Comm formally organized with daily meetings
 - Cabinet and congressional leaders informed of situation



Phone call between President John F. Kennedy and former President Dwight D. Eisenhower. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum. Boston.



October 22

- Address to the nation
 - “Unmistakable evidence” of missile threat in Cuba
 - Announces naval quarantine to prevent ships carrying weapons to reach Cuba
 - Demands Soviets withdraw missiles

Robert Knudsen. White House Photographs. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston

Letters of Diplomacy

- October 22 Letter to Khrushchev from Kennedy delivered by U.S. ambassador to USSR
 - “the one thing that has most concerned me has been the possibility that your government would not correctly understand the will and determination of the United States in any given situation, since I have not assumed that your or any other sane man would, in this nuclear age, deliberately plunge the world into war which it is crystal clear no country could win and which could only result in catastrophic consequences to the whole world, including the aggressor.”
- October 23 Khrushchev response
 - Missiles “are intended solely for defensive purposes”
 - Will not remove the missiles
- Kennedy response
 - Khrushchev started the crisis by sending the missiles



October 23-24

- Adlai Stevenson, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations
 - Explains matter to the U.N. Security Council
- U.S. ships move into position around Cuba
- Soviet submarines move into place
- Soviet freighters with military supplies halt
- Khrushchev sends note to Kennedy
 - “You are no longer appealing to reason, but wish to intimidate us”

Robert Knudsen. White House Photographs. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston

October 25

- Adlai Stevenson shows evidence of missiles in Cuba to the United Nations
- Soviet oil tanker Bucharest approaches the U.S. quarantine zone, heading for Cuba.
- Decision point: How would you handle the situation?
 - Do you intercept the ship or let it go through?
 - As a group, decide how to act and provide your rationale.



US Government, Unknown photographer, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

October 26

- Khrushchev's Decision
 - Fidel Castro writes Khrushchev to launch first strike against the U.S.
 - As a group decide what Khrushchev should do
 - Agree with Castro and launch a strike
 - Contact Kennedy regarding de-escalation
 - What are the pros and cons of each?
 - What are the risks for Castro, Khrushchev and Kennedy?

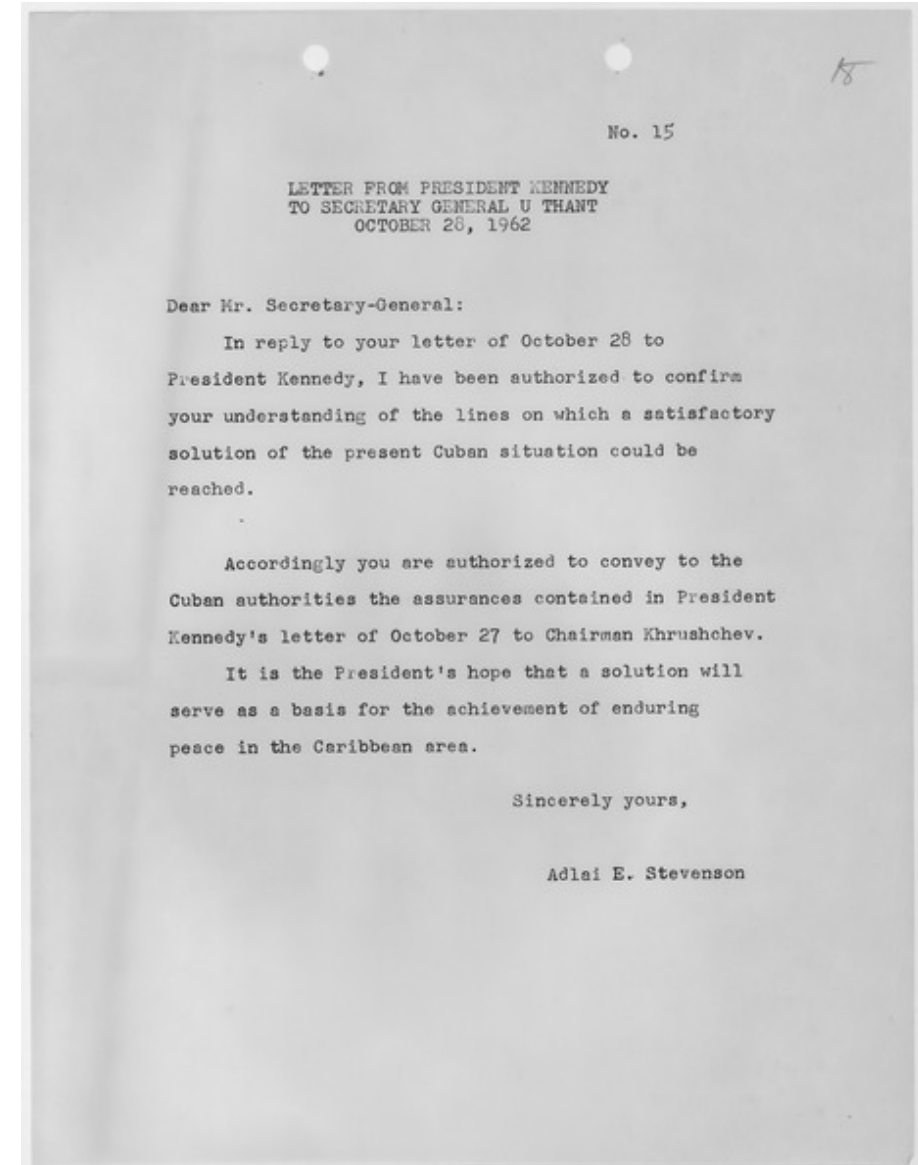


October 27

- U-2 pilot Maj. Rudolf Anderson shot down and killed over Cuba.
 - “We are now in an entirely new ball game” – Kennedy
 - Kennedy determines Khrushchev was not behind order to shoot down plane
- Khrushchev letter to Kennedy demanding U.S. withdraw missiles in Turkey.
 - Kennedy response: US promise not to attack Cuba after Russians withdraw
- U.S. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy and Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin meet
 - U.S. planning to remove missiles from Turkey but could not say so publicly

October 28

- Discussion and decision
 - Discuss the position of each nation regarding the negotiations. Do you accept the agreement?
 - Agreement details
 - Soviets will withdraw missiles from Cuba
 - United States will withdraw missiles from Turkey
 - United States will not attack Cuba after the Soviet withdrawal
- Discussion time: 5 minutes



Presidential Discussions October 28, 1963

- [\(27\) Phone Call with General Eisenhower during Cuban Missile Crisis – YouTube](#)



Cecil Stoughton. White House Photographs. John F. Kennedy
Presidential Library and Museum, Boston

October 28 Letter from Khrushchev to Kennedy

- “I regard with respect and trust the statement you made in your message of October 27, 1962, that there would be not attack, no invasion of Cuba and not only on the part of the United States, but on the part of other nations of the Western Hemisphere, as you said in your same message. Then the motives which induced us to render assistance of such a kind in Cuba disappear....”
- “I note with satisfaction that you have responded to the desire I expressed with regard to elimination of the aforementioned dangerous situation, as well as with regard to providing conditions for a more thoughtful appraisal of the internal situation, fraught as it is with great dangers in our age of thermonuclear weapons, rocketry, spaceships, global rockets, and other deadly weapons. All people are interested in insuring peace.”

Aftereffects

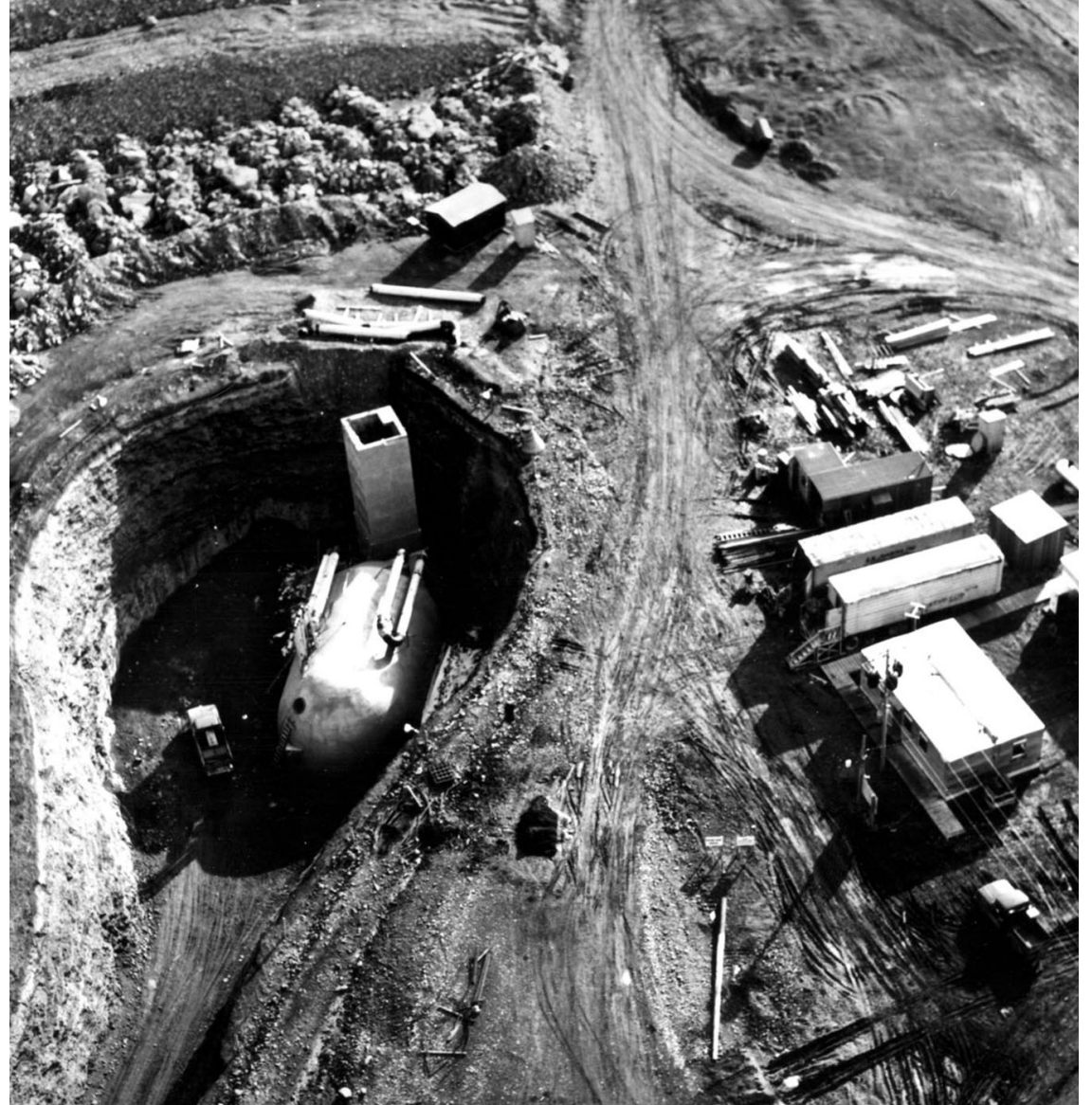
- When reading Khrushchev's comments to Kennedy, what can you infer about trust and interaction between the two leaders?
- How did the Cuban Missile Crisis impact relations between the Americans, Cubans and Soviets?

Cecil Stoughton. White House Photographs. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston



Connecting to Today

- Malmstrom Air Force Base
 - 341st Strategic Missile Wing activated
 - Initially activated Sept. 15, 1942, as 341st Bombardment Group
 - 1961 Construction of the wing's first missile launch facility began
- October 27, 1962
 - 10th Strategic Missile Squadron's Minuteman I missiles became alert-ready
- July 1963
 - 12th and 490th Strategic Missile Squadrons became operational
 - 15 flights consisting of 150 missiles



Connecting to Today

“We are many thousands of miles from the Soviet Union, but this state, in a very real sense, is only 30 minutes away.”

- President Kennedy visits Great Falls, MT
September 26, 1963

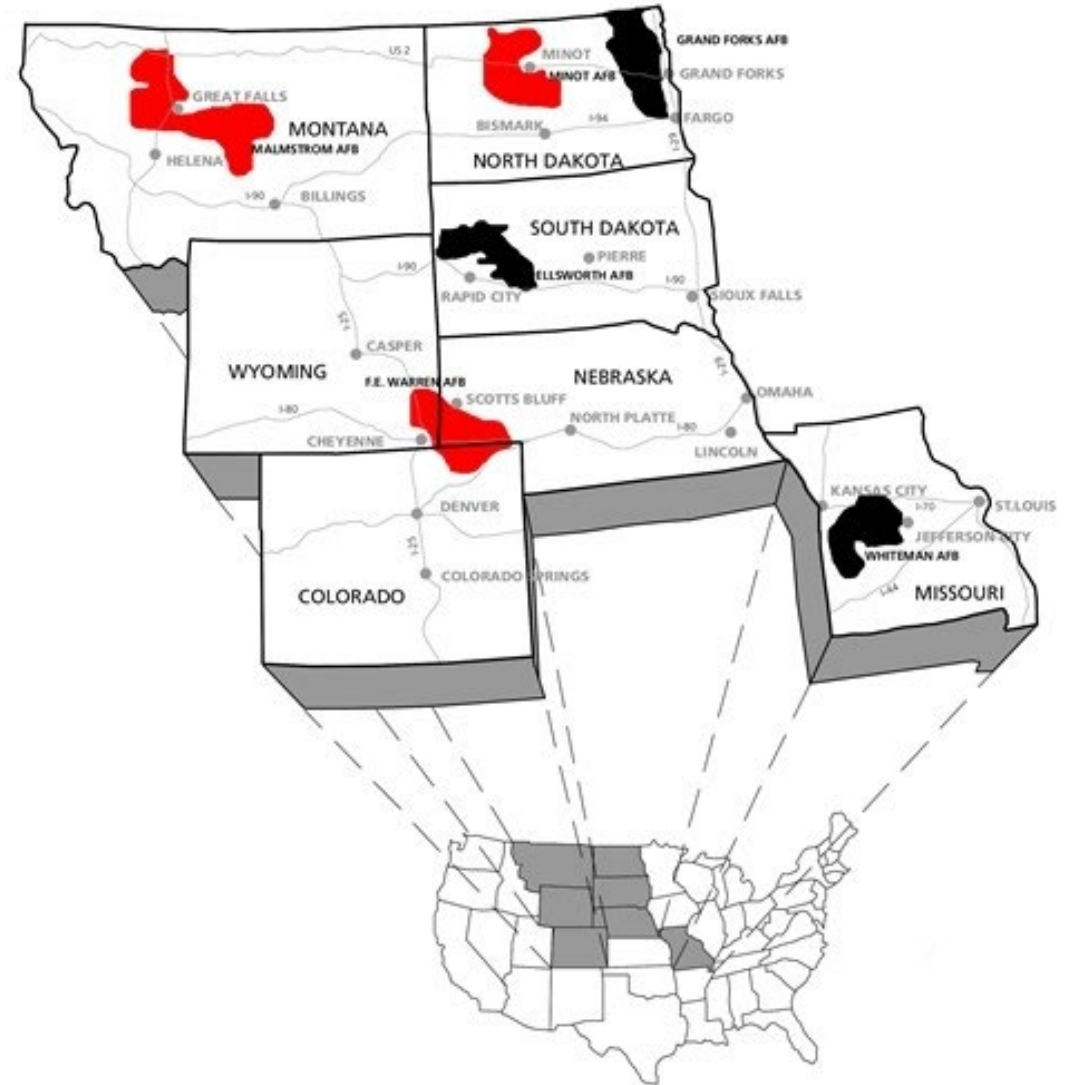
- Great Falls, MT selected to highlight the success over the previous year building nuclear arsenals in the area
- Speech highlighted national defense and conservation/resource development connections to national security

Cecil Stoughton. White House Photographs. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston



Connecting to Today

- Minuteman Missile Fields
 - Black areas = Deactivated
 - Red areas = Still active
- Montana is home to one of three publicly-known large-scale nuclear missile silos in the United States
 - Originally 150 missiles in 1960s
 - Approximately 100 remain today
- Montana Public Radio
 - [Why are there so many nuclear missiles in Montana? | Montana Public Radio \(mtpr.org\)](https://www.mtpr.org)



Connecting to Today

- Montana, February 2023
- Chinese spy balloon photographed over Billings, MT
- Malmstrom AFB is 219 miles northwest of Billings

Courtesy of the Department of Defense





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Primary Sources!!!!

<https://emuseum.jfk.org/collections/21313/cold-war-communism-and-cuban-missile-crisis>





Thank you!

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