

The Cuban Missile Crisis: 13 Days

October 16, 1962: President John F. Kennedy is briefed by the CIA that an American U-2 spy plane has taken photographs of Soviet nuclear missile launch sites under construction in Cuba. Over the next 13 days the Cuban Missile Crisis will unfold, bringing the US and the former Soviet Union the closest we have ever been to nuclear war.



Source: [CIA](#)

October 17, 1962: The US military moves into position in the southern United States as more missile sites are revealed.



Source: [JFK Library](#)

Range of Soviet Missiles



Source: [NGA](#)

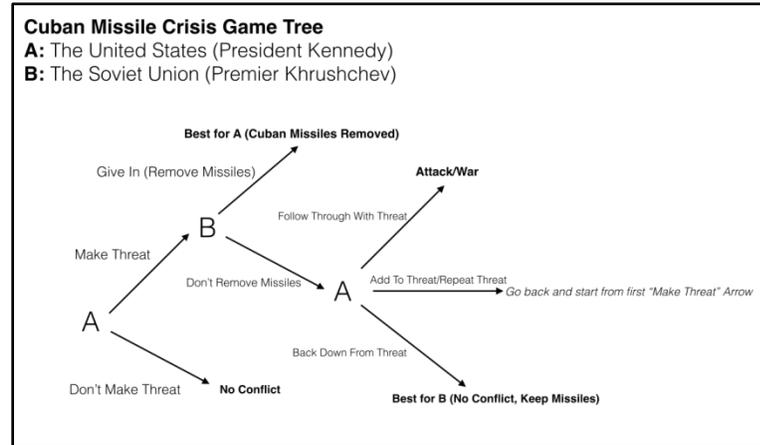
The Cuban Missile Crisis: 13 Days

October 18, 1962: President Kennedy meets with Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko. This meeting had been scheduled long before the US discovered the Soviet missile sites under construction in Cuba. President Kennedy does not reveal that the US knows about the missiles, but warns Gromyko that offensive missiles must not be installed in Cuba. Gromyko appears not to know about the missiles and asserts that Soviet aid to Cuba is only defensive and humanitarian in nature and it constitutes no threat to the United States.

Source: [JFK Library](#)



October 19, 1962: President Kennedy meets with Robert McNamara (US Secretary of Defense) and members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, including Air Force Chief of Staff General Curtis LeMay, before leaving on a campaign trip. By this point Kennedy and his advisors have narrowed their range of responsive options down to just two choices—whether to blockade Cuba or invade it.



(See also *Thirteen Days, a Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis*, by Robert F. Kennedy (W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1968).

Source: [WikiCommons](#)

October 20, 1962: President Kennedy

and his advisors decide to quarantine Cuba to prevent the delivery of additional missiles and planning for the quarantine commences. One of the ships will be a destroyer named the USS Joseph P. Kennedy. The ship was named after President Kennedy's older brother, a naval aviator in WWII who was killed in action in 1944. Source: [navyhistory.org](#)



October 21, 1962: Kennedy meets with the National Security Council to discuss new information received regarding the missile crisis. A speech to the nation is drafted in which Kennedy will explain that the

The Cuban Missile Crisis: 13 Days

Soviet Union has placed offensive missiles, aimed at the United States, in Cuba, and that a quarantine will be placed on military equipment sent to Cuba. The quarantine can be changed to a blockade if the situation changes.

October 22, 1962: President Kennedy officially establishes the Executive Committee of the National Security Council (ExComm) to deal with the crisis in Cuba. He then publically reveals the existence of the missiles and announces a quarantine of Cuba in a televised address to the nation. US forces were put on a high "Defense Condition" (DEFCON-3).



Source: [JFK Library](#)



October 23, 1962: US Ambassador to the United Nations Adlai Stevenson briefs the UN Security Council, publically confronting the Soviet Ambassador in a heated exchange. President Kennedy signed the Proclamation authorizing the quarantine, and navy ships and submarines moved into position around Cuba.

Source: [NSA](#)

President Kennedy and Soviet Premier Khrushchev initiate a series of communications regarding the situation that will continue over the next several days.



5

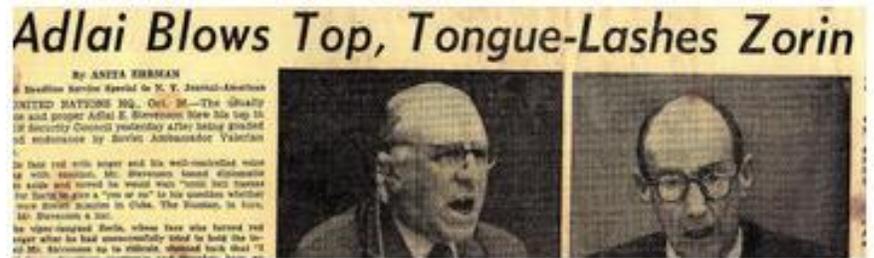
Source: [cubanmissilecrisis.org](#)

The Cuban Missile Crisis: 13 Days



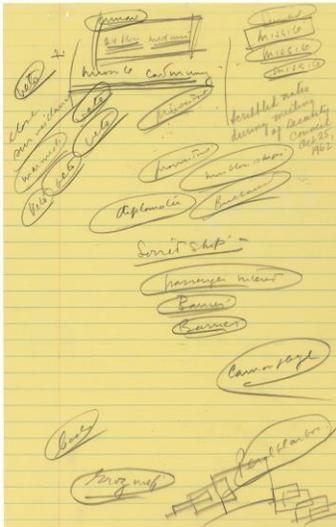
October 24, 1962: US forces are put on DEFCON-2 (DEFCON-1 is war), the highest-ever alert. The world holds its breath waiting for nuclear war. Khrushchev declares the US decisions to be acts of aggression and insists that Soviet ships will continue to Cuba.

October 25, 1962: Adlai Stevenson is involved in a confrontation with Soviet Ambassador Valerian Zorin at the United Nations.



Source: [JFK Library](#)

President Kennedy doodles “missiles missiles missiles” during a Cuban Missile Crisis meeting.

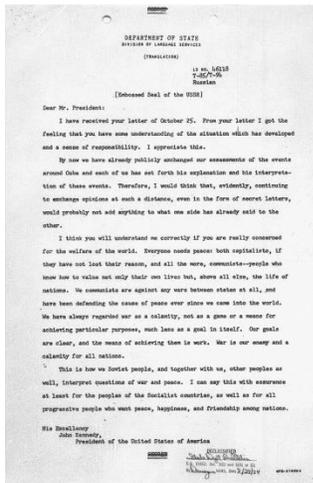


Source: [National Archives](#)

October 26, 1962: President Kennedy receives a rambling letter through back channels from Soviet Premier Khrushchev suggesting that the Soviets can withdraw the missiles if the quarantine is lifted and

The Cuban Missile Crisis: 13 Days

the US guarantees it will not invade Cuba. Earlier exchanges between the two leaders have been fruitless and this is the first sign that a peaceful resolution to the crisis might be possible.



Source: [JFK Library](#)



October 27, 1962: President Kennedy receives a new message from the Soviets demanding that the US withdraw its missiles from Turkey in addition to ending the blockade. Major Rudolph Anderson is killed when his U-2 spy plane is shot down over Cuba. President Kennedy's military advisors intensify their efforts to persuade him to take military action. ExComm finally decides to disregard new Soviet demands and responds to Khrushchev's earlier message of October 26. Robert Kennedy meets secretly

with Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin and they agree to a framework under which the Soviets will withdraw the missiles from Cuba and the US will end its blockade. President Kennedy also secretly agrees that the US missiles in Turkey will be removed in the future.

Source: [JFK Library](#)

October 28, 1962: Soviet Premier Khrushchev agrees to withdraw the missiles from Cuba in return for a US agreement guaranteeing Cuban security and ending the blockade. The long 13 days of the Cuban Missile Crisis are over—and we have stepped back from the brink. President Kennedy will later say in a speech at American University in June of 1963: "Above all, while defending our own vital interests, nuclear powers must avert those confrontations which bring an adversary to the choice of either a humiliating defeat or a nuclear war." *Thirteen Days, a Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis*, by Robert F. Kennedy, p. 97 (W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1968).



Source: [JFK Library](#)

The Cuban Missile Crisis: 13 Days

RESOURCES:

JFK Library

[World on the Brink: JFK and the Cuban Missile Crisis, 13 Days in October 1962](#)

[To the Brink: JFK and the Cuban Missile Crisis](#)

Discovery Channel:

[Defcon2: Cuban Missile Crisis Part 1 of 6](#)

[Defcon 2: Cuban Missile Crisis Part 2 of 6](#)

[Defcon 2: Cuban Missile Crisis Part 3 of 6](#)

[Defcon 2: Cuban Missile Crisis Part 4 of 6](#)

[Defcon 2: Cuban Missile Crisis Part 5 of 6](#)

[Defcon 2: Cuban Missile Crisis Part 6 of 6](#)

US Department of State:

[Milestones in History: The Cuban Missile Crisis, October 1962](#)