

# MISSILES IN CUBA!

For 13 tense days in 1962, the U.S. and the Soviet Union stood on the brink of war. One wrong move and 100 million Americans could have been dead within minutes.

by Deborah Gore

**CAST:**

**Narrators A-H**

**Major Rudolf Anderson, Jr.**, U-2 pilot  
**Mrs. Anderson**, his wife  
**Kelly Freeman**, CIA employee  
**Elizabeth Webster**, CIA employee  
**John McCone**, CIA director  
**John F. Kennedy**, U.S. President  
**Robert Kennedy**, Attorney General  
**Dean Rusk**, Secretary of State  
**Robert McNamara**, Secretary of Defense  
**Adlai Stevenson**, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations  
**Gen. Maxwell Taylor**, chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff  
**Nikita Khrushchev**, Soviet leader  
**Messenger**

**ABOUT THIS PLAY**

"Cuba is one of the hottest spots in the cold war."

— *Junior Scholastic*, October 3, 1962.

A rivalry commonly called the *cold war* developed after World War II between the United States

and the Soviet Union. Both of these nations competed for influence among the developing nations of Latin America. One such country was Cuba. Fidel Castro (fee-DELL CASS-troh), overthrew a corrupt dictatorship in Cuba in 1959. He quickly set up a Communist-style government.

Cuba received military aid from the Soviets. In 1961 the U.S. broke off all ties with Cuba. The U.S. secretly supported an invasion of Cuba by Cuban exiles who wanted to overthrow Castro. The invasion failed.

Tensions between the U.S. and the tiny island nation, only 90 miles south of Florida, were high in the fall of 1962. Here is where our play begins.

**SCENE ONE**

**Narrator A:** A mid-October evening in California...

**Mrs. Anderson:** Be careful. I worry about you flying those jets at night.

**Major Anderson** (*kissing his wife good-bye*): Don't worry, it's just a routine flight. I'll see you tomorrow morning.

**Narrator A:** A few hours later, Anderson crosses the continent in his U-2 spy plane. He heads for Cuba on a top-secret mission for the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). As the sun rises, the island comes into view. The plane dips.

**Anderson** (*throws a switch on cockpit panel*): Let's see what

Our source for many of the quotes: *Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis* by Robert F. Kennedy, New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1969.



the Cubans have down there . . .

**Narrator A:** A periscope-like camera drops out of the plane's belly and starts clicking.

## SCENE TWO

**Narrator B:** Later that morning, the film is rushed to an auto repair shop outside Washington, DC. The building is actually a secret photo lab, code name: The Automat. There, CIA photo-interpreters study the pictures.

**Freeman:** Look! There seem to be Soviet Surface-to-Air missile (SAM) sites down there!

**Webster:** And check out those long tents! Could they be Soviet nuclear missiles?

**Freeman:** You're right! We'd better contact Director McCone!

## SCENE THREE

**Narrator C:** On October 16, President Kennedy meets with his advisers in the Cabinet Room.

**McCone** (*passing photos*): We have photographic evidence that the Soviets are deploying nuclear missiles in Cuba. Soviet freighters are shipping the weapons to Cuba.

**McNamara:** Why would Castro have Soviet missiles?

**Rusk:** That's a question Khrushchev should answer.

**Robert Kennedy:** We've got to do something!

**President Kennedy:** What are our options?

**Taylor:** We should go with a massive air or ground attack to rid the island of all Soviet missiles.

**Robert Kennedy:** But military action would kill innocent Cubans. It might also trigger the launching of nuclear weapons.

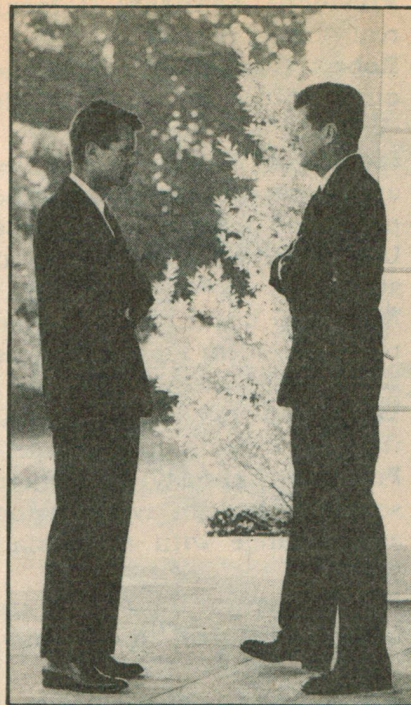
**McNamara:** A full-scale nuclear exchange between the Soviet Union and the U.S. would kill almost 100 million Americans. How about a blockade? We could stop the Soviets from bringing any more nuclear weapons into Cuba.

**President Kennedy:** I think we need to study the possibilities and meet later.

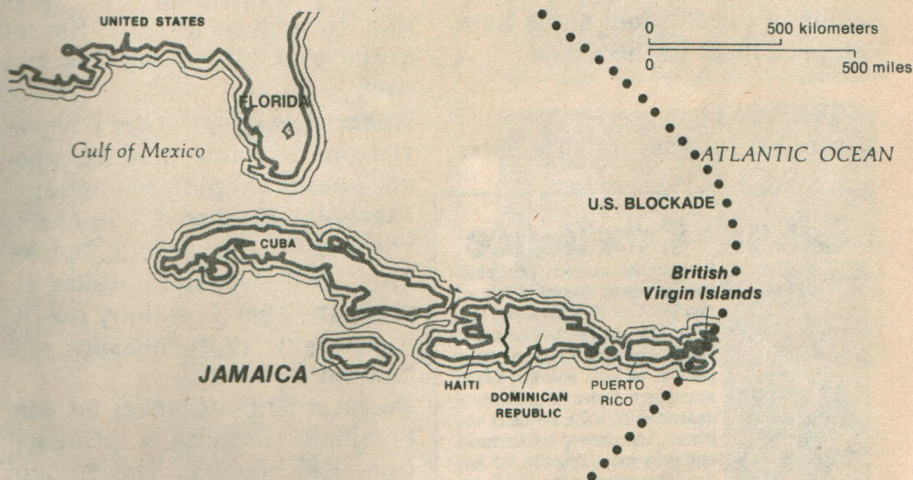


UPI/Bettmann Archive

Left: Khrushchev (l.) meets Castro (r.) in 1960. Right: Pres. Kennedy (r.) and his brother, Robert (l.), discuss the missile crisis.



UPI/Bettmann Archive



## SCENE FOUR

**Narrator D:** On October 17, Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko tells President Kennedy that the Soviet Union would never give nuclear weapons to Cuba. He says the Soviets are only providing Cubans with bread to "prevent hunger." On October 22, Kennedy makes a nationally-televised speech.

**President Kennedy:** Good evening, my fellow citizens. . . . Within the past week, evidence has established that a series of offensive missile sites is now on the island of Cuba. The purpose of these bases: to provide

a nuclear strike against the Western Hemisphere. . . .

We will not unnecessarily risk the costs of worldwide nuclear war . . . — but neither will we shrink from that risk at any time it must be faced.

**Narrator D:** The President says he has ordered a U.S. naval blockade to stop all Soviet ships carrying offensive weapons to Cuba. If the Soviets resist the blockade, Kennedy says, U.S. forces will fight back.

## SCENE FIVE

**Narrator E:** On October 24, U.S. ships form the blockade. At a



Cabinet meeting . . .

**President Kennedy:** It looks really mean, doesn't it?

**Robert Kennedy:** You had no other choice but to blockade Cuba.

**Stevenson:** The Soviet missiles are a grave threat . . . . The peace and security of both the U.S. and the whole world is at stake.

**Narrator D:** In the hushed room, President Kennedy covers his face with his hands.

**Taylor (enters):** Soviet submarines are nearing the blockade!

**President Kennedy:** Isn't there some way we can avoid having an exchange with a Russian sub?

**McNamara:** No, those subs are too great a threat to our ships forming the blockade.

**Messenger:** Director McCone, I have a message for you.

**McCone (reads):** Mr. President, some of the Russian ships have stopped dead in the water!

#### SCENE SIX

**Narrator F:** Navy reports later

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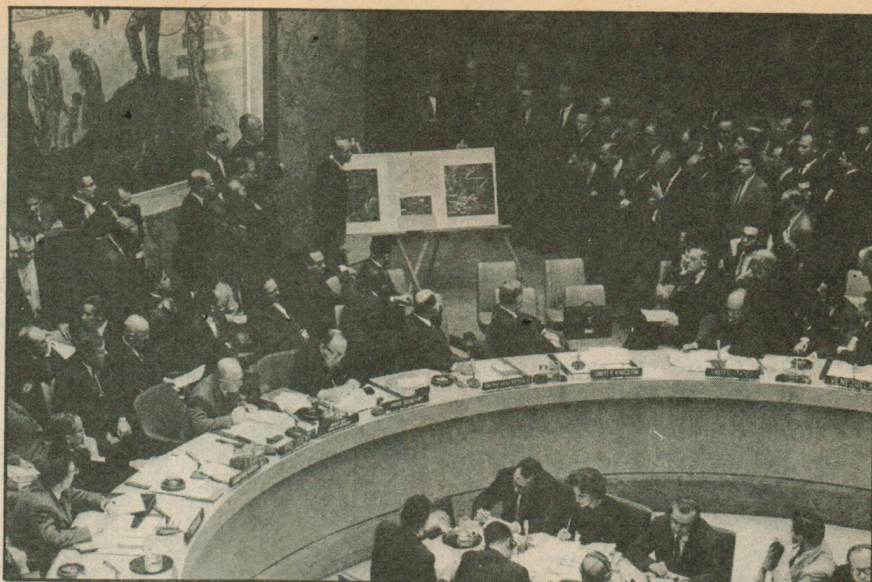
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Photographs of Soviet missiles in Cuba were displayed at the U.N.

confirm that 20 Soviet ships have stopped or turned back at the blockade line. President Kennedy orders the U.S. Navy not to intercept any Soviet ships. Yet the danger is not over . . .

**Robert Kennedy:** These new aerial photos show that the missile sites are rapidly being built.

**President Kennedy:** The blockade seems to be working, but we must deal with the missiles already in Cuba. If military hostilities begin, those missiles will be fired at us.

**Narrator F:** On October 26, the President receives a proposal from Khrushchev. The Soviets will send no further weapons to Cuba, and will destroy or remove the missiles already there — on the condition that the U.S. agrees not to invade Cuba.

**Khrushchev (in a letter):** "We and you ought not to pull on the ends of the rope in which you have tied the knot of war, because the more the two of us pull, the tighter the knot will be tied . . . . If there is no intention to tighten the knot, and thereby to doom the world to the catastrophe of nuclear war, then let us not only relax the forces pulling on the ends of the rope, let us take measures to untie that knot."

#### SCENE SEVEN

**Narrator G:** The next day at the White House . . .

**McNamara:** Mr. President, I have some bad news.

**President Kennedy:** What?

**McNamara (looks at a report):** A U-2 pilot who has flown several photo missions over Cuba . . . was killed this morning when his plane was hit by a SAM missile.

**Narrator G:** President Kennedy turns pale.

**President Kennedy:** How can we send any more U-2 pilots over Cuba with those SAMs firing at them?

**Narrator G:** The President sends a letter to Khrushchev accepting his proposal.

#### SCENE EIGHT

**Narrator H:** On October 28, the Soviets notify the U.S. that all Soviet offensive missiles will be removed from Cuba. Robert Kennedy rushes to the White House. The President is at his desk in the Oval Office.

**President Kennedy (writing to the widow of the U-2 pilot):** "Dear Mrs. Anderson . . ." ☆

#### Discussion Questions

1. Did the U.S. have a right to set up a blockade to keep Soviet missiles out of Cuba? What were the alternatives?

2. What might have happened if the Soviets had *not* backed down?