

Primary Source Reading 17-1 ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

The Cuban Missile Crisis

▣ About the Selection

The transcript below begins on October 16, the first day of the Cuban Missile Crisis. From reading about the origins of World War I, President Kennedy came to believe that most wars start through a series of small mistakes and misunderstandings—at the time each one does not appear so bad, but together they add up to disaster. Kennedy wanted desperately to avoid making such a

Reader's Dictionary



obviate: to make unnecessary

series of mistakes while responding to the Soviet arms buildup in Cuba.

GUIDED READING

As you read, note how Khrushchev's public and private stances are different. Then answer the questions that follow.

October 16, A.M. Meeting

Arthur Lundahl [Director, National Photographic Interpretation Center]: This is a result of the photography taken Sunday, sir.

JFK: Yeah.

Lundahl: There's a medium-range ballistic missile launch site and two new military encampments . . . in west-central Cuba.

JFK: . . . How do you know this is a medium-range ballistic missile?

Lundahl: The length, sir.

JFK: Is it ready to be fired?

Sidney Graybeal [Chief, Guided Missile Division, CIA]: No, sir.

JFK: How long before it can be fired?

Graybeal: That depends. . . .

Robert McNamara [Secretary of Defense]: . . . The question is one of readiness . . . to fire and—and this is highly critical in forming our plans—that the time between today and the time when the readiness to fire capability develops is a very important thing.

October 16, P.M. Meeting

JFK [to Marshall Carter, CIA Deputy Director]: Uh, General, how long would you say we had before these, uh—at least to the best of your ability for the ones we know—will be ready to fire?

Carter: Well, our people estimate that these could be fully operational within two weeks. Uh, this would be the total complex. If they're the oxygen type, uh, we have no—it would be considerably longer since we don't have any indication of, uh, oxygen refueling there nor any radar.

JFK: There isn't any question in your mind, however, that it is an intermediate-range missile?

(continued)

Primary Source Reading **17-1** (continued) ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Carter: No, there's no question. . . .

Dean Rusk [Secretary of State]: You've seen actual missiles themselves and not just the boxes have you?

Carter: . . . In the picture there's an actual missile.

Private Note, Dated October 26, from Chairman Khrushchev to President Kennedy

All the weapons . . . are of a defensive nature. . . . Mr. President, let us show good sense. I assure you that the ships bound for Cuba are carrying no armaments at all. The armaments needed for the defense of Cuba are already there.

Let us therefore display statesmanlike wisdom. I propose: we, for our part will declare that our ships bound for Cuba are not carrying any armaments. You will declare that the United States will not invade Cuba with its troops and will not support any other forces which might intend to invade Cuba. Then the necessity for the presence of our military specialists in Cuba will be obviated.

Public Announcement Made October 27 by Chairman Khrushchev

. . . How are we, the Soviet Union, our Government, to assess your actions which are expressed in the fact that you have surrounded the Soviet Union with military bases. . . . Your missiles are located in Britain, are located in Italy and are aimed against us. Your missiles are located in Turkey.

You are disturbed over Cuba. You say this disturbs you because it is 90 miles by sea from the coast of the United States of America. But Turkey adjoins us.

October 27 Meeting

JFK: Well this is unsettling now, George, because he's [Khrushchev] got us in a pretty good spot here, because most people will regard this as not an unreasonable proposal. . . . I think you are going to find it very difficult to explain why we are going to take hostile military action in Cuba, against these sites . . . the thing he's saying is, if you'll get yours out of Turkey, we'll get ours out of Cuba. . . . I think we have to be now thinking about what our position's going to be on this one that's before us, and before the world.

SOURCE: *Eyewitness to America: 500 Years of America in the Words of Those Who Saw It Happen*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1997.

READER RESPONSE

Directions: Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. What is Khrushchev's claim in the private note about the Soviet weapons in Cuba?
2. What is unsettling to Kennedy about Khrushchev's public announcement?
3. Where does the transcript show that Kennedy and his advisers are being careful to not make a mistake about the Soviet weapons in Cuba?
4. **Critical Thinking** What are the differences between Khrushchev's two proposals?