

The Issue of the Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962

It is October 23rd, 1962. Since the 1940s, there has been a period of political rivalry and ideological tension between the Soviet Union and the United States, known as the Cold War. The USSR controls the Eastern Bloc, a coalition of countries in the East (and South America) that follow a Marxist-Leninist ideology. They are in direct opposition to the United States and the Western Bloc, a group of countries that are mainly in Northern America and Western Europe, who hold anti-Soviet and anti-socialist ideologies. Both sides are immensely powerful and eager to stop the spread of the other's ideas and influence across the globe. There has been no large-scale fighting between the US and the USSR, but both countries have supported opposing sides in smaller proxy wars, installing and supporting governments that match their own ideologies. The sheer power of both superpowers indicates that tensions could soon come to a head.

In July 1962, it was discovered that the Soviet Union, led by Nikita Khrushchev, had begun shipping missiles to Cuba. Cuba is led by Fidel Castro, a Communist leader and Soviet sympathiser. By late August, US spy planes flying over Cuba reported the presence of Soviet technicians and military construction. On October 14th 1962, there were reports of a ballistic missile on a launching site. If launched from Cuba, these missiles could reach the United States of America within minutes. This would result in a retaliation from the US, and potentially the involvement of all countries in both the Eastern and Western Blocs, essentially involving the entire world in a nuclear war. On October 22nd, US President John F. Kennedy placed a naval blockade on Cuba to prevent any more shipments of missiles, noting that the US government would seize any weapons that the Soviets attempt to deliver to Cuba. Soviet ships have altered course away from the quarantine zone since this announcement. So far, messages have been exchanged between the two leaders, but it is not clear if the situation will change in the coming days.

In Cuba, the people are almost completely in the dark, having only learned of the presence of missiles in their country upon hearing Kennedy's address to the world. The government has claimed that a US invasion is imminent and that the Soviet Union is coming to Cuba's defence. There is an atmosphere of mistrust and panic as people fear that the current regime may be toppled. The government has also forced citizens within miles of Cuba's biggest port, Mariel, to evacuate from their homes in an attempt to maintain secrecy surrounding the weapons located there.

Points to consider:

- How can the UN encourage de-escalation of the situation? Can a compromise be reached?
- Should the UN aid the United States' naval blockade of Cuba?
- Should the Soviet Union be sanctioned? Should the Cuban government be sanctioned for allowing the USSR to store missiles in their country?
- Should both governments share the details of the messages exchanged thus far with the UN?
- How can we plan for the worst-case scenario of nuclear war? How can we protect those in the US, Cuba, and across the globe?

Useful links:

<https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/jfk-in-history/the-cold-war>

<https://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/cuban-missile-crisis>

<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1961-1968/cuban-missile-crisis>

<https://alphahistory.com/coldwar/cuban-missile-debate-un-1962/>

