

Textbook Passage

After the Bay of Pigs invasion, the Soviet Union gave Cuba more weapons. In October 1962, President Kennedy learned that the Soviets were secretly building missile bases on the island. If the bases were completed, atomic missiles could reach American cities within minutes.

Kennedy announced that American warships would stop any Soviet ship carrying missiles. The world waited tensely as Soviet ships steamed toward Cuba. At the last minute, the Soviet ships turned back. “We’re eyeball to eyeball,” said Secretary of State Dean Rusk, “and I think the other fellow just blinked.”

Kennedy’s strong stand led the Soviets to compromise. Khrushchev agreed to remove Soviet missiles from Cuba. In turn, the United States promised not to invade the island. Still the Cuban missile crisis had shaken both American and Soviet officials. In all the years of the Cold War, the world never came closer to a full-scale nuclear war.

Source: The American Nation, Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2003, p. 823.

**Document A: Letter From Chairman Khrushchev to President Kennedy
(Modified)**

Moscow, October 27, 1962.

DEAR MR. PRESIDENT,

I understand your concern for the security of the United States...

You wish to ensure the security of your country, and this is understandable. But Cuba, too, wants the same thing; all countries want to maintain their security. But how are we, the Soviet Union, to [understand] the fact that you have surrounded the Soviet Union with military bases; surrounded our allies with military bases; placed military bases literally around our country; and stationed your missile armaments there? This is no secret. . . .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 that this disturbs you because it is 90 miles by sea from the coast of the United States of America. But you have placed destructive missile weapons, which you call offensive, in Turkey, literally next to us.

I therefore make this proposal: We are willing to remove from Cuba the [missiles] which you regard as offensive. Your representatives will make a declaration to the effect that the United States, for its part, . . . will remove its [missiles] from Turkey.

We, in making this pledge, will promise not to invade Turkey. . . .The United States Government will promise not to invade Cuba . . .

The greatest joy for all peoples would be the announcement of our agreement.

These are my proposals, Mr. President.

Respectfully yours,

N. Khrushchev

Source: Letter from Soviet Chairman Khrushchev to President Kennedy. U.S., Department of State, FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1961-1963, Volume XI, Cuban Missile Crisis and Aftermath.

Document B: Letter from President Kennedy to Chairman Khrushchev (Modified)

Washington, October 27, 1962

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I have read your letter of Oct. 26th with great care and welcomed the statement of your desire to seek a prompt solution to the problem. As I read your letter, the key elements of your proposals...are as follows:

1) You would agree to remove these weapons from Cuba under appropriate United Nations observation and supervision; and halt the further introduction of such weapons systems into Cuba.

2) We, on our part, would agree...a) to remove promptly the [blockade] now in effect and (b) to give assurances against an invasion of Cuba, I am confident that other nations of the Western Hemisphere would be prepared to do likewise.

There is no reason why we should not be able to complete these arrangements and announce them to the world within a couple of days. The effect of such a settlement on easing world tensions would enable us to work toward a more general arrangement regarding "other armaments", as proposed in your letter.

But the first step, let me emphasize, is the **cessation** of work on missile sites in Cuba The continuation of this threat by linking these problems to the broader questions of European and world security, would surely [be] a grave risk to the peace of the world. For this reason I hope we can quickly agree along the lines outlined in this letter and in your letter of October 26.

John F. Kennedy

Source: Letter from President Kennedy to Chairman Khrushchev. New York Times, Oct 27, 1962, pg. 30.

Vocabulary

Cessation: end

Document C: Russian Ambassador Cable to Soviet Foreign Ministry (Modified)

Dobrynin's (Russia's Ambassador to the United States) cable to the Soviet Foreign Ministry, October 27, 1962.

Late tonight Robert Kennedy (President Kennedy's Attorney General) invited me to come see him. We talked alone.

Kennedy stated that, "The US government is determined to get rid of those bases [in Cuba]—up to, in the extreme case, of bombing them, since, I repeat, they pose a great threat to the security of the USA. In response I am sure the Soviets will respond and a real war will begin, in which millions of Americans and Russians will die. We want to avoid that in any way we can, I'm sure that the government of the USSR has the same wish."

"The most important thing for us is to get an agreement as soon as possible with the Soviet government to halt further work on the construction of the missile bases in Cuba and take measures under international control that would make it impossible to use these weapons."

"And what about Turkey?" I asked R. Kennedy

"If that is the only obstacle to achieving the rules I mentioned earlier, then the president doesn't see any difficulties in resolving this issue" replied R. Kennedy. "The greatest difficulty for the president is the public discussion of the issue of Turkey. The deployment of missile bases in Turkey was officially done by special decision of the NATO Council. To announce now a **unilateral** decision by the president of the USA to withdraw missile bases from Turkey—this would damage the entire structure of NATO and the US position as the leader of NATO. However, President Kennedy is ready to come to agreement on that question with Khrushchev. I think that in order to withdraw these bases from Turkey we need 4-5 months. However, the president can't say anything public in this regard about Turkey."

R. Kennedy then warned that his comments about Turkey are extremely confidential; besides him and his brother, only 2-3 people know about it in Washington.

"The president also asked Khrushchev to give him an answer within the next day," Kennedy said in conclusion.

Source: Russian Ambassador Dobrynin cable to Foreign Ministry, October 27, 1962. Russian Foreign Ministry archives; publicly released in the early 1990s.

Vocabulary

Unilateral: one-sided

Guiding Questions

Name _____

Document A: Letter From Chairman Khrushchev to President Kennedy

1. What deal does Khrushchev propose to Kennedy?
2. What is the tone of this letter? Provide a quote to support your claim.
3. Do you think Khrushchev has the upper hand? Why or why not?

Document B: Letter from President Kennedy to Chairman Khrushchev

4. In this letter Kennedy restates Khrushchev's proposals. Does Kennedy include everything Khrushchev proposed? If not, why might he have left something out?
5. What is the tone of this letter? Provide a quote to support your claim.
6. Do you think Kennedy has the upper hand? Why or why not?

Document C: Russian Ambassador Cable to Soviet Foreign Ministry

7. What new information do you learn from Robert Kennedy?
8. Why do you think this exchange happened in a private meeting (rather than in an official letter)? [Remember, Document B was published in the *New York Times*].
9. How do you think Robert Kennedy felt during this meeting? Provide evidence.