

## The Deadly Cuban Missile Crisis

**N**ever before in history has such utter destruction on this planet seemed so imminent as during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962.

What were the events which led up to that crisis between the world's two superpowers — America and Russia?

Who was the real architect of the Cuban Missile Crisis? And what led him, irresponsibly, to take the whole world to the very brink of a nuclear *Armageddon*?

Nikita S. Khrushchev (1894-1971) served as Premier of the USSR during the period of 1958-64. He evinced little pity for the weaker nations or his political enemies.

Khrushchev was born April 17, 1894 in the village of Kalinovka near Kursk in the southwestern part of Russia. His father was a poor peasant, and also worked as a coal miner.

As a young boy, Nikita worked as a shepherd during most of the year. He attended church school in the winter. When he was only fifteen years old, he began working in the coal mines where he repaired equipment and machinery.

Khrushchev did not take part in the Russian revolution of October, 1917, in which the Communists (*Bolsheviks*) seized political power in the Soviet Union. When he was 24 years old, he joined the Communist party (in 1918). Khrushchev fought in the Russian civil war (1918-1920) in which the *Bolsheviks* defeated those opposed to their new government.

In the early 1920s the Communist party sent Khrushchev to a school which prepared adult workers for management positions or for higher education.

### *Khrushchev's Rise to Power*

Nikita Khrushchev graduated from the workers' school in 1925. During the next few years he held Communist party positions in Kiev and in the Donets Coal Basin region. In 1929 the Communist party sent the promising Khrushchev to Moscow to attend the J. V. Stalin Industrial Academy. This was a school for the training of gifted persons for factory management.

He became a member of the powerful committee of the Communist

party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in 1934, and was appointed first secretary (or head) of the powerful Moscow city party organization in 1935.

Khrushchev was made first secretary of the Ukraine Communist party in 1938, and carried out Stalin's ruthless purges of those in its ranks. Nikita Khrushchev became one of Joseph Stalin's close associates, and was made a full member of the *Politburo*, Russia's top executive body, in 1939.

For two years, Russia managed to stay out of World War II. Hitler invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, but he didn't launch his *blitzkrieg* against Russia until June 22, 1941. After the Nazi invasion of Russia, Khrushchev directed the withdrawal of industrial equipment from the Ukraine before that food rich region was occupied by the Germans.

During World War II he was a top political adviser in the Soviet army, also helped organize the Ukrainian guerilla army, and took part in planning the historic defense of Stalingrad (now called Volgograd).

After Soviet forces drove the Nazis out of the Ukraine, Nikita Khrushchev worked to get war-torn farms, steel mills and coal mines back into operation.

### *Dictator of Soviet Russia*

Khrushchev was recalled to Moscow as a secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist party in December 1949. When Joseph Stalin died in March 1953 Georgi Malenkov became Russia's new Premier. But only six months later, Nikita Khrushchev had elbowed a number of power-seekers aside and had become secretary of the Communist Party of the entire Soviet Union.

A fierce power struggle soon followed. After Stalin's death, a "collective" leadership had replaced the single ruler of the USSR. If Khrushchev were to reach the top position of power, he would have to outwit all his rivals such as the clever Lavrenti Beria, Kaganovich, Malenkov, and Vyacheslav Molotov. All of these men along with Khrushchev were members of the powerful *Presidium*, which had replaced the *Politburo* in 1952.

One by one, Khrushchev's rivals were dealt with. Lavrenti Beria was executed in 1953. Premier Malenkov resigned in February, 1955, and was succeeded by Nikolai Bulganin.

### *Dethroning a Dead Dictator*

Premier Khrushchev delivered a "secret" report at the 20th All-Union Party Congress in 1956. This report on "The Personality Cult and its Consequences," scathingly denounced the rule, personality and pol-



icies of Joe Stalin. Even though a program of *destalinization* had already begun, it was given new impetus by this bitter attack on the dead dictator.

After charging Stalin with crimes and butcheries against the Soviet peoples, Khrushchev closed the concentration camps, and many of the forced labor camps. Under Premier Khrushchev a much greater degree of freedom and meaningful public controversy was permitted.

But this new atmosphere of relative freedom soon led to serious repercussions in other Communist countries, and created much unrest which finally exploded in an episode of heroic Polish defiance of Russia in 1956. This was put down, and so was a serious revolt in Hungary the same year.

In 1957 Kaganovich, Malenkov and Molotov vainly plotted to remove Khrushchev from his powerful leadership position. But the plot backfired and Khrushchev then removed them all from important positions; and not long afterward, Marshal Zhukov, who had supported Premier Khrushchev against them, was himself removed from his important post.

By March 1958 Khrushchev was in a strong enough position to be able to replace Bulganin as Premier — thus becoming the undisputed leader of both the Soviet state and the Communist Party.

One reason for Khrushchev's phenomenal rise to power was the deceptiveness of his peasant background. He could be a jovial person and had a somewhat clownish appearance. This rather friendly exterior, however, concealed a shrewd and scheming mind which was capable of intriguing plots and outright ruthlessness. His jovial, often uncouth manner was deceptive. He could turn on charm, giving the appearance of great camaraderie, but he could also become very belligerent.

### *"Peaceful Coexistence"*

Premier Khrushchev greatly altered Soviet foreign policy. Vladimir Illyich Lenin, the founder of Soviet Communism, had believed that war between the *democratic* (capitalistic) and *communistic* (socialistic) countries could not and should not be avoided. Nikita Khrushchev strongly disagreed. He espoused the doctrine of "peaceful coexistence."

Premier Khrushchev explained his policy of peaceful coexistence in the following manner:

It is not an army, but peace that is required to propagate communist ideas, disseminate them, and establish them in the minds of men. . . .

War will not help us reach our goal — it will spoil it. . . .

Marxism-Leninism is our main weapon. We will conquer the capitalist world by using this mighty *ideological weapon* and not a hydrogen bomb. . . .

We produce the hydrogen bomb with the sole object of cooling the ambitions of some excessively zealous politicians and generals in the capitalist countries.

But Khrushchev's policy of "peaceful coexistence" caused a serious rupture among the Communist-aligned nations. Communist China violently disagreed with Khrushchev. They called for a more bellicose policy toward the capitalist countries of the world.

Khrushchev visited the U.S. in 1959, and toured numerous farms and factories. He also met President Eisenhower at Camp David, Maryland, and the friendly give-and-take exchanges during those meetings helped somewhat toward easing international tensions.

But it was Khrushchev who broke up the Paris Conference in 1960, when he demanded that President Eisenhower apologize for the U.S. having sent numerous U-2 spy planes over Russia. Eisenhower refused to make an apology, and Khrushchev left Paris in a huff. The conference broke up without having really accomplished anything.

### *Shoe-Pounding Episode*

In the fall of 1960 Premier Khrushchev headed the Russian delegation to the UN General Assembly. At that Assembly he raged at the U.S. over the spy plane incident. He was also incensed over UN interference in the Republic of the Congo (now Zaïre). To punctuate his anger, Khrushchev took off his shoe and pounded the desk at the UN in an undignified display of heated emotion.

But Khrushchev's days as dictator of Russia were numbered. It was the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, more than Khrushchev's failures in managing Russia's agriculture program, which finally resulted in his being toppled from power.

### *Khrushchev's Version of the Cuban Crisis*

What led up to the Cuban Missile Crisis? During that crisis the whole world held its breath — while the two superpowers squared off against each other. Many believed a nuclear Armageddon was imminent.

In order to better understand the Russian version of the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, let us look at the account of that hair-raising episode — as seen through the eyes of Premier Khrushchev. In his autobiography, *Khrushchev Remembers*, we are given some very interesting glimpses into that mind-chilling confrontation.

Khrushchev asserts the Caribbean crisis of October 1962 came to a head this way:



At the time that Fidel Castro led his revolution to victory and entered Havana with his troops, we had no idea what political course his regime would follow. . . .

We decided to send Anastas Ivanovich Mikoyan to America. . . .

While Mikoyan was in the U.S., Fidel invited him to visit Cuba. Mikoyan accepted. . . . Shortly after Mikoyan's visit we established diplomatic relations with Cuba, and we sent a delegation there. . . .

Meanwhile the plot was thickening. Castro was no longer sitting on the fence; he was beginning to behave like a full-fledged Communist, even though he still didn't call himself one. He was enlisting *Communists* into his governments.

### "America . . . Missed Their Chance"

Khrushchev continued:

All the while the Americans had been watching Castro closely. . . . So by the time Castro announced he was going to put Cuba on the road toward Socialism, the Americans had already *missed their chance* to do anything about it by simply exerting their influence: there were no longer any forces left which could be organized to fight on America's behalf in Cuba. That left only one alternative — *invasion!*

The Cubans asked us for arms. We gave them tanks and artillery and sent them instructions. In addition we sent them anti-aircraft guns and some fighter planes. As a result of our assistance Cuba was solidly armed. . . .

Then Khrushchev mentions the *Bay of Pigs* invasion fiasco of April 1961 when exiled Cuban counterrevolutionaries tried to overthrow Fidel Castro, but were badly defeated.

After Castro's crushing victory over the counterrevolutionaries, Russia intensified its military aid to Cuba. Russia welcomed Castro's victory, of course, but at the same time the Russians were quite certain that the Bay of Pigs invasion was only the beginning and that the Americans would not let Cuba alone.

We were sure that the Americans would never reconcile themselves to the existence of Castro's Cuba. They feared, as much as we hoped, that a Socialist [Communist] Cuba might become a magnet that would attract other Latin American countries to Socialism. . . . Everyone agreed that *America would not leave Cuba alone unless we did something*. We had an obligation to do everything in our power to protect Cuba's existence as a Socialist country and as a working *example* to the other countries of Latin America. It was clear to me that we might very well *lose Cuba* if we didn't take some decisive steps in her defense.

What could Russia do to prevent Socialist Cuba from being toppled? Khrushchev's fertile brain hatched up a crafty plot to foil U.S. intentions toward Cuba.

The fate of Cuba and the maintenance of Soviet prestige in that part of the world preoccupied Khrushchev even when he was busy conducting the affairs of state in Moscow and traveling to the other countries. While he was on an official visit to Bulgaria, for instance, one thought kept hammering away at his brain: what will happen if we lose Cuba? He knew it would be a terrible blow to Marxism-Leninism. It would gravely diminish Communist stature throughout the world, but especially in Latin America. If Cuba fell, other Latin American countries would reject Communism, claiming that the Soviet Union hadn't been able to do anything for Cuba except to make empty protests to the United Nations.

What could Russia do to protect the fledgling Communist state in the Caribbean?

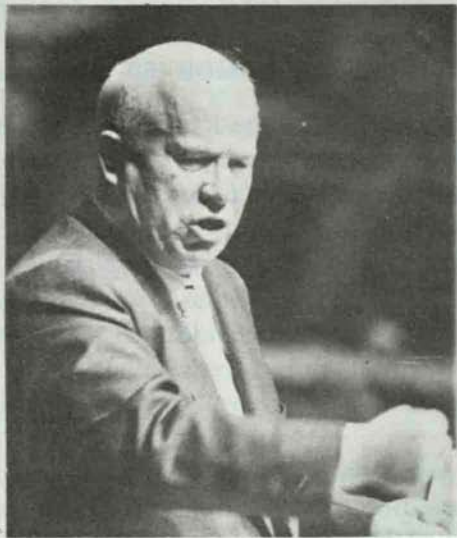
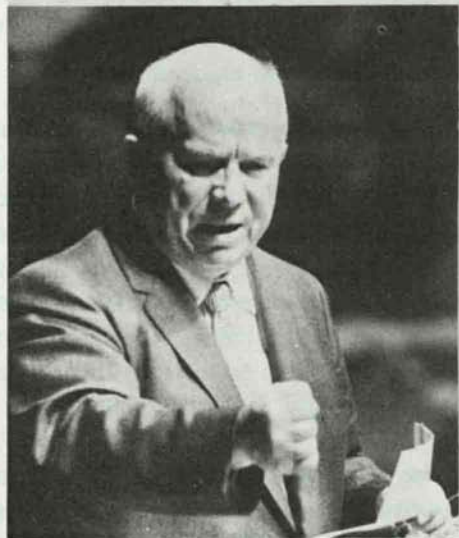
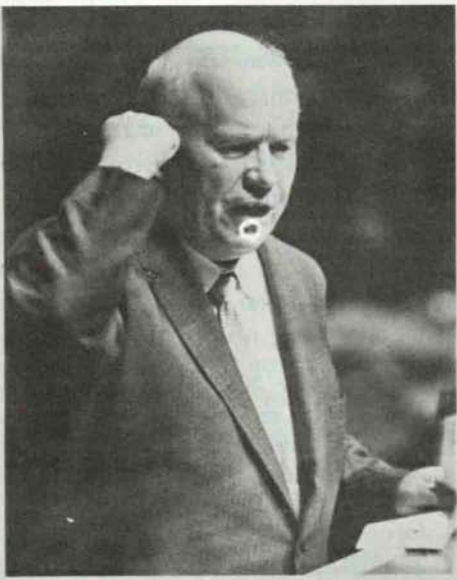
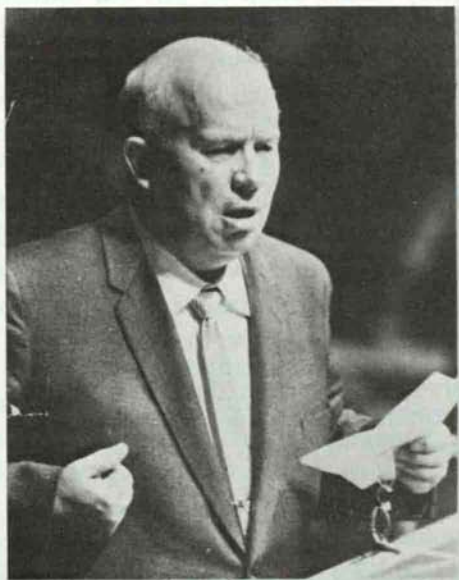
"We had to think up some way of confronting America with more than words," says Khrushchev in *Khrushchev Remembers*. "We had to establish a tangible and effective deterrent to American interference in the Caribbean. But what exactly? The logical answer was *missiles*."

The United States had already surrounded the Soviet Union with its own bomber bases and missiles. We knew that American missiles were aimed against us in Turkey and Italy, to say nothing of West Germany. Our vital industrial centers were directly threatened by planes armed with atomic bombs and guided missiles tipped with nuclear warheads. As Chairman of the Council of Ministers, I found myself in a difficult position of having to decide on a course of action which would answer the American threat but which would also *avoid war*. Any fool can start war, and once he's done so, even the wisest of men are helpless to stop it — especially if it's a nuclear war.

Premier Khrushchev explains how Russia decided to put nuclear-tipped missiles in Cuba. He says:

It was during my visit to Bulgaria that I had the idea of installing missiles with nuclear warheads in Cuba without letting the United States find out they were there until it was too late to do anything about them. I knew that first we'd have to talk to Castro and explain our strategy to him in order to get the agreement of the Cuban government. My thinking went like this: if we installed the missiles *secretly* and then if the United States discovered the missiles were there after they were already *poised and ready to strike*, the Americans would think twice before trying to liquidate our installations by military means." The Russian missiles would soon be installed, and, like a deadly cobra, ready to strike a fatal blow at the U.S.

"I knew," says Khrushchev, "that the United States could knock out some of our installations, but not all of them. If a quarter or even a tenth of our missiles survived — even if only one or two big ones were left — we could still hit New York, and there wouldn't be much of New York left."



Nikita Khrushchev, dynamic, blustering, somewhat uncouth, became the leader of Russia following Stalin's death. — *Wide World Photo*



But why, according to Khrushchev, did the Russians install missiles in Cuba? Did they really hope to devastate America with nuclear weapons?

I want to make one thing absolutely clear: when we put our ballistic missiles in Cuba, *we had no desire to start a war*. On the contrary, our principle aim was only to *deter America from starting a war*. We were well aware that a war which started over Cuba would quickly spread into a world war. Any idiot could have started a war between America and Cuba. Cuba was eleven thousand kilometers away from us. Only a fool would think that we wanted to invade the American continent from Cuba. Our goal was precisely the opposite: we wanted to keep the Americans from invading Cuba, and, to that end, we wanted to make them think twice by confronting them with our missiles. This goal we achieved — but not without undergoing *a period of perilous tension*.

Premier Khrushchev continued: "... Then one day in October President Kennedy came out with a statement warning that the United States would take whatever measures were necessary to remove what he called the 'threat' of Russian missiles on Cuba. The Americans began to make a *belligerent show of their strength*. They concentrated their forces against Cuba, completely surrounding the island with their navy. Things started churning. In our estimate the Americans were trying to frighten us, *but they were no less scared than we were of atomic war*."

Khrushchev admitted he was threatening American cities with "a real threat of destruction."

We hadn't had time to deliver all our shipments to Cuba, *but we had installed enough missiles already to destroy New York, Chicago, and the other huge industrial cities, not to mention a little village like Washington. I don't think America had ever faced such a real threat of destruction as at that moment*.

Russia was almost in a position to use *nuclear blackmail* to force America to do her bidding.

### *The Cuban Quarantine*

When America blockaded Cuba, the Russians were prevented from continuing vital deliveries of their nuclear and missile hardware. Khrushchev tries to gloss over this fact.

"Meanwhile we went about our own business. We didn't let ourselves be intimidated. Our ships, with the remainder of our deliveries to Cuba, headed straight through an armada of the American navy, but the Americans didn't try to stop our ships or even check them. (But the Soviets later turned back their ships which were carrying contraband war materials.) We kept in mind that as long as the United States limited itself to threatening gestures and didn't actually touch us, we



could afford to pretend to ignore the harassment.

What was the upshot of the Cuban Missile Crisis? Although Russia withdrew the missiles, Khrushchev concluded in his memoirs that it was “an episode of world history in which, *bringing the world to the brink of atomic war, we won a Socialist Cuba*. It’s very consoling for me personally to know that our side acted correctly and that we did a great revolutionary deed by not letting imperialism intimidate us. *The Caribbean crisis was a triumph of Soviet foreign policy* and a personal triumph in my own career as a statesman and as a member of the collective leadership. *We achieved, I would say, a spectacular success without having to fire a single shot!*”

### *The American Version*

In the late summer of 1962, America learned that impressive shipments of Soviet arms, equipment and personnel had begun arriving in Cuba. The U.S. President authorized reconnaissance flights over that island in order to obtain photographic proof of what was happening.

The U.S. Attorney General during the Cuban Missile Crisis was Robert Kennedy, brother to President John F. Kennedy. In his book, *Thirteen Days*, Robert F. Kennedy gives a number of interesting facts concerning the Cuban missile buildup. He says:

The photography having indicated that the missiles were being directed at certain American cities, the estimate was that within a few minutes of their being fired *eighty million Americans would be dead*.

President Kennedy’s special assistant, Theodore C. Sorensen, later wrote a moving account of the thirteen tense days when American leaders in Washington agonized over how to meet the Cuban Missile Crisis. Since Mr. Sorensen took an active part in the deliberations and final decisions relative to that crisis, he is one of the most qualified persons to relate the chain of events which transpired during the nightmarish period. In his book entitled *Kennedy*, we are given a moving account of that time.

According to Sorensen’s account, by early September, 1962, “forty-two Soviet medium and intermediate range ballistic missiles — each one capable of striking the United States with a nuclear warhead twenty or thirty times more powerful than the Hiroshima bomb — were in route to Cuba. . . .”

What would America do? U.S. unease over the Cuban missile buildup was communicated to the Russians. All the while, Soviet leaders assured the Americans there was nothing “offensive” in the Cuban missiles. They were there for the sole purpose of *defending* Cuba.

On September 13, President Kennedy delivered an explicit state-

ment expressing American concern and intentions over the Cuban missiles: "If at any time the Communist build-up in Cuba were to endanger or interfere with our security in any way . . . or if Cuba should ever . . . become an offensive military base of significant capacity for the Soviet Union, then this country will do whatever must be done to protect its own security and that of its allies," said the President.

### *A Soviet Blunder*

Kennedy was angry because Khrushchev had deliberately tried to deceive America into believing that Russia had no intention of installing offensive missiles in Cuba.

U.S. military experts had assumed that no missiles would be installed in Cuba until an operational network of Russian SAMS (Surface to Air Missiles) had first been established. It seemed inconceivable to Americans that the Soviets would have tried to build offensive missile sites in Cuba before they had their SAMS ready. Would the Russians dare to take such a desperate gamble?

When a careful analysis of the U-2 photographs clearly revealed that the Soviets were rapidly building *offensive* missile sites in Cuba, Kennedy immediately became alarmed! According to Mr. Sorensen, those missile sites "covered Washington, Dallas, Cape Canaveral, St. Louis and all SAC bases and cities in between; and it was estimated that the whole complex of sixteen to twenty-four missiles could be operational in two weeks. . . ."

America's serious dilemma was simply how could she "get rid of this missile complex before it became operational, either through an air strike's knocking it out, or be pressuring the Soviets into taking it out."

### *"Time Was Running Out"*

Theodore Sorensen relates how the Cuban crisis built up to a climax: "... More MRBM (medium range ballistic missiles) sites were discovered, for a total of six. . . . The literally (over 25) miles of film taken of the island — which was blanketed daily with six or seven flights now revealed excavations for three IRBM sites as well. *The 2,200-mile-range IRBMs, when readied in December, would be capable of reaching virtually any part of the continental United States. . . .*

*The knowledge that time was running out dominated our discussions and kept us meeting late into the night. The stepped-up U-2 flights had apparently not alerted the Soviets to our discovery. But we had to formulate and declare our position, said the President, before they knew we knew, before the matter leaked out to the public and before the missiles became operational.*



What should the United States do to make sure that those deadly missile sites didn't become operational?

At President Kennedy's many meetings with his staff during the perilous thirteen-day crisis, many proposals were made, including: Just doing nothing; using diplomatic warnings and pressures; and the possible offer of removal of our missile bases in Turkey in exchange for the dismantling of the Russian missiles in Cuba. A secret approach to Castro was also considered, as well as a naval blockade, an air strike (or "surgical" strike to remove the sites), and an outright invasion of Cuba — all of these possible alternatives were considered.

But which was the best solution?

The U.S. President and his advisers, after much discussion and debate, narrowed America's course of action down to *two* alternatives: *air strikes* against the sites, or a *naval blockade* of Cuba.

After much further discussion it was finally decided that the safest and best approach would be a *naval blockade* of the island. Mr. Sorensen makes this comment:

Despite all these disadvantages, the *blockade* route gained strength on Thursday as other choices faded. It was a more limited, low-key military action than the air strike. It offered Khrushchev the choice of avoiding a direct military clash by keeping his ships away. It could at least be initiated without a shot being fired or a single Soviet or Cuban citizen being killed. Thus it seemed slightly less likely to precipitate an immediate military riposte.

Moreover, a naval engagement in the Caribbean, just off our own shores, was the most advantageous military confrontation the United States could have, if one were necessary. Whatever the balance of strategic and ground forces may have been, the superiority of the American Navy was unquestioned; and this superiority was world-wide, should Soviet submarines retaliate elsewhere. To avoid a military defeat, Khrushchev might well turn his ships back, causing U.S. allies to have increased confidence in our credibility and Cuba's Communists to feel they were being abandoned.

Furthermore, adds Mr. Sorensen: "Precisely because it was a limited, low-level action, the argument ran, the blockade had the advantage of permitting a more controlled escalation on our part, gradual or rapid as the situation required. It could serve as an unmistakable but not sudden or humiliating warning to Khrushchev of what we expected from him. . . ."

But President Kennedy realized that even after the decision was taken to go the blockade route, there were still a number of unanswered questions: "How should we relate it to the missiles? *How would it help get them out?* What would we do if they became operational?"

From the beginning, Kennedy wanted to leave Khrushchev a way out. President Kennedy then consulted with Dwight Eisenhower, and

advised the Joint Chiefs of Staff to order all service commanders to be fully prepared for any possible military action. U.S. defenses at the American Guantanamo base in Cuba were strengthened. De Gaulle and NATO were briefed on the gravity of the Cuban crisis.

And it was decided that America would use discretion in the way she applied the blockade: "He (Kennedy) asked Navy Chief of Staff Anderson, Jr. to describe plans and procedures for the *blockade*. First, said the Admiral, each approaching ship would be *signaled to stop* for boarding and inspection. Then, if no satisfactory response, a *shot* would be fired into her rudder to cripple but not to sink. . . ."

### *Kennedy Tells The World*

Events during the Cuban missile build-up continued moving swiftly to a climax. American forces in the U.S. and around the world had been given a red alert. American custodians of nuclear weapons in Turkey, West Germany, Italy and elsewhere were instructed to take extraordinary precaution to make certain that their deadly atomic weapons were not fired except under the President's orders.

All the while, President Kennedy was trying not to force Khrushchev's hand. He did not want to *humiliate* him — thereby possibly driving him to some desperate action.

Mr. Kennedy's firm resolve is revealed in his statement: "It shall be the policy of this nation to regard any nuclear missile launched from Cuba against any nation in the Western Hemisphere as an attack by the Soviet Union on the United States, requiring a full *retaliatory reponse* upon the Soviet Union." This is the kind of language which an aggressive Khrushchev would understand.

President Kennedy had worked diligently on his address to the nation — and to the world. He did not want it to sound *belligerent*, and neither did he wish it to evince any *timidity*.

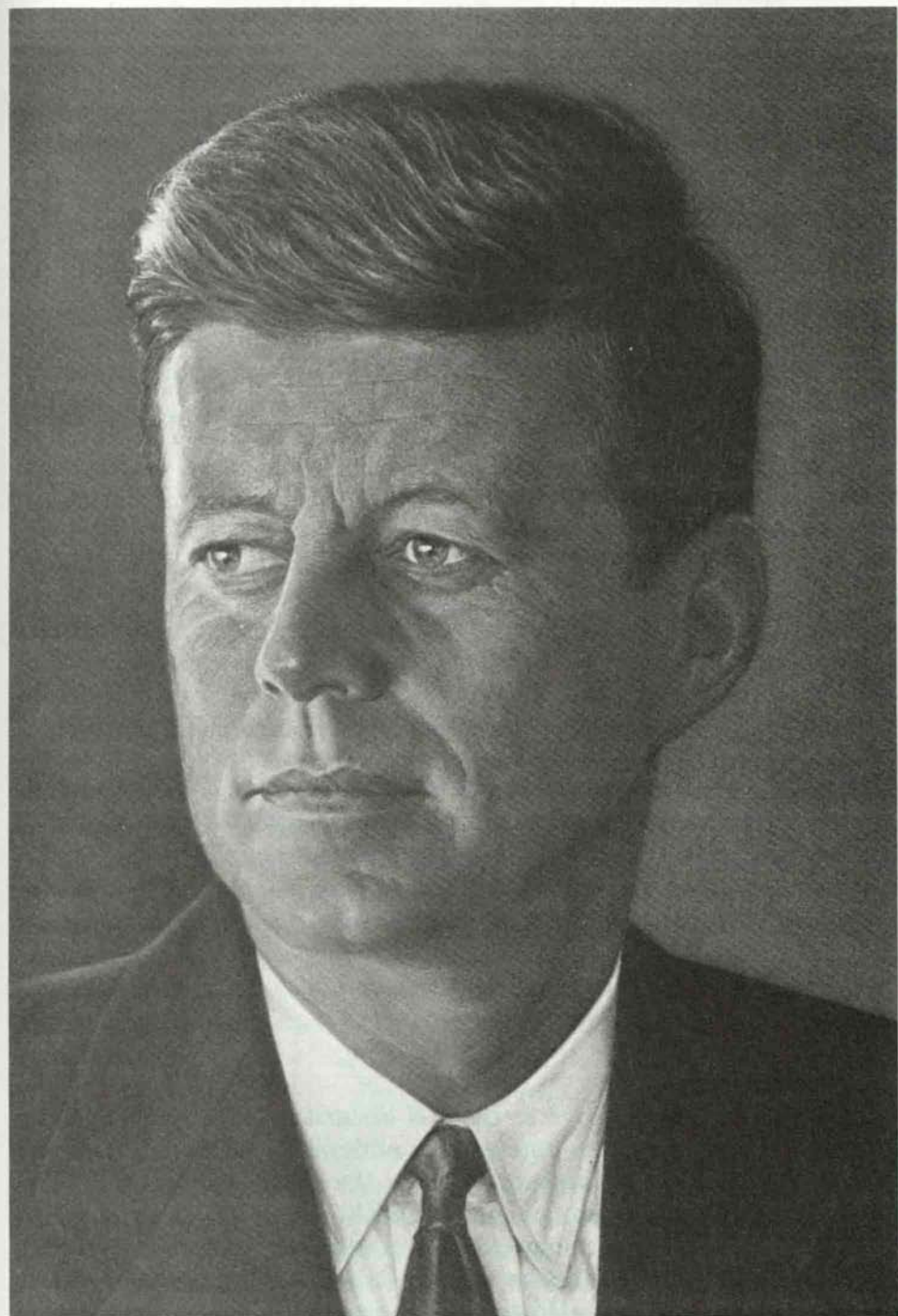
By Monday, October 21, Kennedy was ready, his speech written and rewritten. In his speech, a grave President was about to tell the nation and the world what the Soviets had been doing in Cuba, and what the American response would be:

"Good evening, my fellow citizens," said the President.

"This government, as promised, has maintained the closest surveillance of the Soviet military build-up on the island of Cuba. Within the past week, unmistakable evidence has established the fact that *a series of offensive missile sites is now in preparation on that imprisoned island*. The purpose of these bases can be none other than to provide a nuclear strike capability against the Western Hemisphere. . . .

"This urgent transformation of Cuba into an important strategic base, by the presence of these large, long-range and clearly *offensive*





John Fitzgerald Kennedy, America's 35th President, stood up to the deadly Russian threat when Nikita Khrushchev placed missiles in Cuba. Painting by Sam. J. Patrick.

*weapons* of sudden mass destruction, constitutes an explicit threat to the peace and security of all the Americas. . . .”

This speech by the President officially announced the Cuban Crisis to the world. This was a clear, unmistakable expression of the American will not to let the Russians get away with their *nuclear blackmail* right on our doorstep.

### *A Calm President*

America was very fortunate to have a cool-headed President in the White House at the time of the Cuban Crisis. Theodore Sorensen, in his book, *Kennedy*, recalls: “Similarly, in our meetings and in his office during those two weeks, he was calm and deliberate, his mind clear, his emotions controlled, never brooding, always in command. He retained that composure even when fatigue was overtaking us all. . . .

“The Presidency was never lonelier than when faced with its first *nuclear confrontation*. John Kennedy never lost sight of what either *war* or *surrender* would do to the whole human race. His UN mission was preparing for a negotiated *peace* and his Joint Chiefs of Staff were preparing for *war*, and he intended to keep both on rein. He was determined, despite divided counsel and conflicting pressures, to *take all necessary action and no unnecessary action*. He could not afford to be hasty or hesitant, reckless or afraid. The odds that the Soviets would go all the way to war, he later said, seemed to him then ‘somewhere between one out of three and even. . . .’ ”

America had feared that a quarantine of Cuba might provoke many peoples around the world — especially America’s allies. But when Kennedy stood firm, he found that Prime Minister Macmillan, De Gaulle, Dr. Adenaur and Willy Brandt and the people of West Berlin, and a host of others around the world showed that they were solidly behind what he had done. And the OAS (Organization of American States) rallied behind the U.S. quarantine action.

### *A Scene at the U.N.*

America’s representative to the UN Security Council, Ambassador Adlai Stevenson, with photo interpreters and intelligence analysts by his side, made a brilliant presentation before the UN Security Council on October 23rd, and then again on October 25th.

The U.S. Ambassador pointedly asked the Soviet Ambassador Zorin if he denied the fact that missiles were in Cuba: “All right, sir, let me ask you one simple question: Do you, Ambassador Zorin, deny that the U.S.S.R. has placed and is placing medium — and intermediate — range missiles and sites in Cuba? Yes or no. Don’t wait for the translation. Yes or no.”



The flabbergasted Zorin replied: "I am not in an American courtroom, sir. . . ."

The American Ambassador shot back: "You are in the court of world opinion right now!"

And Zorin quickly replied: "...and therefore I do not wish to answer a question that is put to me in the fashion that a prosecutor does. In due course, sir, you will have your reply."

U.S. Ambassador Stevenson replied: "I am prepared to wait for my answer until Hell freezes over, if that's your decision."

Clearly, the Russians were beginning to realize that their dastardly deceitfulness, and their attempted nuclear blackmail, had backfired on them. The shock of this Soviet treachery was turning much of the world's opinion against the Russians.

### *Kennedy's Personal Orders*

President Kennedy was very careful in his direction of the Cuban blockade not to let events get out of his hands. He issued a clear order to the military that he was personally in charge of the entire operation, and wanted to make sure that they didn't do anything to cause matters to get out of control.

But, in the meantime, the Russians continued hastily building the missile sites. Then, low-level U.S. reconnaissance flights were ordered to fly over Cuba — flying just above the treetops, but below the range of the Russian SAMs. Their low-level photos "showed in remarkable detail more Soviet military personnel and weapons than anticipated, all Cubans excluded from missile areas and *two deadly MRBMs ready to operate.*"

By now eighteen Russian dry cargo ships were steaming toward the quarantine. And five of those ships had large hatches. They were being watched with special care by U.S. reconnaissance.

### *Tension Build-up*

Soon, every Soviet ship was known by name to the Americans, and they also knew which of the ships were suspected of carrying deadly armaments. As the ships plowed through the waters heading straight for the American naval blockade, tension began building up.

Just as the quarantine went into effect, American intelligence reported that about a half dozen Soviet subs were joining the Soviet ships. U.S. orders were prepared to sink any subs interfering with the blockade.

Then . . . suddenly . . . came welcome news. The Russian ships nearest Cuba had either stopped or altered their course.

Premier Khrushchev then asked an American businessman to tell President Kennedy that he should agree to a summit, and that the Caribbean conflict could lead to nuclear war. Khrushchev by now admitted that offensive Soviet missiles were in Cuba. Furthermore, Khrushchev said, Russian submarines would sink any U.S. vessels which attempted to force a Soviet ship to stop.

Then, as the U.S. naval quarantine tightened its grip around Cuba, things began heating up.

On *Thursday*, October 25, a Russian tanker was hailed — and on personal instructions from Kennedy (who thought the tanker may not have received instructions from Moscow) was let pass on to Cuba — like all nonsuspicious tankers.

On *Friday*, October 26, a Panama-owned, Greek-manned, Lebanese-registered freighter, (under charter to the Soviets) was halted and boarded — after the U.S. Navy had first obtained the President's personal authorization.

Kennedy preferred not to have to intercept any Soviet ships until necessary, but he wanted a nonbloc ship under Soviet charter to be the first ship to be boarded. This would show that America meant business.

After the Lebanese-registered freighter was boarded and inspected by an unarmed U.S. boarding party, and after it was found that they were only carrying trucks and truck parts, the freighter was given U.S. permission to pass on through the blockade.

### *Russians Halt Their Ships*

But America wasn't all that concerned about Lebanese freighters and Soviet tankers. It was the Russian cargo ships and their submarine escorts which the U.S. was deeply concerned about. Unless the Soviets showed their willingness to remove the offensive missiles from Cuba, Kennedy was determined to stop the Russian cargo ships by *Friday*. But he wanted to give the red-faced Khrushchev as much time as possible to make and communicate his uncomfortable decision to his cargo ships.

Theodore Sorensen, in his book *Kennedy*, says:

Gradually, rather than dramatically, the good news came in, mixed, in fact, with "bad" news recounted above. Sixteen of the eighteen Russian ships, including all five with large hatches, were reported Wednesday to have *stopped* — then to be lying dead in the water or moving in uncertain circles — and, finally, Thursday and Friday to have turned around. "That's nice," observed one member of our group. "The Soviets are reacting to us for a change." U.S. planes followed them all the way back to Soviet ports. A minimum of force had obtained a maximum gain. The value of conventional strength in the nuclear age had been underlined as never before. The quarantine, speculated the President later, "had much more power than we first thought it did because, I



think, the Soviet Union was very reluctant to have us stop ships which carried . . . highly secret and sensitive material." The Soviet military, he reasoned, long obsessed with secrecy, could not risk letting their missiles, warheads and electronic equipment fall into our hands.

When President Kennedy authorized the U.S. Navy to blockade Cuba, he made it clear that this action did not rule out possible "surgical" strikes against the Cuban missile sites. Neither did it rule out the possibility that the U.S. might launch an invasion against Castro's Cuba and remove those sites herself.

Various options were still open to the President. He could further tighten the blockade to strangle the Cuban economy. He could step up the low-level flights, which were already harassing both the Cubans and the Soviets. A leaflet drop could be used to inform the Cuban citizens what Castro's policy of cozying up to the Soviets was about to do to their nation.

President Kennedy refused to be rushed by overzealous generals or admirals. But Kennedy had previously authorized full-speed preparations for a possible invasion of Cuba.

Even though the Russian ships had turned back, the Soviets inside Cuba continued feverishly building the missile sites. Several letters began to be sent back and forth between Khrushchev and Kennedy.

### *Khrushchev's Offer*

Mr. Sorenson, reporting on this crisis, says: "... A new Khrushchev-to-Kennedy letter was received at the State Department Friday evening, October 26 — long, meandering, full of polemics but in essence appearing to contain the germ of a reasonable settlement: inasmuch as his missiles were there only to *defend Cuba against invasion*, he would withdraw the missiles under UN inspection if the U.S. agreed *not to invade*. . . . In Khrushchev's letter the offer was a bit vague. It seemed to vary from one paragraph to the next, and was accompanied by the usual threats and denunciations. Nevertheless, it was with high hopes that the Executive Committee convened Saturday morning, October 27, to draft a reply."

But, says Mr. Sorensen: "In the course of that meeting our hopes quickly faded. A new Khrushchev letter came in, this time public, making no mention of the private correspondence but raising the ante: *The Jupiter missiles in Turkey must be removed in exchange*. . . ."

Khrushchev wrote the President: "We will remove our missiles from Cuba, you will remove yours from Turkey. . . . The Soviet Union will pledge not to invade or interfere with the internal affairs of Turkey; the U.S. to make the same pledge concerning Cuba."

Everything was in combat readiness on both sides. The forces of the United States were alerted world-wide. Both air-strike planes and the largest invasion force mounted since World War II were massed in

Florida. Kennedy and his advisors felt nuclear war to be closer on that day than at any time in the nuclear age. If the Soviet ships continued coming, if the missile crews continued working and if Khrushchev continued insisting on concessions, then — Kennedy believed — the Soviets must want a war. And war would be unavoidable.

### *Kennedy Holds His Ground*

What would President Kennedy's next step be? He wrote a letter to Premier Khrushchev. Here are excerpts from that important letter:

The *first* thing that needs to be done . . . is for work to cease on offensive missile bases in Cuba and for *all weapons systems in Cuba capable of offensive use to be rendered inoperable*, under effective United Nations arrangements.

As I read your letter, the key elements of your proposals — which seem generally acceptable as I understand them — are as follows:

1. You would agree to remove these weapons systems from Cuba under appropriate United Nations observation and supervision; and undertake, with suitable safeguards, to halt further introduction of such weapons systems into Cuba.

2. We, on our part, would agree — upon the establishment of adequate arrangements through the United Nations to ensure the carrying out and continuation of these commitments — (a) to remove promptly the quarantine measures now in effect and (b) to give assurances against an invasion of Cuba.

. . . the first ingredient, let me emphasize . . . is the cessation of work on missile sites in Cuba and measures to render such weapons inoperable, under effective international guarantees. The continuation of this threat, or a prolonging of this discussion concerning Cuba by linking these problems to the broader questions of European and world security, would surely lead to an intensification of the Cuban crisis and a grave risk to the peace of the world.

Robert Kennedy later wrote in his book *Thirteen Days*:

"The Soviet Union had secretly established missile bases in Cuba while at the same time proclaiming privately and publicly that this would never be done. We had to have a commitment by tomorrow that those bases would be removed. I was not giving them an ultimatum but a statement of fact. He (Khrushchev) should understand that if they did not remove those bases, *we would remove them* . . . there would be not only dead Americans but dead Russians as well."

Furthermore, Robert Kennedy continued telling the Russian Ambassador, Dobrynin: "Time was running out. We had only a few more hours — we needed an answer immediately from the Soviet Union. I said we must have it the next day."

*President Kennedy had stood firm.* He had flatly refused to remove America's Jupiter missiles from Turkey. And he steadfastly demanded



that Russia remove all of her offensive weaponry from Cuba. There could be no prolonged parlying so long as Khrushchev held a gun to America's head — so long as his nuclear sword of Damocles was poised, ready to plunge into the heart of the U.S.

The Russians had continued frantically building their offensive missile sites. American patience was just about at its end. It was at this point that President Kennedy requested that his brother, Robert, deliver to the Soviet Ambassador a strong verbal message. Mr. Robert Kennedy later said that he told the Russian Ambassador that the point of escalation was at hand. The U.S. could either proceed toward peace and disarmament, or she could take “strong and *overwhelming retaliatory* action . . . unless (President Kennedy) received *immediate* notice that the missiles would be withdrawn.”

### *Khrushchev Accepts Kennedy's Terms*

During this entire Cuban Missile Crisis, the world had held its breath. Would this *terra firma* become a charred, dead planet? Was mankind ready to push the nuclear buttons which would usher in the long-dreaded Armageddon?

Or would sanity prevail? Would the Soviet and American leaders keep cool, and draw back from the brink of nuclear oblivion?

By *Sunday* morning, October 28, Khrushchev had broadcast to the world the news that he was *accepting* Kennedy's terms. “. . . In the course of the 9 a.m. newscast a special bulletin came in from Moscow. It was a new letter from Khrushchev, his fifth since Tuesday, sent publicly in the interest of speed. Kennedy's terms were being accepted. The missiles were being withdrawn. Inspection would be permitted. The confrontation was over,” writes Ted Sorensen.

President Kennedy, the nation, and the whole world breathed a tremendous sigh of relief. John F. Kennedy was given the good news just before he left to attend a church service. He expressed “tremendous satisfaction” and requested to see a copy of Khrushchev's message on his way to church.

### *What About the Future?*

Khrushchev admittedly took a big gamble in trying to install offensive missiles in Cuba. The Soviets intended to use them as *blackmail* to force the retreat of American power around the world. It was therefore the Russians who had to back down. It was they who *lost face* in the eyes of the whole world!

America and the whole world can be thankful to Providence that U.S. intelligence discovered the Soviet treachery when it did. This great nation should feel deep, heart-felt gratitude that, as Churchill once put

it, some "Guiding Hand" had again directed our leaders during the time of the world's greatest peril since the beginning of man's six thousand long years of recorded history.

All mankind ought to be grateful that the world was snatched back from the brink of a frightening nuclear Armageddon — and consequent nuclear annihilation. Our escape was by the slenderest of threads. Right now, it could have all been over, and the earth a scorched, lifeless cinder orbiting the sun.