



JOINT CRISIS COMMITTEE

CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

BACKGROUND GUIDE



Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the Joint Crisis Committee on the Cuban Missile Crisis. As members of the dias, we are honoured to provide you with the foundation for what promises to be an intense and thought-provoking committee.

The Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962 is one of the most critical moments in modern history. The United States and the Soviet Union, the two dominant superpowers of the era, were brought to the brink of nuclear war. Decisions made during those thirteen tense days shaped global politics and diplomacy for decades. Now, it is your turn to step into the shoes of leaders, strategists, and policymakers faced with the immense responsibility of averting disaster—or pursuing your nation’s interests, no matter the cost.

This committee will challenge you to think critically, act decisively, and collaborate strategically under the pressure of a rapidly evolving crisis. Whether you represent the United States, the Soviet Union, or another key actor, your choices will determine the outcome of this high-stakes confrontation. Will you negotiate, escalate, or innovate? The world is watching.

In this background guide, we have provided an overview of the historical context, key players, and pivotal events leading up to the crisis. Use it as a starting point to immerse yourself in the intricacies of the Cold War and the dynamics of global diplomacy during this era.

We are excited to see the creativity, insight, and leadership you will bring to the table. May this committee inspire you to think beyond the headlines, explore the nuances of international relations, and appreciate the weight of the decisions leaders must make in times of crisis.

Good luck, and let the espionage and debate begin!

Sincerely,
Bani Malik and Anokhi Shah



Historical Information - What exactly was the Cuban Missile Crisis?

The Cuban missile crisis will always be remembered as the turning point during the Cold War. This milestone marks the realization for nations just how important nuclear weaponry is when put into the wrong hands. Occurring from October 16 to October 28, 1962, the Cuban Missile Crisis was a critical Cold War confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union, centred on the discovery of Soviet nuclear missile installations in Cuba. Triggered by U.S. reconnaissance photographs showing missile sites under construction, the crisis escalated as President John F. Kennedy imposed a naval blockade, termed a "quarantine," to prevent further Soviet arms shipments. The standoff brought the world to the brink of nuclear war, with both nations' leaders exchanging tense communications and positioning military forces for potential conflict. The crisis was ultimately resolved when Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev agreed to dismantle the missile sites in exchange for a U.S. commitment not to invade Cuba and a secret agreement to remove American missiles from Turkey. This 13-day ordeal underscored the perils of nuclear brinkmanship and the necessity of diplomatic negotiation during the Cold War.

To understand this crisis, it's imperative to understand the Cold War and the steps that led up to this event. The Cold War was a prolonged period of geopolitical tension and ideological rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union, lasting from 1945 until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. At the end of World War II, although peace had been 'achieved,' the leaders of the two emerging powers, Stalin and Truman, recognized the divided world through the 20th century. The two contrasting systems of democracy (west) and communism (east) soon engulfed the world, further increasing tensions that would last for decades. The world has been divided into developed, developing, and not developed nations based on their association. The developed were democrats, the developing were the communists, and the not developed were those who had not fallen under either. Rooted in their starkly opposing political systems—capitalism and democracy in the U.S. versus communism and authoritarianism in the Soviet Union—proxy wars, espionage, an arms race, and the competition for global influence marked the Cold War.

The division of Europe after World War II, particularly the Soviet domination of Eastern Europe was due to how the Allies in World War Two had defeated Germany. The Allies were the USA, Canada, the UK, the Soviet Union, and anyone against Germany. These allies had come together in San Francisco in 1945 to create the United Nations and then in 1949 in Washington, D.C. to create NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization). This had riled up the Axis powers and they had developed their alliance called the Warsaw Pact. During 1945, the Yalta and Potsdam conferences had also occurred. The Allied leaders—Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Joseph Stalin—outlined plans for the post-war order. While agreements were made to allow free elections in liberated nations, the Soviet Union, under Stalin, sought to



establish a buffer zone of communist states in Eastern Europe to secure its borders and prevent future invasions. As the Red Army remained stationed in Eastern Europe following the war, Stalin quickly installed pro-communist regimes in countries that they had ‘liberated,’ such as Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and East Germany. These nations, known as Soviet satellite states, were heavily controlled by Moscow, with local communist parties consolidating power through rigged elections, suppression of opposition, and intimidation.

By 1946, this division was famously described by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill as the “Iron Curtain,” symbolizing the ideological and physical separation between Eastern and Western Europe. While the West pursued capitalism and democracy, Eastern Europe became firmly entrenched under Soviet communism. The Iron Curtain was a metaphor and a physical reality, with fortified borders, barbed wire, and strict travel restrictions isolating the East from the West. Stalin justified his domination of Eastern Europe as a security measure, citing Russia’s history of invasions from Western Europe, including Napoleon’s campaigns and Nazi Germany’s assault during World War II. Creating a buffer zone of allied communist states was seen as a way to protect the Soviet Union from future threats.

Germany, particularly its capital, Berlin, became a central flashpoint in this division. Germany was split into four occupation zones controlled by the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and the Soviet Union. The Western allies eventually merged their zones into West Germany, a capitalist democracy, while the Soviet-controlled East Germany became a communist state. Berlin, although located within East Germany, was similarly divided, and the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 became a stark symbol of the Cold War. Soviet domination of Eastern Europe was not without resistance; uprisings such as Hungary’s revolt in 1956 and Czechoslovakia’s Prague Spring in 1968 were brutally crushed by Soviet military intervention, demonstrating the lengths to which the USSR would go to maintain its control. The division of Europe created a stark ideological battleground that deepened distrust between the Soviet Union and Western nations.

One critical Cold War development was the arms race. The arms race was one of the defining features of the Cold War, characterized by a competitive buildup of military power, particularly nuclear weapons, between the United States and the Soviet Union. This competition began during World War II, with both nations racing to develop advanced weaponry. The U.S. achieved a significant milestone with the successful development and use of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, establishing itself as the first nuclear power. However, the Soviet Union quickly worked to close the gap, detonating its first atomic bomb in 1949, an event that ended the American nuclear monopoly and marked the beginning of an intense and dangerous rivalry.



The arms race escalated throughout the 1950s and 1960s as both superpowers developed more advanced and destructive weapons. The U.S. responded to the Soviet atomic bomb with the development of the hydrogen bomb, which it first tested in 1952, followed by the Soviets' successful hydrogen bomb test in 1953. These thermonuclear weapons were significantly more powerful than earlier atomic bombs. Simultaneously, both nations invested heavily in the development of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), capable of delivering nuclear warheads across vast distances. By the late 1950s, the Soviet Union had successfully launched the world's first artificial satellite, Sputnik, into orbit, signalling its technological advancements and raising fears in the U.S. of Soviet superiority in missile technology.

With both nations amassing vast nuclear arsenals to deter one another, the U.S. had stationed nuclear missiles in Turkey, a NATO ally bordering the Soviet Union, which Moscow viewed as a direct threat to its security in the late 1950s. Simultaneously, the Cuban Revolution of 1959 brought Fidel Castro to power, aligning Cuba with the Soviet Union and transforming it into a communist state just 90 miles from the U.S. The Cuban Revolution's impact rippled beyond Cuba's borders, dramatically altering the geopolitical landscape of the Cold War. As Fidel Castro's regime solidified its power and aligned with the Soviet Union, tensions between Cuba and the United States escalated. The Cuban government's nationalization of industries, the expulsion of U.S. businesses, and its embrace of Marxism-Leninism placed it in direct opposition to U.S. interests in the Western Hemisphere. The United States, which had been a staunch supporter of Batista and feared the spread of communism in the Americas, quickly became hostile toward Castro's new government. This animosity would culminate in one of the most perilous confrontations of the Cold War—the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962.

This alignment alarmed the U.S., leading to failed attempts to destabilize Castro's government, including the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961 and numerous covert CIA operations. These actions pushed Cuba closer to the Soviet Union, which sought to protect its ally and counteract the perceived U.S. strategic advantage in Turkey.

By 1962, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev devised a plan to secretly place medium- and intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Cuba. This would not only defend Cuba from potential U.S. aggression but also shift the nuclear balance of power by positioning missiles within striking distance of most American cities. However, the installation of these missiles was discovered by U.S. reconnaissance by U-2 spy planes in October 1962.

After the United States discovered Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba, the world came perilously close to nuclear war. These photos revealed missile sites under construction in Cuba. President John F. Kennedy and his advisors immediately recognized the threat these missiles posed, as they could deliver nuclear warheads to most of the continental United States within



minutes. This discovery marked the beginning of a tense 13-day confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union, known as the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Kennedy convened his National Security Council (ExComm) to determine the U.S. response. Options ranged from a full-scale military invasion of Cuba to diplomatic negotiations. Ultimately, Kennedy decided to implement a naval "quarantine" of Cuba, a less aggressive term than "blockade," which would prevent further shipments of military equipment to the island. On October 22, 1962, Kennedy addressed the nation, revealing the presence of Soviet missiles in Cuba and announcing the quarantine. He also demanded immediate dismantling and removing the missiles already in place. The announcement escalated tensions globally.

Khrushchev accused the United States of aggression and warned against interference in Cuba. Over the next several days, intense negotiations took place. U.S. naval forces intercepted Soviet ships headed toward Cuba, creating moments of extreme tension as the world held its breath. Meanwhile, backchannel communications and public exchanges between Kennedy and Khrushchev revealed both leaders' desire to avoid war.

The crisis peaked on October 27, 1962, often called "Black Saturday." A U-2 spy plane was shot down over Cuba, and the U.S. military moved to DEFCON 2, the highest alert level short of war. Amidst this high-stakes atmosphere, Khrushchev sent two messages to Kennedy. The first, a private and conciliatory letter, proposed the removal of missiles from Cuba in exchange for a U.S. pledge not to invade Cuba. The second, more public and confrontational, demanded the removal of U.S. missiles from Turkey as part of the deal.

Kennedy and his advisors decided to respond only to the first letter, offering a public assurance not to invade Cuba if the missiles were removed. Privately, U.S. officials also conveyed that the Jupiter missiles in Turkey would be dismantled later, though this was not included in the official agreement. On October 28, Khrushchev announced that the Soviet Union would dismantle the missile sites in Cuba, bringing the crisis to an end.

Though this crisis didn't result in a direct nuclear, the Cuban Missile Crisis represented one of the most perilous moments of the Cold War, where the prospect of nuclear conflict became alarmingly real. With both nations prepared for escalation, the crisis showcased how fragile the global balance of power had become. It was not just a clash of ideologies but a test of restraint, as both the United States and the Soviet Union faced immense pressure to act decisively. The peaceful resolution, achieved through negotiation rather than force, marked a rare moment of mutual understanding during a period defined by mistrust and competition. The outcome highlighted the necessity of managing Cold War tensions without resorting to the catastrophic use of nuclear weapons, illustrating how close diplomacy could bring the world back from the brink of disaster.



With so much happening during the crisis, when does our committee occur?

Our committee will begin on October 16, 1962. This is the point where the United States recognized that the Soviet Union had placed missiles just 90 miles away from them, in Cuba, and progressed along with the committee. This formally institutes the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Questions to Consider for the Soviets

- Should we escalate, maintain, or withdraw our missile presence in Cuba?
- If the U.S. attacks Cuba, how do we retaliate without triggering a global nuclear war?
- If forced to remove the missiles, how can we ensure that we gain something in return?
- How do we frame our actions as defensive and legitimate on the world stage?
- Should we negotiate directly with Kennedy or use back-channel diplomacy?
- Should we use economic pressure or trade disruptions to create leverage against the U.S.?
- What public messaging should we send to Soviet citizens to justify our course of action?
- If we de-escalate, how do we prevent internal backlash from hardliners in the Soviet government?
- How do we respond if the U.S. expands its military presence near Soviet borders (e.g., Turkey, Italy)?
- Can we leverage the UN to present our case as a defensive move rather than an aggressive one?
- How do we keep the Warsaw Pact and other socialist allies unified behind our position?
- Should we use economic aid as a bargaining chip to strengthen ties with Latin American nations?
- Should we use this crisis as an opportunity to propose broader arms control agreements with the U.S.?
- What media narratives should we push to counter U.S. claims that we are the aggressor?



Questions to consider for the Americans

- How do we weaken Soviet power and influence?
 - How do we maintain a good image in the international community while we do it?
- How can we leverage alliances (NATO, regional partners) without appearing overly aggressive?
- Should we authorize covert operations, and what are the potential repercussions?
- Can we use economic sanctions as a bargaining tool without pushing the opposition to desperate actions?
- What narratives should we push in international media to justify our stance?
- How will this crisis impact global markets, and how can we mitigate economic fallout?
- Should we engage in espionage or sabotage to undermine enemy capabilities?
- How do we assess and counter the risk of Soviet submarines or nuclear retaliation?
- How do we ensure that Khrushchev does not perceive diplomacy as a weakness?
- Should we secretly offer to remove U.S. missiles from Turkey in exchange for Soviet withdrawal from Cuba?
- Should we apply economic pressure on the USSR to weaken its ability to maintain the crisis?
- Should we impose an economic blockade on Cuba beyond the naval quarantine?
- What role should media outlets play in shaping public perception of the crisis?

Soviet Union Characters and Descriptions

Andrei Andreyevich Gromyko-> Soviet Foreign Minister who initially denied the presence of Soviet missiles in Cuba to U.S. officials.

Sergei Vladimirovich Kurashov-> Soviet Minister of Health.

Nikita Sergeyeovich Khrushchev-> Soviet Premier who ordered the deployment of nuclear missiles to Cuba and later negotiated their removal.

Sergey Pavlovich Korolyov -> Chief Soviet rocket engineer.

Vladimir Yefimovich Semichastny -> Head of the KGB, responsible for intelligence operations during the crisis.

Anatoly Fyodorovich Dobrynin-> Soviet Ambassador to the U.S., played a key role in diplomatic negotiations.



Vladimir Nikolaevich Novikov-> Chairman of the State Committee for Defense Technology, overseeing military production.

Alexei Nikolayevich Kosygin -> Soviet Deputy Premier, involved in economic planning but not a major figure in the crisis.

Nikolai Semyonovich Patolichev -> Soviet Minister of Foreign Trade.

Mikhail Alexandrovich Olshanski-> Soviet diplomat.

Rodion Yakovlevich Malinovsky-> Soviet Minister of Defense supervised the military deployment of missiles in Cuba.

Nikolai Demyonovich Psurtsev-> Head of Soviet communications, overseeing military and state radio networks.

Yekaterina Alexeyevna Furtseva-> Soviet Minister of Culture.

Vasily Fyodorovich Garbuzov -> Soviet Minister of Finance.

Vladimir Ivanovich Terebilov-> Soviet legal official.

Dmitriy Fyodorovich Ustinov-> Soviet military-industrial official, involved in weapons production.

Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev-> Soviet Presidium member later succeeded Khrushchev.

Fidel Castro(CUBAN)-> Cuban Prime Minister who backed Soviet missiles and opposed U.S. demands.

Joaquin Ordoqui(CUABN)-> Cuban military leader who coordinated defence with Soviet forces.

American Characters and Descriptions

Lyndon B. Johnson-> U.S. Vice President, largely excluded from key decision-making during the crisis.

Dean Rusk ->U.S. Secretary of State, advocated for a diplomatic resolution while supporting the blockade.

C. Douglas Dillon-> U.S. Secretary of the Treasury supported strong military action against Cuba.



Robert McNamara-> U.S. Secretary of Defense played a key role in military strategy and supported a naval blockade.

John F. Kennedy-> U.S. President, led the crisis response, ultimately negotiating the removal of Soviet missiles.

Robert F. Kennedy->U.S. Attorney General, a key advisor to the president and a backchannel negotiator with the Soviets.

McGeorge Bundy-> National Security Advisor helped shape policy options and supported the blockade.

John McCone-> CIA Director provided intelligence on Soviet missile deployments in Cuba.

General Maxwell D. Taylor-> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, advised on military responses to the crisis.

George Ball-> Under Secretary of State favoured diplomatic solutions over military action.

Curtis LeMay->U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff strongly advocated for airstrikes and invasion of Cuba.

Paul Nitze-> Assistant Secretary of Defense, involved in strategic military planning.

Llewellyn Thompson->U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union advised Kennedy on Soviet decision-making.

J. Edgar Hoover-> FBI Director monitored domestic security concerns but played a minor role in the crisis.

Adlai Stevenson-> U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations presented evidence of Soviet missiles in Cuba to the UN.

Donald Wilson-> Deputy Director of the U.S. Information Agency, helped manage public messaging during the crisis.

Arthur Lundahl-> Chief of the National Photographic Interpretation Center analyzed U-2 spy plane images confirming Soviet missiles in Cuba.

Jose Cardona(CUBAN)-> Anti-Castro exile leader who headed the U.S.-backed Cuban Revolutionary Council.



Fulgencio Batista(CUBAN)-> Former Cuban dictator overthrown by Castro in 1959. His U.S.-backed rule fueled the revolution.

