

# Photograph and Speech Related to the Cuban Missile Crisis

Stacey Bredhoff and Lee Ann Potter

On Sunday, October 14, 1962, an American U-2 aircraft, flying a photographic reconnaissance mission over Cuba, took 928 images (one is included with this article). The next day, analysts at the National Photographic Interpretation Center concluded that the photographs showed evidence of Soviet missile site construction in Cuba and conveyed their findings to McGeorge Bundy, President John F. Kennedy's National Security Adviser.

Early the following morning, Bundy delivered the news and photos to the president in his bedroom. Wearing his bathrobe, reviewing newspapers and working papers in preparation for a normal workday, the president learned of the imminent threat to the nation's security. The presence and size of the missiles was presumptive of nuclear capability. He called a meeting of his foreign policy advisers for 11:45 that morning. This meeting would be the first of many held by the president and his advisors over the next two weeks.

President Kennedy later formalized the role of his core advisory group, establishing the Executive Committee of the National Security Council, which became known as the "Ex Comm." He selected people whom he trusted to provide a range of opinions, and asked them for their recommendations. Many other advisors and experts participated in the meetings intermittently throughout the crisis. The president served as chairman of the Committee, and the Ex Comm members included:

- Lyndon B. Johnson, Vice President
- Dean Rusk, Secretary of State
- Robert McNamara, Secretary of

- Defense
- Douglas Dillon, Secretary of the Treasury
- Robert F. Kennedy, Attorney General
- John McCone, Director of Central Intelligence
- George Ball, Undersecretary of State
- Roswell Gilpatric, Deputy Secretary of Defense
- Gen. Maxwell Taylor, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
- Llewellyn Thompson, Ambassador-at-Large
- Theodore Sorensen, Special Counsel
- McGeorge Bundy, National Security Adviser

Unbeknownst to almost all the participants, President Kennedy secretly recorded the Ex Comm meetings, and much of what we know today about the president's decision-making is revealed on those tapes.

Most Ex Comm meetings began with an intelligence update delivered by John McCone, director of Central Intelligence. On October 18, he reported that photo analysts now found evidence of site con-

struction for intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBMs). With a target range of nearly 2,200 miles, nearly twice as large an area as the range of the MRBMs (medium range ballistic missiles) depicted in the first photographs shown to the president just three days earlier. IRBMs in Cuba would pose a threat to all parts of the United States, except for the northwest Pacific coast.

Over the next two days, the president maintained his normal schedule to avoid arousing public interest. He would not publicly reveal that there was a crisis until he had decided on a response. His advisers met almost continuously in smaller groups and debated various courses of action. The debates were heated. At first, the only point on which all could agree is that some action must be taken: the Soviet missile deployment could not be tolerated. Eventually, three possible courses of action emerged from the discussions: military strike, diplomatic negotiation, or the institution of a blockade to prevent Soviet ships carrying military equipment from reaching Cuba.

On Saturday afternoon, October 20, the president made his decision. He chose a blockade over military strikes or invasion, with the idea that a blockade was a limited action and that further military steps could be taken later, if necessary. He would address the nation the following Monday evening, speaking publicly about the national crisis for the first time. Before the announcement, he would meet

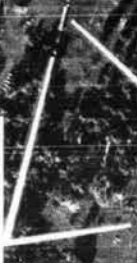
*continued on page 228*

Good evening, my fellow citizens:

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. Upon receiving the first preliminary hard information of this nature last Tuesday morning at 9 a.m.,

**MRBM FIELD LAUNCH SITE  
SAN CRISTOBAL NO 1  
14 OCTOBER 1962**

**ERECTOR, LAUNCHER EQUIPMENT**



**ERECTOR, LAUNCHER EQUIPMENT**

**8 MISSILE TRAILERS**



**EQUIPMENT**



**TENT AREAS**



**CONSTRUCTION**



## TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

1. Show students the featured photograph and lead a class discussion with the following questions: What kind of document is it? When was it created? By whom? For what purpose? Tell students that MRBM stood for medium range ballistic missile and share information with them from the background essay about the photograph and the others taken on October 14, 1962. Explain that the photographs provided President Kennedy with evidence that the Soviets were building missile launch sites in Cuba. Ask students whether they would have shared the photographs with the American people right away, or whether they would have wanted additional information. If they would have waited for additional information, ask them what details would have been most valuable to them—and write this list on the board. [You may wish to show the students the photograph using the [www.Docsteach.org](http://www.Docsteach.org) website (National Archives Identifier 193926), and utilize the zoom feature.]

2. Provide students with a copy of President Kennedy's speech to the nation delivered October 22, 1962 (see [www.Docsteach.org](http://www.Docsteach.org), Identifier 193899, or 193898). Encourage them to read it as they listen to the speech being delivered (available online from the Kennedy Library at <http://microsites.jfklibrary.org/cmc/oct22/doc5.html>). Ask students to compare the information provided in the speech with the list they generated in Activity #1. Next, ask them how they would have reacted to the president's message. Encourage them to interview a friend or relative who remembers the Cuban Missile Crisis, asking how they felt during the crisis and what aroused their emotions. Invite students to share the results of their interviews with the class.

3. Share the timeline with students showing the Soviet Deployment of Missiles in Cuba. Divide students into 12 small groups and assign each group a different day spanning the period October 17-28, 1962. Direct them to conduct research about the major events that occurred on their assigned date. Compile their findings, and as a group, decide which events were most important and lead a class discussion about why. Students may find the "World on the Brink: JFK and the Cuban Missile Crisis" microsite from the Kennedy Library to be particularly helpful: <http://microsites.jfklibrary.org/cmc/>

4. Tell students to imagine that they are President Kennedy facing the Cuban Missile Crisis, and that they recognize how helpful a group of advisors could be. Ask them to brainstorm a list of the characteristics they think presidential advisors should possess, as well as the information, expertise, and skills members of an advisory committee should have. Next, provide students with the list of the members of Kennedy's Executive Committee of the National Security Council. Invite them to select one of the names

and conduct biographical research on that person. Encourage students to identify the characteristics, information, expertise, or skills their member might have brought to the committee. Encourage students to share the results of their research and compare their findings with the lists they generated.

5. Visit the Kennedy Library's website for additional resources and activities related to the Cuban Missile Crisis (<http://jfklibrary.org/Education/Teachers/Curricular-Resources.aspx>). One that may be of particular interest focuses on Kennedy's advisors' deliberations leading up to the blockade decision. It invites students to listen in on JFK's midnight recording in which he discusses his intention to move forward with a limited blockade and why he preferred this option. The lesson also includes an extension activity that asks students to listen to the president's October 22nd address, consider the audiences he was addressing, and explain how he presented his decision to these audiences.

### Special Exhibit Note:

There are 43 hours of secret White House recordings relating to the Cuban Missile Crisis; they are preserved by the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum in Boston, Massachusetts. Excerpts from these recordings form the centerpiece of the exhibit "To the Brink—JFK and the Cuban Missile Crisis," that opens in the National Archives Building in Washington, DC, October 2012 and will open at the Kennedy Library in Boston in April 2013.

### Note about the documents:

The photograph, "MRBM Field Launch Site San Cristobal No. 1," taken October 14, 1962, is part of a series titled, "United States Department of Defense: Cuban Missile Crisis, compiled 10/1962 - 11/1962," in the holdings of the John F. Kennedy Library (NLJFK), at Columbia Point, Boston, Mass. President John F. Kennedy's reading copy of his address to the nation on the buildup of Soviet nuclear weapons in Cuba and the establishment of a United States blockade of Cuba, delivered on October 22, 1962, is also in the holdings of the Kennedy Library. Both are available online from the National Archives at [www.Docsteach.org](http://www.Docsteach.org) (National Archives Identifier numbers 193926 and 193899) along with the first two minutes of the television broadcast of the speech (Identifier 51510), and additional records related to the Cuban Missile Crisis.

## Chronology of Soviet Deployment of Missiles in Cuba

**Spring 1962:** Khrushchev conceives of a plan to secretly deploy nuclear missiles in Cuba. The Presidium (the Soviet Union's executive governing body) approves Khrushchev's proposal. The plan is eventually codenamed *Anadyr*, the site of a strategic air base in Siberia from which Soviet bombers could reach the United States.

**May 30, 1962:** Cuban leadership accepts Soviet offer of the missiles; Castro later proposes that the deployment be publicly announced—not carried out in secret—but Khrushchev insists on the operation's secrecy.

**Summer 1962:** U.S. intelligence detects Soviet military shipments to Cuba.

**September 4, 1962:** President Kennedy issues a statement warning the Soviet Union that “the gravest issues would arise” if they were to deploy weapons “with significant offensive capability.”

**September 7, 1962:** President Kennedy calls up 150,000 army reservists for one year of active duty.

**Throughout September 1962:** The Soviet Union repeatedly

denies the deployment of offensive weapons. Meanwhile the United States detects more state-of-the-art Soviet defensive Surface-to-Air-Missiles (SAMs) in Cuba and after September 10 decides to limit the amount of time any U-2 flew over Cuba to lessen the risk of one being shot down.

**October 4, 1962:** The first nuclear warheads arrive in Cuba.

**October 1962:** The Soviet Union continues to deny the presence of offensive weapons in Cuba.

**October 9, 1962:** U.S. intensifies surveillance flights over Cuba in an effort to obtain evidence of nuclear missile sites there.

**October 14, 1962:** A U-2 flight flies over the western end of Cuba for the first time since September 5 and photographs activity in San Cristobal, a town in western Cuba.

**October 15, 1962:** Analysts at the National Photographic Interpretation Center (NPIC) find evidence in the photographs of a medium-range ballistic missile site.

**October 16, 1962:** The evidence is presented to President Kennedy.

with congressional leaders to alert them to the situation in Cuba and his response.

On October 22, 1962, at 7 p.m., President Kennedy interrupted the nation's Monday night television programs with a speech that lasted 17 minutes. In it, he explained that the Soviet Union was in the process of installing nuclear weapons in Cuba. He said that the presence of those missiles so close to the United States would pose a mortal threat to the nation and upset the balance of power between the two superpowers, and that they must be removed. He outlined the steps he was taking in response. He did not shrink from disclosing the gravity of the threat, but he withheld details of a nuclear strike's full horror. (The first page of the president's reading copy of the speech is featured in this article.)

The U.S. response to the missile sites—President Kennedy's message to the nation and the subsequent military mobilization—alarmed the Soviets. In a gross miscalculation, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev had assumed that the United States would tolerate the presence of the missiles in Cuba.

For the next six days, events escalated and tense diplomatic negotiations—com-

plicated by slow communication channels—ensued between the two superpowers.

On Sunday, October 28, Khrushchev and his advisers assembled at a dacha (an estate) outside Moscow. Anxious to end the crisis as soon as possible, he started to dictate a letter to President Kennedy informing him that the missile sites in Cuba would be removed. When Khrushchev learned that the United States had made a secret offer to remove its missiles from Turkey, he readily agreed to keep that part of the agreement secret. To end the crisis as soon as possible, couriers rushed Khrushchev's message to the Moscow radio station where it was broadcast at approximately 4 p.m., which was 9 a.m. in Washington.

President Kennedy learned of Khrushchev's decision to remove the mis-

siles from Cuba when it was broadcast on the American airwaves. He replied later that day, welcoming the message as “an important contribution to peace,” as he looked toward the future, stressing the importance of the two nations working together toward disarmament. 🌐

### For Further Information

Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *“One Hell of a Gamble”: Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy 1958-1964* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997).

Sheldon M. Stern, *Averting “The Final Failure”: John F. Kennedy and the Secret Cuban Missile Crisis Meetings* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003).

Michael Dobbs, *One Minute to Midnight: Kennedy, Khrushchev, and Castro on the Brink of Nuclear War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008).

**STACEY BREDHOFF** is curator at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum in Boston, Mass.; **LEE ANN POTTER** is head of Education and Volunteer Programs for the National Archives Experience at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. Potter serves as the “Teaching with Documents” feature editor. The documents in this article are from a special 50th anniversary exhibit entitled, “To the Brink: JFK and the Cuban Missile Crisis.” They are in the public domain and can be reproduced in any quantity. For additional information about the education programs of the National Archives, please visit [www.archives.gov/nae](http://www.archives.gov/nae), and [www.archives.gov/education](http://www.archives.gov/education); and for information on education resources and programs at the Kennedy Library, see [www.jfklibrary.org/Education](http://www.jfklibrary.org/Education).

The authors would like to thank Nancy McCoy, Nina Tisch, and Jim Wagner at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum in Boston, and Karen Hibbitt at the National Archives for their help with this article.