

## Cuban Missile Crisis

The Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 was the closest the United States and Soviet Union came to nuclear war. Those 13 days were extremely tense. John F. Kennedy and Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev sent a series of leaders to each other during the crisis. Examine the communication from both leaders and complete the questions.

Once nuclear missiles were discovered in Cuba, president Kennedy addressed the nation on October 22, 1962.



Watch part of John F. Kennedy's October 22, 1962 address to the nation  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZLxgeINIBEM&t=2s>

1. Why does president Kennedy emphasize the difference between offensive and defensive weapons?
2. What actions does president Kennedy say the United States will take because of this crisis?

## Cuban Missile Crisis

3. In your opinion, does president Kennedy want to start a conflict or does a he want a peaceful solution to the crisis?
4. Cite evidence from the speech to support your answer for question #3?

Below is part of the response that Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev sent to president Kennedy after his speech

**Mr. John F. Kennedy**  
**President of the United States of America**  
**Washington**

**Dear Mr. President,**

....

***Imagine, Mr. President, what if we were to present to you such an ultimatum as you have presented to us by your actions. How would you react to it? I think you would be outraged at such a move on our part. And this we would understand.***

***Having presented these conditions to us, Mr. President, you have thrown down the gauntlet. Who asked you to do this? By what right have you done this?***

***You, Mr. President, are not declaring a quarantine, but rather issuing an ultimatum, and you are threatening that if we do not obey your orders, you will then use force. Think about what you are saying! And you want to persuade me to agree to this! What does it mean to agree to these demands? It would mean for us to conduct our relations with other countries not by reason, but by yielding to tyranny. You are not appealing to reason; you want to intimidate us.***

***No, Mr. President, I cannot agree to this, and I think that deep inside, you will admit that I am right. I am convinced that if you were in my place you would do the same.***

***You want to force us to renounce the rights enjoyed by every sovereign state; you are attempting to legislate questions of international law; you are violating the generally accepted standards of this law. All this is due not only to hatred for the Cuban people and their government, but also for reasons having to do with the election campaign in the USA. What morals, what laws can justify such an approach by the American government to international affairs? Such morals and laws are not to be found, because the actions of the USA in relation to Cuba are outright piracy. This, if you will, is the madness of a degenerating imperialism. Unfortunately, people of all nations, and not***

## Cuban Missile Crisis

*least the American people themselves, could suffer heavily from madness such as this, since with the appearance of modern types of weapons, the USA has completely lost its former inaccessibility.*

*When you lay conditions such as these before us, try to put yourself in our situation and consider how the USA would react to such conditions. I have no doubt that if anyone attempted to dictate similar conditions to you -- the USA, you would reject such an attempt. And we likewise say -- no.*

*The Soviet government considers the violation of the freedom of navigation in international waters and air space to constitute an act of aggression propelling humankind into the abyss of a world nuclear-missile war. Therefore, the Soviet government cannot instruct captains of Soviet ships bound for Cuba to observe orders of American naval forces blockading this island. Our instructions to Soviet sailors are to observe strictly the generally accepted standards of navigation in international waters and not retreat one step from them. And, if the American side violates these rights, it must be aware of the responsibility it will bear for this act. To be sure, we will not remain mere observers of pirate actions by American ships in the open sea. We will then be forced on our part to take those measures we deem necessary and sufficient to defend our rights. To this end we have all that is necessary.*

*Respectfully, /s/ N. Khrushchev*

**N. KHRUSHCHEV**

**Moscow  
24 October 1962**

- 
1. In one word, what is the tone of the letter Nikita Khrushchev sent to president Kennedy?
  2. Many historians believe Nikita Khrushchev was threatening president Kennedy? Cite two pieces of evidence from the letter to support this?

## Cuban Missile Crisis

Two dates later on October 26th, as tensions got worse, Nikita Khrushchev sent another letter to president Kennedy. Below, is part of that letter.

***Dear Mr President...***

***I think you will understand me correctly if you are really concerned about the welfare of the world. Everyone needs peace.***

***I see, Mr President, that you too are not devoid of a sense of anxiety for the fate of the world understanding, and of what war entails. What would a war give you? You are threatening us with war. But you well know that the very least which you would receive in reply would be that you would experience the same consequences as those which you sent us.***

***Our vessels, apparently, will soon enter the zone which your Navy is patrolling. I assure you that these vessels, now bound for Cuba, are carrying the most innocent peaceful cargoes.***

***I don't know whether you can understand me and believe me. But I should like to have you believe in yourself and to agree that one cannot give way to passions. It is necessary to control them. And in what direction are events now developing?***

***Let us normalize relations...our side should not transport armaments of any kind to Cuba during a certain period of time, while negotiations are being conducted—and we are ready to enter such negotiations—and the other side should not undertake any sort of piratical actions against vessels engaged in navigation on the high seas. I consider these proposals reasonable. This would be a way out of the situation which has been created, which would give the peoples the possibility of breathing calmly...***

***Let us therefore show statesmanlike wisdom. I propose: We, for our part, will declare that our ships, bound for Cuba, will not carry any kind of armaments. You would declare that the United States will not invade Cuba with its forces and will not support any sort of forces which might intend to carry out an invasion of Cuba. These thoughts are dictated by a sincere desire to relieve the situation, to remove the threat of war."***

***Respectfully yours***

***N. Khrushchev***

---

1. How is the tone of this 2nd letter different than the 1st?

2. Cite two examples to support your answer question #1.