

MOMENTOUS DECISIONS

The Cuban missile crisis

Hero of the Cuban Missile Crisis. (October 14th–28th, 1962)

Who?

Russian deputy brigade commander Captain Vasili Arkhipov aboard the Soviet submarine B59.

Some people dispute that he deserves the credit.

When?

October 27, 1962.

Where?

Near Cuba.

Why?

To avoid nuclear war.

Lead-up to the Missile Crisis.

- The U.S. government of President Dwight D. Eisenhower was concerned about the direction in which Castro's government was going.
- In March 1960, Eisenhower allocated \$13.1 million to the CIA in order to plan Castro's overthrow.
- Was it the army general inside him coming to the surface?



Kennedy approves.

- Following his election in 1960, president John F. Kennedy was informed of the invasion plan and gave his consent to the plans developed by the CIA.
- Was Kennedy as sincere as he appeared?



CIA supported bombing.

- On 15th April, 1961 eight CIA-supplied B-26 bombers, piloted by Cuban exiles and two privately contracted, Americans attacked Cuban air fields and returned to the U.S.
- On the night of 16th April, the main invasion landed at a beach named Playa Girón in the Bay of Pigs.



Bay of Pigs Invasion.

- 16/17th–19th April 1961.



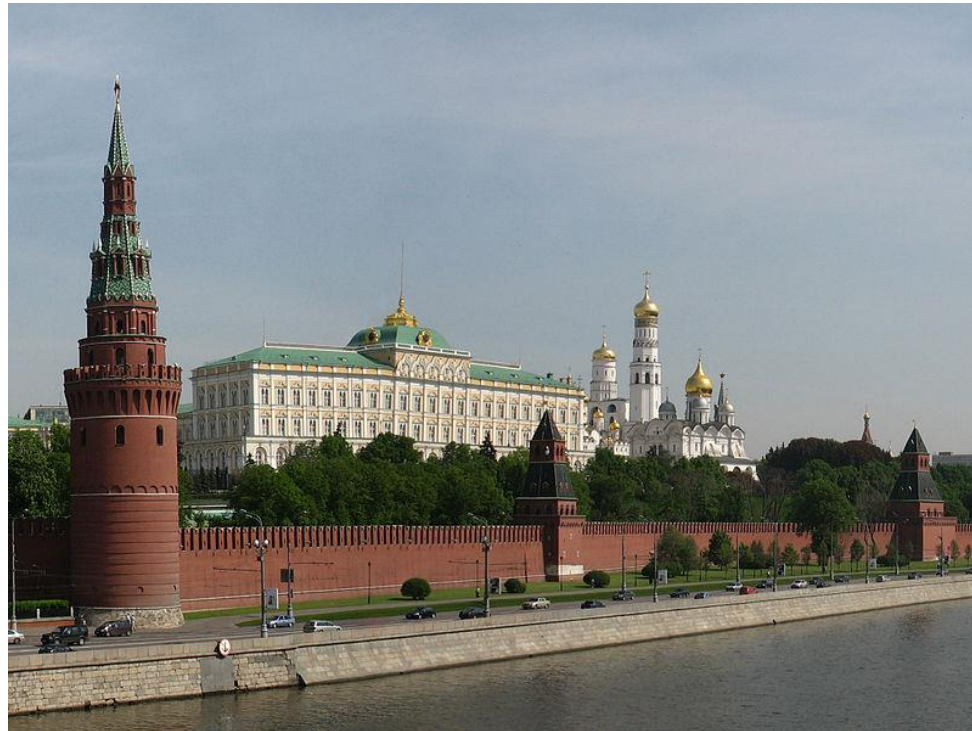
Lack of support.

The invasion failed and was celebrated across Latin America as evidence of the fallibility of U.S. imperialism.



Accurate prediction.

- Afterward, former President Eisenhower told Kennedy that "the failure of the Bay of Pigs will embolden the Soviets to do something that they would otherwise not do."



Rush to judgement.

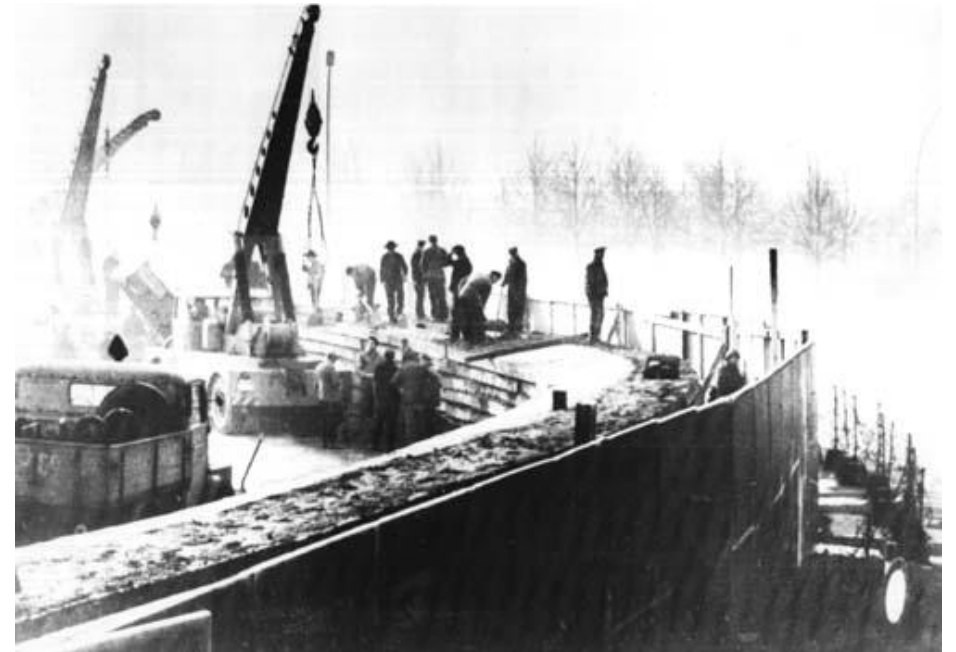
- The half-hearted invasion left Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev and his advisers with the impression that Kennedy was indecisive and, as one Soviet adviser wrote, "too young, intellectual, not prepared well for decision making in crisis situations ... too intelligent and too weak".

- A weak person in the Oval Office?



Another Test for Kennedy after the Bay of Pigs fiasco.

- The Berlin Crisis of 1961 (4th June – 9th November 1961) was the last major politico-military European incident of the Cold War about the occupational status of the German capital city, Berlin, and of post–World War II Germany.
- The USSR provoked the Berlin Crisis with an ultimatum demanding the withdrawal of Western armed forces from West Berlin—culminating with the city's *de facto* partition and the East German erection of the Berlin Wall.



A dangerous assumption.

- To Khrushchev, Kennedy's weakness was confirmed by the President's soft response during the Berlin Crisis of 1961, particularly the building of the Berlin Wall.
- Speaking to Soviet officials in the aftermath of the crisis, Khrushchev asserted, "I know for certain that Kennedy doesn't have a strong background, nor, generally speaking, does he have the courage to stand up to a serious challenge."
- He also told his son Sergei that, on Cuba, Kennedy "would make a fuss, make more of a fuss, and then agree".



A response to the two 'failures'?

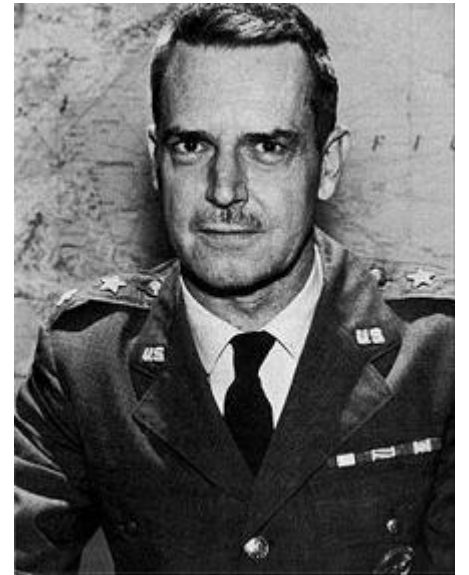
- On November 30, 1961, aggressive covert operations (called Operation Mongoose) against Fidel Castro's revolutionary government in Cuba, were authorized by President Kennedy.

- Fidel and Ché.



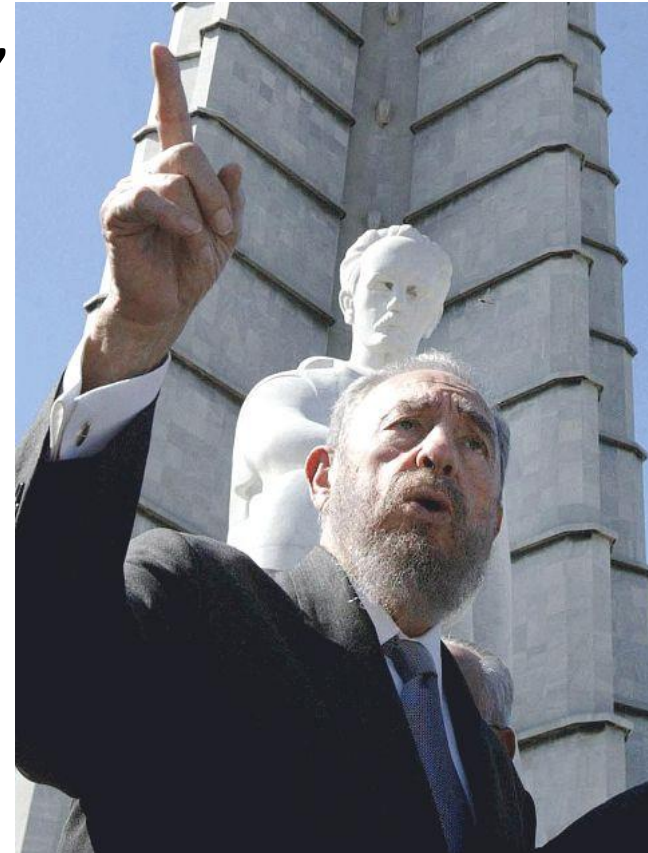
Operation Mongoose (one version; different dates are given by other versions).

- Mongoose's six-phase schedule was presented by (air force) Major General **Edward Lansdale** on February 20, 1962.
- It was overseen by Attorney General Robert Kennedy.
- President Kennedy was briefed on the operation's guidelines on March 16, 1962.
- Lansdale outlined the coordinated program of political, psychological, military, sabotage, and intelligence operations as well as assassination attempts on key political leaders.



Target date.

- A document from the United States Department of State confirms that Mongoose aimed to "help Cuba overthrow the Communist regime", including its leader Fidel Castro, and it aimed "for a revolt which can take place in Cuba by October 1962".
- Castro in front of a Havana statue of Cuban national hero José Martí in 2003.



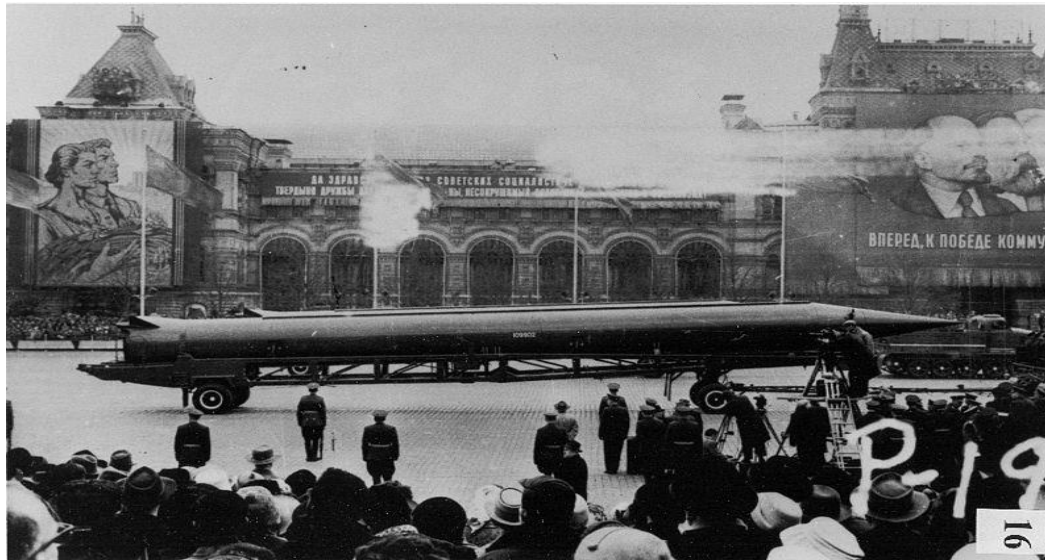
Thirteen days at the precipice.

- With failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion of 1961, and the presence of American Jupiter ballistic missiles in Italy and Turkey arrayed against the USSR, with Moscow within range, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev decided to place nuclear missiles in Cuba.
- First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.



A dangerous agreement.

- After earlier discussions, by May 1962 (some sites say July) Khrushchev and Castro had agreed to place strategic nuclear missiles secretly in Cuba.
- Khrushchev's motive may have been to protect Cuba against another invasion but he probably had other ideas in mind.



Diplomacy not the answer.

- On **October 16th**, Kennedy was informed that U-2 flights over Cuba had discovered what were most likely medium-range missile sites.
- Though he and his advisors considered approaching Khrushchev through diplomatic channels, they could not devise a way of doing this without appearing weak.



Warmongers and a sceptical president.

- The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff unanimously agreed that a full-scale attack and invasion was the only solution.
- They believed that the Soviets would not attempt to stop the US from conquering Cuba.
- Kennedy was sceptical.



Bloody minded and idiotic militarists. Thank whoever you believe in, for McNamara.

- The warmongers believed that the missiles would seriously alter the military balance, but Secretary of Defence **Robert McNamara disagreed.**
- He was convinced that the missiles would not affect the strategic balance at all.
- This was a momentous disagreement!



Rational in the face of militarists exaggerations.

- McNamara reasoned that an extra 40 (to be placed in Cuba) would make little difference to the overall strategic balance.
- The US already had approximately 5,000 strategic warheads while the Soviet Union had only 300.



Kennedy and McNamara.

- Two against the tide.



Clear thinking by Kennedy, and his fears for Berlin.

- Kennedy stated : “They, no more than we, can let these things go by without doing something.
- They can't, after all their statements, permit us to take out their missiles, kill a lot of Russians, and then do nothing.
- **If they don't take action in Cuba, they certainly will in Berlin”.**
- President Kennedy meets with Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko in the Oval Office (**October 18, 1962**).



Possibility of the fall of West Berlin.

- Kennedy concluded that attacking Cuba by air would signal the Soviets to presume "a clear line" to conquer West Berlin.
- Kennedy also believed that United States' allies would think of the US as "trigger-happy cowboys" who lost Berlin because they could not peacefully resolve the Cuban situation.



Scrutinising the enemy.

Political considerations.

- The advisory committee to Kennedy agreed that the missiles would affect the **political balance**.
- First, Kennedy had explicitly promised the American people less than a month before the crisis that "if Cuba should possess a capacity to carry out offensive actions against the United States ... the United States would act."



Appearances are important.

- Second, US credibility among their allies, and among the American people, would be damaged if they allowed the Soviet Union to *appear* to redress the strategic balance by placing missiles in Cuba.
- Kennedy explained after the crisis that "it would have politically changed the balance of power.
- "It would have appeared to, and appearances contribute to reality."



Fighting words. 1

- After many discussions with his advisers Kennedy forewarned Britain, France, Germany and Canada before, on October 22nd at 7:00 pm EDT, he delivered a nationwide televised address on all of the major networks announcing the discovery of the missiles.
- 1.“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 response upon the Soviet Union”.



Fighting words. 2

- 2.“To halt this offensive build-up, a strict quarantine on all offensive military equipment under shipment to Cuba is being initiated.
- All ships of any kind bound for Cuba, from whatever nation or port, will, if found to contain cargoes of offensive weapons, be turned back.

- P-2H Neptune over Soviet ship
Oct 1962.



Fighting words. 3

- "This quarantine will be extended, if needed, to other types of cargo and carriers.
- "We are not at this time, however, denying the necessities of life as the Soviets attempted to do in their Berlin blockade of 1948."

- Landmarks of Berlin.



Careful choice of words.

- The word “quarantine” was used instead of “blockade” because the latter word implied a state of war existed and Kennedy wanted to avoid that possibility.
- Khrushchev's October 24th, 1962 letter to Kennedy stated that the Cuban (missile crisis) blockade "constitute[s] an act of aggression ..."

Уважаемый господин Президент,

Получил Ваше письмо от 23 октября, ознакомился с ним и отвечаю Вам.

Представьте себе, господин Президент, что мы поставили бы Вам те ультимативные условия, которые Вы поставили нам своей акцией. Как бы Вы реагировали на это? Думаю, что Вы возмущались бы таким шагом с нашей стороны. И это было бы нам понятно.

Поставив нам эти условия, Вы, господин Президент, бросили нам вызов. Кто Вас просил делать это? По какому праву Вы это сделали? Наши связи с Республикой Куба, как и отношения с другими государствами, независимо от того, какое это государство, касаются только двух стран, между которыми имеются эти отношения. И если уж говорить о карантине, упоминаемом в Вашем письме, то это, как это принято в международной практике, могут устанавливать только государства по договоренности между собой, а не какой-то третья сторона. Существуют, например, карантин на сельскохозяйственные товары и продукты. Но в данном случае речь идет совсем не о карантине, а о гораздо более серьезных вещах, и Вы это сами понимаете.

Его Правительству
господину Джону Ф.Кеннеди,
Президенту Соединенных Штатов Америки
г.Вашингтон

Russian missile downs U2.

- During the crisis an American U2 spy plane was shot down and the pilot Rudolph Anderson killed.
- Missile “memorial” in Cuba.



Provocation by individual.

- Kennedy and his advisers reasoned that this was an unauthorised act by an individual Soviet officer and therefore the U.S. did not respond with force (it was later confirmed to be a correct reasoning).



A look back at the Crisis.

- Perhaps the most dangerous moment in the crisis was only recognised during the Cuban Missile Crisis Havana **conference in October 2002.**



A warning to Soviet submarine.

- Attended by many of the veterans of the crisis, they all learned that on October 27th, 1962 the USS Beale had tracked and dropped signalling depth charges (the size of hand grenades) **on the B-59**, a Soviet submarine which, unknown to the US, **was armed with a nuclear torpedo.**
- A US Navy HSS-1 Seabat helicopter hovers over **Soviet submarine B-59.**



A critical dispute.

- Running out of air, the Soviet submarine was surrounded by American warships and desperately needed to surface.
- An argument broke out among the **three officers** on the B-59 who had **to unanimously approve** the launch of the torpedo.
- They were **captain Valentin Savitsky**, political officer Ivan Semonovich Maslennikov, and Deputy brigade commander Captain 2nd rank Vasili Arkhipov.
- U.S. nuclear torpedo.



An angry response to being trapped.

- An exhausted Captain Savitsky became furious and ordered that the nuclear torpedo on board be made combat ready.



A hold-out for caution.

- Accounts differ about whether Commander Arkhipov vetoed the attack, or whether Savitsky himself finally concluded that the only reasonable choice left open to him was to come to the surface.
- Most accounts credit Captain 2nd rank **Arkhipov** with vetoing the launch.



A hero.

- During the Havana conference of 2002 Robert McNamara stated that nuclear war had come much closer than people had thought.
- Thomas Blanton, director of the National Security Archive, said, "A guy called Vasili Arkhipov saved the world."



Final resolution of the crisis and perhaps a taste of sour grapes.

- It was eventually agreed that the missiles would be withdrawn if the United States dismantled its Jupiter missiles in Turkey and Italy.
- Over Italy's and Turkey's objections this was done.
- The U.S. was happy with this agreement because **the Jupiter missiles were regarded as obsolete**, with their function already being fulfilled by submarines carrying Polaris missiles.