

**Name:**

**Cuban Missile Crisis Role-Play**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Students</b>
<b>John F. Kennedy (President)</b>	
<b>Robert Kennedy</b>	
<b>Robert McNamara</b>	
<b>John Scali, journalist</b>	
<b>Former Secretary of State Dean Acheson</b>	
<b>Nikita Krushchev</b>	
<b>Anatoly Dobrynin</b>	
<b>Foreign Minister Andrei Gromkyo</b>	
<b>Defense Minister Rolion Malinovsky</b>	
<b>Fidel Castro</b>	
<b>Che Guevara</b>	

# Cuba timeline<sup>1</sup>

1952 - Batista seizes power again and presides over an oppressive and corrupt regime.

1953 - Fidel Castro leads an unsuccessful revolt against the Batista regime.

1956 - Castro lands in eastern Cuba from Mexico and takes to the Sierra Maestra mountains where, aided by Ernesto "Che" Guevara, he wages a guerrilla war.

1958 - The US withdraws military aid to Batista.

Triumph of the revolution

1959 - Castro leads a 9,000-strong guerrilla army into Havana, forcing Batista to flee. Castro becomes prime minister, his brother, Raul, becomes his deputy and Guevara becomes third in command.

1960 - All US businesses in Cuba are nationalised without compensation.

1961 - Washington breaks off all diplomatic relations with Havana. The US sponsors an abortive invasion by Cuban exiles at the Bay of Pigs; Castro proclaims Cuba a communist state and begins to ally it with the USSR.

## **Bay of Pigs<sup>2</sup>**

On January 1, 1959, a young Cuban nationalist named Fidel Castro (1926-) drove his guerilla army into Havana and overthrew General Fulgencio Batista (1901-1973), the nation's American-backed president. For the next two years, officials at the U.S. State Department and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) attempted to push Castro from power. Finally, in April 1961, the CIA launched what its leaders believed would be the definitive strike: a full-scale invasion of Cuba by 1,400 American-trained Cubans who had fled their homes when Castro took over. However, the invasion did not go well: The invaders were badly outnumbered by Castro's troops, and they surrendered after less than 24 hours of fighting.

<sup>1</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/1203355.stm>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/bay-of-pigs-invasion>

# Telegram From the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the

## 0 Department of State

Moscow, April 18, 1961, 2 p.m.

2550. Following letter to President Kennedy from Khrushchev handed me by Acting Foreign Minister Semenov at 12:15 today.

Mr. President, I send you this message in an hour of alarm, fraught with danger for the peace of the whole world. Armed aggression has begun [\[Page 8\]](#) against Cuba. It is a secret to no one that the armed bands invading this country were trained, equipped and armed in the United States of America. The planes which are bombing Cuban cities belong to the United States of America, the bombs they are dropping are being supplied by the American Government.

All of this evokes here in the Soviet Union an understandable feeling of indignation on the part of the Soviet Government and the Soviet people.

Only recently, in exchanging opinions through our respective representatives, we talked with you about the mutual desire of both sides to put forward joint efforts directed toward improving relations between our countries and eliminating the danger of war. Your statement a few days ago that the USA would not participate in military activities against Cuba created the impression that the top leaders of the United States were taking into account the consequences for general peace and for the USA itself which aggression against Cuba could have. How can what is being done by the United States in reality be understood, when an attack on Cuba has now become a fact?

It is still not late to avoid the irreparable. The Government of the USA still has the possibility of not allowing the flame of war ignited by interventions in Cuba to grow into an incomparable conflagration. I approach you, Mr. President, with an urgent call to put an end to aggression against the Republic of Cuba. Military armament and the world political situation are such at this time that any so-called "little war" can touch off a chain reaction in all parts of the globe.

As far as the Soviet Union is concerned, there should be no mistake about our position: We will render the Cuban people and their government all necessary help to repel armed attack on Cuba. We are sincerely interested in a relaxation of international tension, but if others proceed toward sharpening, we will answer them in full measure. And in general it is hardly possible so to conduct matters that the situation is settled in one area and conflagration extinguished, while a new conflagration is ignited in another area.

**Letter #1: Presidential Correspondence: Lot 66 D 204**  
**Washington, April 18, 1961.**

**Citation & Source Information:**The source text is a press release from the Office of the White House Press Secretary, which was marked for release at 6:45 p.m. April 18.*Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States:John F. Kennedy, 1961*, pp. 286-287;*American Foreign Policy: Current Documents, 1961*, pp. 296-297; and Claflin, *The President Wants To Know*, pp. 59-60.

Mr. Khrushchev: You are seriously misunderstanding the events in Cuba. For months there has been clear and growing resistance to the Castro dictatorship. More than 100,000 refugees have recently fled from Cuba into neighboring countries. Their urgent hope is naturally to assist their fellow Cubans in their struggle for freedom.

These are unmistakable signs that Cubans find intolerable the denial of democratic freedoms and the continued manipulation of the 26th of July Movement by the Soviet Regime. We do not intend to send American troops, but it cannot be surprising that, as resistance within Cuba grows, refugees have been using whatever means are available to return and support their countrymen in the continuing struggle for freedom. Where people are denied the right of choice, violence is the only means of achieving their liberties.

I believe, Mr. Khrushchev, that you should recognize that free peoples in all parts of the world do not accept the claim of historical inevitability (definitely will happen) for Communist revolution. What your government believes is its own business; what it does in the world is the world's business. The great revolution in the history of man, past, present and future, is the revolution of those determined to be free.

**-John F. Kennedy**

## **Letter #2: Transmitted in telegram 2562 from Moscow, April 11, 1961**

**Citation & Source Information:** No classification marking. Transmitted in telegram 2562 from Moscow, April 11. A copy of section 1 of 3 of that telegram is in the Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Countries Series, USSR, Khrushchev Correspondence. The source text was transmitted as an enclosure to despatch 1183 from Moscow, May 11, and indicates it was "translated from Russian." The Russian-language text was transmitted as an enclosure to despatch 747 from Moscow, May 3. (Department of State, Central Files, 611.37/5-361) A slightly different text is printed in Department of State Bulletin, May 8, 1961, pp. 664-667.

MR. PRESIDENT, I have received your reply of April 18. You write that the United States intends no military intervention in Cuba. But numerous facts-speak differently. Despite all assurances to the contrary, it has now been proved beyond doubt that it was precisely the United States which prepared the intervention, financed its arming and transported the gangs of mercenaries (foreign invaders) that invaded the territory of Cuba during the Bay of Pigs.

United States armed forces also took a direct part in the accomplishment of the . American bombers and fighters supported the operations of the mercenaries who landed on Cuban territory, and participated in the military operations against the armed forces of the lawful Government and people of Cuba.

Cuba today is not, of course, the Cuba you identify with the handful of traitors who have come out against their people. It is the Cuba of workers, peasants and intellectuals, it is a people which has rallied round its revolutionary Government headed by the national hero, Fidel Castro.

You simply claim, in fact, some right of yours to employ military force whenever you find it necessary, and to suppress other peoples each time you decide that their expression of their will constitutes "communism". But what right have you, what right has anyone in general, to deprive a people of the possibility of choosing their social and political system of their own free will?

**Choice Moment 2.1. CASTRO–What should Castro do?**

1. Wait for another U.S. attack and hope that he has enough troops to repel it.
2. Ask the Soviet Union to place nuclear weapons in Cuba, but risk starting a nuclear war
3. Try to make an economic pact with the U.S., and reject the Soviet deal, a risky proposition that could result in Cuba losing all of its trading partners

**Decision: (Claim + Evidence from text)**

**Transition...Castro has decided to ask for**  
\_\_\_\_\_ **from the Soviet Union.**

**Choice Moment 2.2: KHRUSHCHEV'S RESPONSE– How do you want to respond to Castro's query about nuclear weapons to Cuba?**

1. Ignore him and continue subtle jabs at Kennedy
2. Speak to him personally and then make the decision
3. Not let him know, since he really does not understand the Cold War, and place the missile there anyway

**Decision:**

**What are the stakes for Khrushchev? U.S.? Cuba?**

**Card 2.3 (Castro)**

"We have to confront America with more than words!"

**Card 2.4 (Khrushchev)**

Any attack on Soviet ships going to Cuba means war with the Soviet Union!

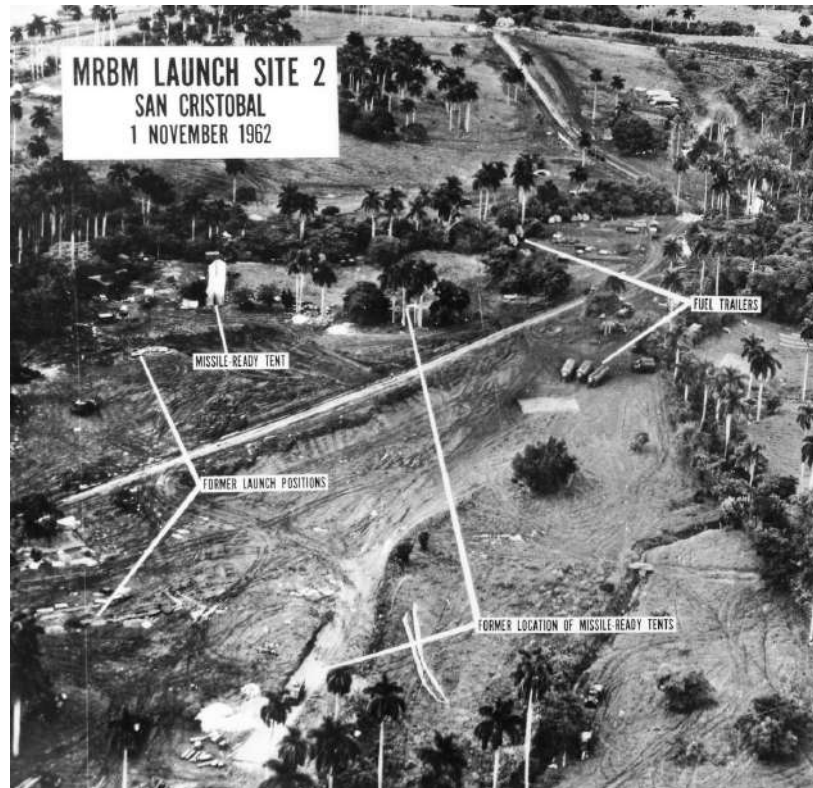
**Choice Moment 3.1: September 4th (Kennedy, Dulles, and Robert Kennedy)**



Kennedy, Dulles, and Robert Kennedy are presented with the photo above. What should they do...

1. Order more reconnaissance flights to get a closer look at the missiles
2. Send in American troops
3. Continue the CIA covert operations, but do nothing else.

**Decision:**



**Choice Moment 3.2 (Kennedy, Dulles, and Robert Kennedy): They narrow it down to six possible responses:**

1. Do nothing: American vulnerability to Soviet missiles was not new.
2. Diplomacy: Use diplomatic pressure to get the Soviet Union to remove the missiles.
3. Secret approach: Offer Castro the choice of splitting with the Russians or being invaded.
4. Invasion: Full force invasion of Cuba and overthrow of Castro.
5. Air strike: Use the US Air Force to attack all known missile sites.
6. Blockade: Use the US Navy to block any missiles from arriving in Cuba.

**Decision:**

**What are the stakes for Khrushchev? U.S.? Cuba?**



**Choice Moment 3.3 (Kennedy, Dulles, and Robert Kennedy):** As the build-up continues, on October 21st, EXCOMM meets to reassess the situation. They come-up with a few choices:

1. Continue to wait it out and do nothing
2. Create a Quarantine where our ships chase away any Soviet or other ships that attempt to land on the island.

**Decision:**

**What are the stakes for Krushchev? U.S.? Cuba?**

**Card 3.4: President Kennedy Says on October 21st**

To halt this offensive buildup, a strict quarantine (blockade) 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."

**In your own words...**

**What does this mean for the Cuban people?**

# Letter From President Kennedy to Chairman Khrushchev

Washington, October 22, 1962.

Dear Mr. Chairman: A copy of the statement I am making tonight concerning developments in Cuba and the reaction of my Government thereto has been handed to your Ambassador

in Washington. <sup>1</sup> In view of the gravity of the developments to which I refer, I want you to know immediately and accurately the position of my Government in this matter.

It was in order to avoid any incorrect assessment on the part of your Government with respect to Cuba that I publicly stated that if certain developments in Cuba took place, the United States would do whatever must be done to protect its own security and that of its allies.

Moreover, the Congress adopted a resolution expressing its support of this declared

policy. <sup>2</sup> Despite this, the rapid development of long-range missile bases and other offensive weapons systems in Cuba has proceeded. I must tell you that the United States is determined that this threat to the security of this hemisphere be removed. At the same time, I wish to point out that the action we are taking is the minimum necessary to remove the threat to the security of the nations of this hemisphere. The fact of this minimum response should not be taken as a basis, however, for any misjudgment on your part.

I hope that your Government will refrain from any action which would widen or deepen this already grave crisis and that we can agree to resume the path of peaceful negotiations.

Sincerely,

JFK

**Choice Moment 3.3 (Khrushchev):** How do you respond?

### Card 3.4: Khrushchev Says

Imagine, President Kennedy, 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.

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.

The Soviet government considers the violation of the freedom of navigation in international waters and airspace 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.

**What's at stake at this moment for the U.S.? Soviet Union? World? Explain. 3-5 sentences**




**The U.S. has created a blockade around Cuba with no ships allowed in or out...**

**Card 3.5 Alexander Fomin (Soviet Double Agent)**

Bumping into journalist John Scali: "It seems that War is about to break out. Is there any way you could talk to your high level friends at the State Department, like Robert Kennedy, to see if they would be interested in a diplomatic solution

**Choice Moment 4.1: John Scali is faced with a decision...**

1. Go to his friend Robert Kennedy at the State Department and risk being called a traitor himself
2. Do nothing, and hope the situation sorts itself out.

**Choice Moment 5.1: Robert Kennedy has a choice about what to tell the Russian**

1. Reach out and inform the Soviets that if they remove the missiles, the U.S. would be unlikely to invade Cuba
2. Inform the Soviets that they are going to attack in 12 hours if they do not begin removing the missiles
3. Do nothing and wait for the Soviets to make the first move.

**Decision:**

**What are the stakes for Khrushchev? U.S.? Cuba?**

**Choice Moment (Khrushchev) - What are your options? What do you do?**

**Card 5.2: Kennedy Reads the following letter from Khrushchev:**

Mr. President, we and you ought not now to pull on the ends of the rope in which you have tied the knot of war, because the more the two of us pull, the tighter that knot will be tied. And a moment may come when that knot will be tied so tight that even he who tied it will not have the strength to untie it, and then it will be necessary to cut that knot, and what that would mean is not for me to explain to you, because you yourself understand perfectly of what terrible forces our countries dispose.

Consequently, if there is no intention to tighten that knot and thereby to doom the world to the catastrophe of thermonuclear war, then let us not only relax the forces pulling on the ends of the rope, let us take measures to untie that knot. We are ready for this.

Khrushchev, October 26, 1962

**In your own words...**

**How should the Cuban people feel about this? Explain.**

**Card 5.3 Kennedy reads the following letter from Khrushchev:**

"You are angry about Cuba. You say that this disturbs you because it is ninety-nine miles by sea from the coast of the United States of America. But ... you have placed destructive missile weapons, which you call offensive, in Italy and Turkey, literally next to us ... I therefore make this proposal: We are willing to remove from Cuba if you will remove yours from Turkey and Italy... and after that, persons entrusted by the United Nations Security Council could inspect on the spot the fulfillment of the pledges made."

**In your own words:**

**Choice Moment 5.2: How does Kennedy respond?**

1. Accept the deal and begin moving the weapons out of Turkey
2. Send more spy planes to see what's going on in Cuba
3. Wait a little bit longer to see how things develop

**Decision:**

**What are the stakes for Krushchev? U.S.? Cuba?**

**Synthesis:** What were the most important decisions that were made during Cuban Missile Crisis?

**Decision #1:**

**Decision #2:**

**Decision #3:**

**Decision #4:**

## Homework #5 (Read + Annotate + Critical Questions): How Castro Held the World Hostage

By JAMES G. BLIGHT and JANET M. LANGOCT. 25, 2012, The New York Times.

**Source information:** James G. Blight and Janet M. Lang are [professors](#) at the Balsillie School of International Affairs and the [authors](#) of “The Armageddon Letters: Kennedy/Khrushchev/Castro in the Cuban Missile Crisis.”

**Citation:** Blight, James G., and Janet Lang. "How Castro Held the World Hostage." The New York Times. The New York Times, 25 Oct. 2012. Web. 22 Nov. 2016.

ON Oct. 26-27, 1962, human civilization came close to being destroyed. Schoolchildren were ordered into shelters; supermarket shelves were emptied of soup cans and bottled water. It was the most perilous moment of the [Cuban missile crisis](#), and of the cold war. But the danger of Armageddon did not begin, as legend has it, when the United States learned that Soviet missiles had reached [Cuba's](#) shores earlier that month.

Rather, it was driven by [Fidel Castro's](#) fears and insecurities after the botched Bay of Pigs invasion and by the failures of President [John F. Kennedy](#) and Premier [Nikita S. Khrushchev](#) to take him seriously. With Soviet missiles stationed on the island and America poised to attack, Cuba 50 years ago was far more dangerous than [Iran](#) or North Korea is today. But the 1962 crisis shows that a small, determined revolutionary state, backed into a corner and convinced of its inevitable demise, can bring the world to the brink of catastrophe.

Twenty years ago, we spent four days in Havana discussing the missile crisis with Mr. Castro, former Soviet officials and American decision makers from the Kennedy administration, including the former defense secretary Robert S. McNamara.

Mr. Castro's interest had been piqued by the declassification and release of Soviet and American documents in 1991 and 1992, which both surprised and angered him. These included long-suppressed passages from memoirs, released 20 years after Khrushchev's death, in which he wrote that Mr. Castro had become irrational and possibly suicidal and that the crisis had to end before Cuba ignited a nuclear war. In addition, declassified letters between Khrushchev and Kennedy revealed the extent to which Washington and Moscow cut Cuba out of negotiations, refused to consider Cuban demands and eventually resolved the crisis in spite of Mr. Castro's objections. So to truly understand how the world came close to Armageddon, one must look not to Washington and Moscow but to Havana.

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After the American-sponsored Bay of Pigs debacle, Fidel Castro, then just 35 but already Cuba's unquestioned ruler, drew an astonishing conclusion. "The result of aggression against Cuba will be the start of a conflagration (complication) of incalculable consequences, and they will be affected too," he told the Cuban people. "It will no longer be a matter of them feasting on us. They will get as good as they give."

For the next 18 months, Mr. Castro prepared for nuclear Armageddon, while Kennedy and Khrushchev sleepwalked toward the abyss. Focused on their global competition, the United States and the Soviet Union were clueless about the mind-set of the smaller, weaker, poorer party. Kennedy wanted Cuba off his agenda and he resolved never again to cave in to his hawkish advisers and critics, who had continued clamoring for an invasion of the island, even after the Bay of Pigs disaster. Khrushchev, for his part, was worried about "losing Cuba" and decided in early 1962 to offer nuclear missiles to Mr. Castro to deter the invasion they both believed was being planned but that Kennedy was privately resolved to avoid. But as Khrushchev wrote in his memoirs, the Soviet Union never intended to actually use the missiles; they were merely pawns in a game of superpower competition.

However, Mr. Castro believed the fundamental purpose of Soviet [nuclear weapons](#) was to destroy the United States in the event of an invasion. After centuries of humiliation and irrelevance, he concluded, Cuba would matter fundamentally to the fate of humanity. Cuba couldn't prevent the onslaught, nor could it expect to survive it. He insisted that the Cubans and Russians on the island would resist "to the last day and the last man, woman or child capable of holding a weapon." Around noon on Oct. 26, Mr. Castro summoned the Soviet ambassador, Aleksandr Alekseev, to his command post. Mr. Castro couldn't understand why Soviet troops in Cuba were sitting on their hands while American planes were flying over the island with impunity. He urged them to start shooting at U-2 spy planes with surface-to-air missiles and suggested that Cuban troops should begin firing on low-flying planes with antiaircraft guns, contrary to Soviet wishes. Alekseev promised to relay Mr. Castro's complaints to the Kremlin. Alekseev later told us he felt "almost schizophrenic" when he sent the cables to Moscow, because it was his duty to represent the cautious Soviet position, yet he himself, like Mr. Castro, expected an American onslaught. At that moment, "I was almost 100 percent Cuban," he recalled.

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While Cuba was preparing for nuclear war, Khrushchev and Kennedy were, unbeknown to Mr. Castro, moving toward a peaceful resolution of the crisis. Terrified that a catastrophic war might break out, Khrushchev took the initiative even as Kennedy was preparing an offer of his own. He wrote to Kennedy on Oct. 26: "Let us then display statesmenlike wisdom. I propose: we, for our part, will declare that our ships bound for Cuba are not carrying any armaments. You will declare that the United States will not invade Cuba with its troops and will not support any other forces which might intend to invade Cuba. Then the necessity for the presence of our

military specialists in Cuba will be obviated.” It would take another three agonizing weeks to work out the details, but Kennedy and Khrushchev had finally locked onto a common ideas.

All these letters (except those delivered over the radio at the peak of the crisis) were methodically dictated, translated, encrypted and then transmitted. Such slow communication in a time of crisis seems inconceivable today, but at the heart of the cold war absolute secrecy was the objective, not speed. (It was only after the missile crisis that the “red phone” hot line between the White House and the Kremlin was installed.)

Unaware of Kennedy’s and Khrushchev’s progress toward a deal, at 2 a.m. on Oct. 27, Mr. Castro decided to write to Khrushchev, encouraging him to use his nuclear weapons to destroy the United States in the event of an invasion. At 3 a.m., he arrived at the Soviet Embassy and told Alekseev that they should go into the bunker beneath the embassy because an attack was imminent. According to declassified Soviet cables, a groggy but sympathetic Alekseev agreed, and soon they were set up underground with Castro dictating and aides transcribing and translating a letter.

Mr. Castro became frustrated, uncertain about what to say. After nine drafts, with the sun rising, Alekseev finally confronted Mr. Castro: are you asking Comrade Khrushchev to deliver a nuclear strike on the United States? Mr. Castro told him, “If they attack Cuba, we should wipe them off the face of the earth!” Alekseev was shocked, but he dutifully assisted Mr. Castro in fine-tuning the 10th and final draft of the letter.

From his bunker, Mr. Castro wrote that, in the event of an American invasion, “the danger that that aggressive policy poses for humanity is so great that following that event the Soviet Union must never allow the circumstances in which the imperialists could launch the first nuclear strike against it.” An invasion, he added, “would be the moment to eliminate such danger forever through an act of clear, legitimate defense however harsh and terrible the solution would be, for there is no other.” Mr. Castro was calm as he composed this last will and testament for the 6.5 million citizens of Cuba, and the 43,000 Russians on the island who would be incinerated alongside them.

According to his son and biographer, Sergei Khrushchev, the Soviet premier received that letter in the midst of a tense leadership meeting and shouted, “This is insane; Fidel wants to drag us into the grave with him!” Khrushchev hadn’t understood that Mr. Castro believed that Cuba was doomed, that war was inevitable, and that the Soviets should transform Cuba from a mere victim into a martyr.

By ignoring Mr. Castro’s messianic martyrdom, both Kennedy and Khrushchev inadvertently pushed the world close to Armageddon.

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The parallels between the Cuban missile crisis and today's nuclear standoff with Iran are inexact, but eerie. Cuba then and Iran now share a revolutionary mind-set, a belief that Washington's goal is regime change, and a conviction that nuclear weapons might guarantee their survival in the face of unrelenting American hostility. The third player in today's crisis is not a superpower but [Israel](#), which views a nuclear Iran as an unacceptable threat to its existence. Israel shares with Iran (and 1960s Cuba) a national narrative that is steeped in the glorification of military heroism in the face of potential defeat.

Whoever wins the presidential election must persuade the Israelis to restrain themselves. Iran's leaders are rational, and Israel's overwhelming nuclear superiority means that Israel need not fear Iran. America must convince Iran that it doesn't need nuclear weapons, because it has nothing to fear from Israel or the United States. The American president must do what even Kennedy and Khrushchev could not: treat a lesser power as an equal and pay attention to its fears. Ignoring Cuba's insecurities 50 years ago pushed the world to the brink of catastrophe. Today we must be wary of backing the Iranians into a corner so that they feel they must choose between capitulation and martyrdom. In 1962, the Soviets just barely stopped the Cubans; this time, there is no Khrushchev.

### **Critical Questions**

1. What is the authors' claim about what caused the Missile Crisis? Do you agree with this claim?
2. Why did Moscow and Washington cut Castro out of the negotiations? What does this tell us about who really had the power in this situation?
3. After the Bay of Pigs, what was Castro worried about? What was Khrushchev worried about?

4. Did Khrushchev intend to ever use the missiles? What does this imply about why he put them there?
5. What did Fidel want to do with the missiles? Why did he want to do this?
6. What crises do we have today that are similar? How can we use the Missile Crisis to inform our decision making?

### **Homework #3 (Read + Annotate + Critical Questions): CIA Plot to Kill Castro Detailed**

**By ANITA SNOW**

**The Associated Press**

**Wednesday, June 27, 2007; 7:49 AM**

**Citation:** Snow, Anita. "CIA Plot to Kill Castro Detailed." Washington Post. The Washington Post, 27 June 2007. Web. 22 Nov. 2016.

HAVANA -- The CIA recruited a former FBI agent to approach two of America's most-wanted mobsters and gave them poison pills meant for Fidel Castro during his first year in power, according to newly declassified papers released Tuesday.

Contained amid hundreds of pages of CIA internal reports collectively known as "the family jewels," the official confirmation of the 1960 plot against Castro was certain to be welcomed by communist authorities as more proof of their longstanding claims that the United States wants Castro dead.

Communist officials say there have been more than 600 documented attempts to kill Castro over the decades. Now 80, Castro has not been seen in public since handing power to his younger brother Raul while recovering from intestinal surgery last July. But in a letter published on Monday, the elder Castro claimed without providing details that President Bush had "authorized and ordered" his killing.

And while Cuban government press officials didn't return a call seeking reaction Tuesday, the release of the newly declassified CIA documents had already been noted in state media.

"Upon the orders of the White House, the Central Intelligence Agency tried to assassinate President Fidel Castro and other former personalities and leaders," the Communist Party newspaper Granma said Saturday. "What was already presumed and denounced will be corroborated."

Other aborted U.S. attempts to kill Castro, who rose to power in January 1959 in a revolution that ousted dictator Fulgencio Batista, have been noted in other declassified documents.

The papers released Tuesday were part of a report prepared at the request of CIA Director James Schlesinger in 1973, who ordered senior agency officials to tell him of any current or past actions that could potentially violate the agency's charter.

Some details of the 1960 plot first surfaced in investigative reporter Jack Anderson's newspaper column in 1971.

The documents show that in August 1960, the CIA recruited ex-FBI agent Robert Maheu, then a top aide to Howard Hughes in Las Vegas, to approach mobster Johnny Roselli and pass himself off as the representative of international corporations that wanted Castro killed because of their lost gambling operations.

At the time, the bearded rebels had just outlawed gambling and destroyed the world-famous casinos American mobsters had operated in Havana.

Roselli introduced Maheu to "Sam Gold" and "Joe." Both were mobsters on the U.S. government's 10-most wanted list: Momo Giancana, Al Capone's successor in Chicago; and Santos Trafficante, one of the most powerful mobsters in Batista's [Cuba](#). The agency gave the reputed mobsters six poison pills, and they tried unsuccessfully for several months to have several people put them in Castro's food.

This particular assassination attempt was dropped after the failed CIA-sponsored Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in April 1961. The CIA was able to retrieve all the poison pills, records show.

**Critical Questions:**

1. What was the U.S. trying to do to Castro?
2. Why would Communist authorities “welcome” this report?
3. What does this suggest about what the Americans *actually* wanted from Cuba?

**Homework #4: Read + Annotate + Critical Questions**  
**You (and Almost Everyone You Know) Owe Your Life to This Man.**  
*Temperament matters. Especially when nuclear weapons are involved.*  
Robert Krulwich, National Geographic, March 25th, 2016

**Citation:** Krulwich, Robert. "You (and Almost Everyone You Know) Owe Your Life to This Man." National Geographic, National Geographic Society, 22 May 2017, [news.nationalgeographic.com/2016/03/you-and-almost-everyone-you-know-owe-your-life-to-this-man/](https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2016/03/you-and-almost-everyone-you-know-owe-your-life-to-this-man/)

Temperament matters.

Especially when nuclear weapons are involved and you don't—you can't—know what the enemy is up to, and you're scared. Then it helps (it helps a lot) to be calm.

The world owes an enormous debt to a quiet, steady Russian naval officer who probably saved my life. And yours. And everyone you know. Even those of you who weren't yet born. I want to tell his story...

It's October 1962, the height of the Cuban missile crisis, and there's a Soviet submarine in the Caribbean that's been spotted by the American Navy. President Kennedy has blockaded Cuba. No sea traffic is permitted through.

The sub is hiding in the ocean, and the Americans are dropping depth charges left and right of the hull. Inside, the sub is rocking, shaking with each new explosion. What the Americans don't know is that this sub has a tactical nuclear torpedo on board, available to launch, and that the Russian captain is asking himself, Shall I fire?

This actually happened.

The Russian in question, an exhausted, nervous submarine commander named Valentin Savitsky, decided to do it. He ordered the nuclear-tipped missile readied. His second in command approved the order. Moscow hadn't communicated with its sub for days. Eleven U.S. Navy ships were nearby, all possible targets. The nuke on this missile had roughly the power of the bomb at Hiroshima.

**"WE'RE GONNA BLAST THEM NOW!"**

Temperatures in the submarine had climbed above 100 degrees. The air-conditioning system was broken, and the ship couldn't surface without being exposed. The captain felt doomed. Vadim Orlov, an intelligence officer who was there, remembers a particularly loud blast: "The Americans hit us with something stronger than the grenades—apparently with a practice depth bomb," he wrote later. "We thought, That's it, the

end.” And that’s when, he says, the Soviet captain shouted, “Maybe the war has already started up there ... We’re gonna blast them now! We will die, but we will sink them all—we will not become the shame of the fleet.”

Had Savitsky launched his torpedo, had he vaporized a U.S. destroyer or aircraft carrier, the U.S. would probably have responded with nuclear-depth charges, “thus,” wrote Russian archivist Svetlana Savranskaya, understating wildly, “starting a chain of inadvertent developments, which could have led to catastrophic consequences.”

But it didn’t happen, because that’s when Vasili Alexandrovich Arkhipov steps into the story.

He was 34 at the time. Good looking, with a full head of hair and something like a spit curl dangling over his forehead. He was Savitsky’s equal, the flotilla commander responsible for three Russian subs on this secret mission to Cuba—and he is maybe one of the quietest, most unsung heroes of modern times.

What he said to Savitsky we will never know, not exactly. But, says Thomas Blanton, the former director of the nongovernmental National Security Archive, simply put, this “guy called Vasili Arkhipov saved the world.”

Arkhipov, described by his wife as a modest, soft-spoken man, simply talked Savitsky down.

The exact details are controversial. The way it’s usually told is that each of the three Soviet submarine captains in the ocean around Cuba had the power to launch a nuclear torpedo if—and only if—he had the consent of all three senior officers on board. On his sub, Savitsky gave the order and got one supporting vote, but Arkhipov balked. He wouldn’t go along.

He argued that this was not an attack.

The official Soviet debriefs are still secret, but a Russian reporter, Alexander Mozgovoi, an American writer, and eyewitness testimony from intelligence officer Orlov suggest that Arkhipov told the captain that the ship was not in danger. It was being asked to surface. Dropping depth charges left then right, noisy but always off target—those are signals, Arkhipov argued. They say, We know you’re there. Identify yourselves. Come up and talk. We intend no harm.



**Critical Questions:**

1. Why did the Soviets almost fire a missile at the United States?
2. What would the consequences have been had the Soviets fired a missile?
3. What does this moment tell us about the Cold War more broadly?