

Negotiation, Not War: How Kennedy's Diplomacy Changed the Cold War

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United States History II: 1865–Present
April 27, 2025

During the Cold War, the world stood on the brink of nuclear disaster, yet President John F. Kennedy and his administration's leadership proved crucial in maintaining peace and keeping the world safe. His careful handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis demonstrated a strong balance between firmness and diplomacy. Kennedy's approach not only defused one of the tensest moments in history but also strengthened America's position. The Kennedy administration's handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis and Cold War tensions between the U.S. and the Soviet

Union is one of America's biggest political wins. It is important to investigate because understanding Kennedy's strategies offers valuable insights into successful crisis management and the prevention of nuclear conflict during critical times. The Kennedy administration's handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis reduced Cold War tensions between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, as illustrated by the effective diplomacy of President Kennedy, bettered relations between the powerhouses, and an ultimately successful avoidance of nuclear war..

The causes leading up to the Cold War and the Cuban Missile Crisis are many; however, the main reason for the Cold War is said to have been political.¹ Whereas the main reason for the Cuban Missile Crisis was The Soviets actions and President Kennedy's reaction². Ultimately political and ideological differences between the U.S. and The Soviet Union, along with CubanSoviet relations and a nuclear arms race, all contributed to the cause of the Cold War and Cuban Missile Crisis. The Cold War and Cuban Missile Crisis unfolded in a number of ways. For example, the Cold War unfolded over years of struggles between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. The Cuban Missile Crisis really only unfolded in a couple of weeks before the Soviet Union

1.Thomas G. Paterson and William J. Brophy, "October Missiles and November Elections: The Cuban Missile Crisis and American Politics, 1962," *Journal of American History* 73, no. 1 (June 1986): 88, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1903607>.

2.Michael E. Weaver, "The Relationship between Diplomacy and Military Force: An Example from the Cuban Missile Crisis," *Diplomatic History* 38, no. 1 (January 2014): 140, <https://doiorg.ezproxy.snhu.edu/10.1093/dh/dht070>.

agreed to remove their missiles from Cuba.³President Kennedy and the White House would release a statement to the public on October 28th, 1962 announcing the dismantling and returning of "offensive" weapons to The Soviet Union from Cuba.⁴ The outcomes of the Cold War and the Cuban Missile Crisis are quite different. The Cuban Missile Crisis ended with a peaceful resolution between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. The Cold War however, continued for years and years leaving behind a legacy on the importance of NATO and lessons on nuclear

threats.⁵

A major trend during the historical period and that relates to the Cold War and the Cuban Missile Crisis, was the growing fear of nuclear warfare.⁶ During the Cold War and the Cuban Missile Crisis, citizens were growing more fearful of nuclear war. The stockpiling of nuclear missiles by powerhouse countries had people becoming more concerned, along with the "trade and aid" agreement between Cuba and The Soviet Union, people were starting to worry. Not to mention the growing tension between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, everyone was on their toes about nuclear warfare and the consequences that come with it.⁷⁸ A trend of the historical period that relates to the Cold War and the Cuban Missile Crisis was a trend of containment, where the U.S. and allies were trying to stop the spread of communism.⁹ It was major for the U.S. especially. During the Cold War, the United States became really focused on containment.

3. Chairman Khrushchev to President Kennedy, letter, October 27, 1962, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, <https://microsites.jfklibrary.org/cmc/oct27/doc4.html>.

4. Chairman Khrushchev to President Kennedy.

5. Ambassador Dobrynin to the Soviet Foreign Ministry, telegram, October 27, 1962, National Security Archive, George Washington University, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/moment.htm.

6. Steven L. Danver, ed., "JFK: Report on the Soviet Arms Buildup in Cuba," in *Defining Documents: The Cold War (1945–1991)*, ed. Michael Shally-Jensen, vol. 2, *Escalation and Detente* (Ipswich, MA: Salem Press, 2016), 316.

7. Stewart Alsop and Charles Bartlett, "In Time of Crisis," *Saturday Evening Post*, December 8, 1962, 16, <https://www.saturdayeveningpost.com/wp-content/uploads/satevepost/1962-12-08-missile-crisis.pdf>.

8. Paterson and Brophy, "October Missiles," 93.

9. Paterson and Brophy, "October Missiles," 108.

Containment of the spread of communism was becoming a major trend and a real priority for the United States. President Kennedy and allies did not want Castro or communism going anywhere and in fact, wanted them "locked" in Latin America.¹⁰

The growing fear of nuclear warfare, and the importance of containment, are extremely historically significant because they helped change and shape global politics forever. One major trend during the historical period and that relates to the Cold War and the Cuban Missile Crisis,

was the growing fear of nuclear warfare.¹¹ During the Cold War and the Cuban Missile Crisis, citizens were growing rightfully fearful of a nuclear war. The stockpiling of nuclear missiles by powerhouse countries and tense relations between governments had people becoming very concerned. Not to mention the growing tension between the U.S. and Soviet Union, everyone was on their toes about nuclear warfare, and the consequences that come with it, something needed to be done.¹² Another major trend of the historical period that relates to the Cold War and the Cuban Missile Crisis was a trend of containment, where the U.S. and allies were trying to stop the spread of communism.¹³ During the Cold War, the United States became a lot more focused on this issue. Containment of the spread of communism started to become a real priority and President Kennedy and allies did not want Castro or communism going anywhere, in fact, they wanted them "locked" in Latin America.¹⁴ The growing fear of nuclear warfare, and the importance of containment, are extremely historically significant because they helped change and shape the way global politics operate forever. Without these frightening lessons, global politics would likely be in a much more conflicted place than where it is today.

10. Paterson and Brophy, "October Missiles," 108.

11. Danver, "JFK: Soviet Arms Buildup," 316.

12. Alsop and Bartlett, "In Time of Crisis," 16.

13. Paterson and Brophy, "October Missiles," 108.

14. Paterson and Brophy, "October Missiles," 108.

One of the major victories for how the Cold War and Cuban Missile Crisis were handled was the effective diplomacy and communication from President Kennedy and his administration. As evidently seen in the October 27th, 1962, Letter From Chairman Khrushchev to President Kennedy¹⁵, effective communication and diplomacy can have major impacts on how crises can be avoided. The letter between the two shows nonaggressive, professional communication on an effective way of negotiating a deal. We see the concerns of both parties within this letter through

quotes like "You wish to ensure the security of your country, and this is understandable. But Cuba, too, wants the same thing", along with a view of how important solving the conflict truly is through quotes like "These issues have so far not been resolved, but they are awaiting urgent solution, which would clear up the international atmosphere. We are prepared for this"¹⁶.

President Kennedy and the White House the next day October 28th, would release a statement announcing the dismantling and returning of "offensive" weapons to The Soviet Union from Cuba to the public¹⁷. This letter and statement are great examples of effective communication and diplomacy as well as a great example of our next point, bettering relationships between the two powerhouses.

Another significant factor that played a massive role in avoiding a major conflict was the bettering of relations between the powerhouses, the U.S. and the Soviet Union. The Cold War and Cuban Missile Crisis were almost devastating to the U.S. thankfully relationship building from Kennedy's administration with the Soviet Union prevented this. It is not a secret that there was serious conflict and bitterness between the U.S. and the Soviet Union at the time and something needed to be done. Thankfully President Kennedy and his administration knew what

15.Chairman Khrushchev to President Kennedy. 16.Chairman Khrushchev to President Kennedy.

17.Chairman Khrushchev to President Kennedy.

to do. As seen within the meeting between Dobrynin and Robert Kennedy, which is said to have been "a turning point in the crisis"¹⁸. This conversation between the two men greatly strengthened the relationship between the countries while also maintaining the United States' power. In the meeting, R. Kennedy stated that the most important thing for the U.S. "is to get as soon as possible the agreement of the Soviet government to halt further work on the construction

of the missile bases in Cuba and take measures under international control that would make it impossible to use these weapons"¹⁹, and it worked.

Finally, perhaps the biggest and most important factor of the Cold War and Cuban Missile Crisis was ultimately the successful avoidance of an all-out nuclear war. The Cold War and Cuban Missile Crisis were almost nuclear events that could have possibly ended the world. Thankfully, they ended the way they did due to factors like effective diplomacy, and bettered relations however history as we know it could have been very different. In my opinion, the most important factor is the fact that the U.S. managed to avoid an all-out violent nuclear war. As Kennedy said in his October 22, 1962 speech, "Cubans today look forward to the time when they will be truly free—free from foreign domination, free to choose their own leaders, free to select their own system, free to own their own land, free to speak and write and worship without fear or degradation"²⁰, he stuck to his word, working hard to make sure they could. Through his and his administration's hard work to world became a much safer place. To me this is the biggest win of the entire conflict for obvious reasons like the world didn't end but also because it was a win for everyone, not just the United States. The Cold War and Cuban Missile Crisis were very scary times for Cuba, the U.S., and the world, thankfully the effective diplomacy and communication

18.Ambassador Dobrynin to the Soviet Foreign Ministry.

19.Ambassador Dobrynin to the Soviet Foreign Ministry.

20.Danver, "JFK: Soviet Arms Buildup," 320.

along with the bettering of relationships by the Kennedy administration prevented any further damage.²¹

Ultimately in the end, the Kennedy administration's careful and strategic management of the Cuban Missile Crisis played a major role in easing Cold War tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. Through Kennedy's skillful diplomacy, the relationship between the

two superpowers shifted toward a more cautious and cooperative relationship, helping solve conflicts and prevent any future escalations. Most importantly, Kennedy and his administration steered the world away from the brink of nuclear war, leaving a lasting impact on international relations and the world itself.

21. Alsop and Bartlett, "In Time of Crisis," 16.

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