

TOP SECRET BRIEFING A

To: President John F. Kennedy and advisors
From: The U.S. Intelligence Community
Re: Nuclear Missiles in Cuba, mid October 1962

Mr. President, on October 14, 1962, American U-2 spy planes photographed a missile launch pad under construction on the island of Cuba. This launch pad, when completed, would allow the firing of Soviet-supplied nuclear weapons with a range of 1,000 miles--enough to put the lives of 80 million Americans at risk should the missiles be fired at the United States.

After the Bay of Pigs invasion failed to overthrow Fidel Castro in Cuba, Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev pledged he would not put offensive nuclear missiles in Cuba. It is now clear that Khrushchev was lying and cannot be trusted. The state of readiness of the launch pads indicates that the Soviets have been secretly shipping nuclear missiles for months. It appears they may be ready to fire very soon.

The missiles in Cuba are part of what appears to be a huge arms buildup to shore up Communist control of Cuba. We believe there are as many as 20,000 Soviet "technicians" in Cuba at this time. The Soviets may be armed with tactical--small battlefield--nuclear weapons undetectable from the air. In addition, the Soviets have installed a ring of SAMs (surface-to-air missiles) that are capable of shooting down any American aircraft the United States uses to maintain surveillance of the situation.

As you and your advisors are aware, Mr. President, the United States maintains clear superiority to the Soviets in the nuclear arms race. The number of ICBMs in U.S. arsenals is nearly double that of the Soviets. Also, U.S. nuclear missiles in Turkey provide a distinct advantage. Remember, too, that a U.S. Navy submarine armed with nuclear missiles is about to be placed in the Mediterranean Sea to provide quick-strike capabilities.

Why the Soviet premier has chosen this action at this time is not entirely clear--after all, there are already enough nuclear missiles in the Soviet Union itself to annihilate the United States. It appears that the Soviet premier may be attempting to gain an upper hand in the Cold War with one bold move.

Critical-Thinking Question A: You are a presidential advisor to Kennedy. You must decide whether the president should be concerned about Soviet missiles and launch pads in Cuba. What do you advise the president to do? Kennedy has asked you to brainstorm possible U.S. responses to the Soviet missile threat in Cuba. What will you include on your list?