

## The Cuba missile Crisis – Thirteen days

*Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis* is a non-fiction account of the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, written by Robert F. Kennedy. The book was released in 1969, a year after his assassination.

*Thirteen Days* details the many meetings of the John F. Kennedy cabinet and Joint Chiefs of Staff (formed into the [ExComm](#)) (Executive Committee) during the tense period after the Soviet missile build-up on Cuba was discovered.

### 1 – Opening scene

First image

Missile launching

Last image

Military plane taking aerial pictures

First words

None

Last words

None

**What do the first images symbolise ?**

Race armament (surface to surface missiles)

Nuclear war (mushroom, essays)

Space race (satellite)

All these are characteristic of the Cold War.

In 1962, the US forces consisted of

- 2,000 strategic bombers,
- 294 ICBMs,
- 144 SLBMs,

against only

- 150 bombers,
- 75 ICBMs,
- 0 SLBM,

on the Soviet side.

The gap kept widening as a hundred or so new US ballistic missiles became operational each year, whereas the Soviets could barely produce 25 of them, equipped with rather rudimentary guidance systems.

**How did this crisis start ?**

Aerial pictures taken by a U2, a plane which flew at 20 000 meters. It was equipped with cameras which could take pictures of an area 155 square km.

### 2 – Missiles in Cuba

First image

Kevin Costner (Kenneth O'Donnell) sleeping

Last image

Missile experts looking for a photo match on a book of pictures taken by a spy

First words

Hey !!!

Last words

That's it. That's the one we're looking for

**How did the director chose to introduce some of the characters and the main action set ?**

Family breakfast :      Robert Mac Namara (Secretary of defense)  
                                     Bobby Kennedy (General attorney)

Costner arrives at the White House. Seems to know the place and the most important people (Jacky Kennedy, president's wife) → he is a counsellor (advisor)

**What seemed to preoccupy JFK ?**

Re-election

2 planes shot in Vietnam

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### What was curious about the picture representing the missile ?

The picture was taken in a town, probably during a parade in a soviet town (like our 14<sup>th</sup> of July).

In fact the picture had been taken by a soviet named Oleg Penkovski who spied for the USA.

The Cuban crisis highlights the crucial part played by intelligence gathered either by agents (HUMINT), listening devices (SIGINT), or photography (PHOTINT).

As early as 1961 the National Security Agency had been monitoring messages from and to Soviet ships en route to Cuba or secretly unloading military equipment (tanks, radars, anti-aircraft guns). Then, the CIA found out that Il-28 bombers and MiG fighters were arriving.

More materiel was shipped in 1962. The CIA spotted 57 ships in the month of August. By then, their conclusion was that the Cubans were building up an anti-aircraft defence system to Soviet standards. Confirmation came from the CIA that launch sites were under construction. Their surface-air SAM-2 missiles could destroy aircraft flying at high altitude. USS Oxford, fitted with listening devices, patrolled the Cuban zone in order to intercept radio communications. The NSA detected the presence of air-traffic controllers speaking Spanish with strong Slavic accents.

And yet the CIA persisted in thinking that the Soviets were not prepared to run the risk of a clash by deploying nuclear warheads in Cuba.

But converging information kept coming from other sources, such as the French Intelligence services. A Colonel Houel informed the Americans that major earthworks were under way in the north of the island, which a US Air Force spy-plane soon confirmed.

### 3 – “I need to see the president”

#### First image

Bundy talking to O'Donnell

#### Last image

JFK looking at his family in the garden

#### First words

“I need to see the president”

#### Last words

Pearl

Harbor

### Where were the aerial pictures taken ?

Cuba

### What did they show ?

Medium range ballistic missiles (SS4 Sandal) with 1000 miles (1600 km) with 3 megatons nuclear warheads.

### Why is it a problem for the USA ? Where is Cuba ?



Discovered by Columbus in 1492, the island remained under Spanish rule until 1898, when it became independent with the help of the United States whose influence became predominant. 40% of the sugar production, 80% of the island's exports, was under US control. Military bases were established, among which Guantánamo. At the south-east end of the island, 45 square miles of Cuban territory,

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(only 30 on the mainland) were given to the US in 1903 as a token of gratitude for its help in the war against Spain. A treaty signed in 1934, and which can only be modified by mutual consent, ceded the base to the US.

During WWII Guantánamo was strategic in the fight against German submarines. It is the main US logistical base and training camp in the Caribbean, an essential part of its antisubmarine defence system. During the missile crisis, it took only a few hours for the 2,811 members of the military personnel's families to be evacuated whilst the garrison was substantially strengthened. Guantánamo has its own desalination plant and all supplies are shipped from nearby Florida.

US troops intervened in Cuba in 1906, 1912 and 1917. Military support was given to the Machado (1925-1933) and Batista (1934-1958) dictatorships.

In 1953, Fidel Castro, a young nationalist leader helped by peasants, took arms against Batista who was finally ousted in January 1959. From then on, Cuba became a hot issue in the Cold War, since the Castro revolution challenged US influence in Latin America where it could easily spread.

**According to the Kennedy's, who seems to be responsible for putting missiles into Cuba ?**

Khrushchev, USSR's first secretary, although he had assured he wouldn't .

**Which dramatic war event does this reminds the Kennedy administration ? Why ?**

Pearl Harbor (December 7<sup>th</sup> 1941) : a sneak attack without any declaration of war.

### **4 – National security meeting**

#### First image

Kennedy brothers and O'Donnell walking in a corridor

#### Last image

Kennedy

#### First words

Good morning gentlemen

#### Last words

We have to get those missiles out of there

**Until then, only civil servants seemed to be concerned by the problem. Who's new around the table ?**

The army becomes a main actor very fast. Another briefing is organised for it..

**How many missiles are there in Cuba ?**

32 (perhaps more) surface to surface medium range ballistic missiles (MRBM), not yet operational until 10-14 days.

But US didn't know how many soviets were in Cuba. They thought less than 10 000.

On 21 May 1962, Nikita Khrushchev decided to install in Cuba 36 SS-4 medium range missiles (referred to as "Sandal" by NATO forces) with 24 launch vehicles, and 24 SS-5 intermediate range "Skean" ballistic missiles with 16 launch vehicles. Some 45,000 troops, 250 armoured vehicles were based on the island. Mig-21 fighter-bombers and long-range 42 Il-28 bombers were assembled. 180 anti-aircraft SAM-2 missiles were deployed.



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### Which part of the US territory is threatened ? What casualties ?

The west coast up to Washington DC (capital where the meeting takes place) could be destroyed with only 5 minutes warning. → 80 million American killed, military bases destroyed limiting US retaliatory options.

Given the distance of 2000 km, this would have required an average speed of 7000 m/s, a speed missiles at that time could not reach. In reality, they would have taken about 20 minutes.

### Why Cuba ?

First : Cuba was a soviet satellite in the western world. In May 1960, Cuba and the Soviet Union had resumed diplomatic relations. In July, Ernesto "Che" Guevara, by then Castro's second-in-command, declared that Cuba had joined the Socialist bloc.

Second : By deploying missiles in Cuba, Khrushchev was trying to make up for the fact that Soviet strategic forces were lagging behind those of the USA. Cuba was the ideal site.

The medium-range missiles deployed in Cuba would have almost doubled the Soviet offensive force, since most of the US territory was within range. US radars, located in Canada in order to detect an intercontinental Soviet strike over the Pole, would have been unable to detect them. Having, thus, balanced the scales, Khrushchev could hope for the North Atlantic Treaty be weakened, for the Alliance to be loosened, and for concessions over Berlin.

The Khrushchev plan was approved by the Soviet Defence Council on 24 May, and by Castro on 29 May. The first nuclear warheads followed on 4 October.

### What could be the diplomatic consequences for the USA if nothing was done ?

First : US influence in the world would be shattered if the Soviets show that they can do whatever they want wherever they want. In fact, an ICBM missile launched from Moscow could hit Washington DC also. It wasn't just a question of military protection. It was also a question of political and military influence on certain parts of the world. Missiles in Cuba were considered as a soviet intrusion.

Second : In America, it would be considered as a Munich attitude, a policy of appeasement which would embolden the Soviets. In 1962, some of Kennedy advisors even thought that if the missiles were not removed, the President could face an impeachment procedure.

Moreover : JFK's father, Joe Kennedy had been an appeaser in 1938, and his sons were always suspect of being like him.

### What are US options ?

International pressure (UNO)

US action : diplomatic or air strikes before the missiles become operational.

## 5 – EX COMM experts

### First image

Kennedy brothers and O'Donnell walking out of the White House

### Last image

Kennedy brothers and O'Donnell in President's office

### First words

No matter what Khrushchev's intentions are (...), I don't see anyway around hitting him

### Last words

JFK must go to Connecticut

### What could be the consequences if USA attacked Cuba immediately ? If not ?

Soviets would attack and invade West Berlin (wall built in 1961) → NATO (1949) would be attacked → war

But if USA didn't react, apart the diplomatic consequences, there could be a war anyway. In fact, the Kennedy administration was sure that the Soviets wanted to get hold of West Berlin, that it was a Berlin crisis. The soviet plan was to start a confrontation with the USA, on their border. Cuba wasn't important, it was just a war camp, a strategic place to install missiles in order to have a diplomatic leverage (influence) on the USA to force it to withdraw its soldiers from west Berlin.

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### What was the administration's first decision ?

Put together different people (congressmen, civil servants from each department, members of the National Security Council, soviet specialists) to think of what to do → called EX COMM

The Executive Committee consisted of senior members of the National Security Council established by President Truman in 1947. The discussions were secretly recorded and submitted to the President. Dissolved in February 1963, Ex Comm had proved so efficient that it was reactivated some time later under the name of "Permanent Group". Besides the President, its members were:

Vice-President Lyndon B. Johnson (1908-1973) from Texas, elected to the House of Representatives in 1937 and a Senator since 1949. During the Cuban crisis Kennedy relied on his expertise in Congress matters..

Robert F. Kennedy (1925-1968) the President's younger brother, and his closest aide. First a lawyer, he was Attorney General from 1961 to 1964. His role in Ex Comm was decisive. He was assassinated in 1968, as he was running for president.

Kenneth O'Donnell (1924-1977), a member of the President's inner circle, he was a most important adviser, often in the background.

Theodore Sorensen (born 1928), was originally a lawyer; he became the assistant of Senator John Fitzgerald Kennedy (1953-1960) whom he followed to the White House as special adviser (1961-1964). Reputed to have been Kennedy's most loyal collaborator, he advocated a blockade and wrote the statement which the President issued on 22 October.

McGeorge Bundy (1919-1996), was a National Security Adviser (1961-1966). He advocated massive air strikes against Cuba..

Robert McNamara (born 1916), the Secretary of Defence was a technocrat. Kennedy trusted him. During the crisis he advocated a blockade.

General Maxwell Taylor (1901-1987), had been Chief of Staff of the US Army in the Eisenhower administration. A trusted friend of Kennedy's, he was nominated Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (1962-1964) and was a hardliner during the Cuban crisis.

### What's the general mood during this first meeting ?

Fighting was the first option. Very few participants advocated for diplomatic solutions

### What does the joint-chief recommend ?

Ultimatum

Massive air strike (sneak attack)

Landing invasion 8 days later (but they thought that the Soviets were less than 10 000)

Castro's removal

### How did Americans consider the Soviets ?

Soviets only understand action and respect force → fight is necessary

### What were the consequences ?

Nuclear war was necessary to defeat the Soviets unless cooler heads prevailed before that (that is Soviets acceptance to withdraw their missiles)

### What is Kennedy afraid of ?

Another Bay of Pigs.

In August 1960, after Cuba joined the socialist bloc, the US imposed a trade embargo on the island; in October Castro retaliated by nationalizing all US assets. On March 17, 1960 the Eisenhower administration agreed to a recommendation from the CIA to equip and drill Cuban exiles for action against the new Castro government. The CIA began to recruit and train anti-Castro forces in Guatemala Sierra Madre mountains on the Pacific coast of Guatemala.

The CIA was initially confident that it was capable of overthrowing Castro, having experience assisting in the overthrow of other foreign governments such as Iranian prime minister Mohammed Mossadegh in 1953 and Guatemalan president Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán in 1954.

Under Kennedy's orders critical details were changed that removed any chance of success of the mission without US help.

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On the morning of April 17, 1961, three flights of Douglas B-26B Invader light bomber aircraft displaying Cuban [Fuerza Aerea Revolucionaria](#) (FAR - Revolutionary Air Force) markings bombed and strafed the Cuban airfields. This failed because the airstrikes were not continued as was originally planned - limited by decisions at the highest level of US government. Castro also had prior knowledge of the invasion, thanks to KGB agents and had moved the airplanes out of harm's way. Four 2,400-ton chartered transports (named the *Houston*, *Rio Escondido*, *Caribe*, and *Atlantico*) transported 1,511 Cuban exiles to the Bay of Pigs on the Southern coast of Cuba. They were accompanied by two CIA-owned infantry landing crafts (LCI's), called the *Blagar* and *Barbara J*, containing supplies, ordnance, and equipment. The small army hoped to find support from the local population, intending to cross the island to Havana. The CIA assumed that the invasion would spark a popular uprising against Castro. However by the time the Invasion began, Castro had already executed some who were suspected of colluding with the American campaign, and imprisoned the others.

It soon became evident after contact with Cuban reinforcements that the exiles were not going to receive effective support at the site of the invasion and were likely to lose. Reports from both sides describe tank battles (see much detail in printed references section below) involving heavy USSR equipment. Kennedy decided against giving the faltering invasion US air support (though four US pilots were killed in Cuba during the invasion) because of his opposition to overt intervention. Kennedy also cancelled several sorties of bombings (only two took place) on the grounded Cuban Air force, which might have crippled the Cuban Air force and given air superiority to the invaders. U.S. Marines were not sent in, even though there were support ships off the coast ready to land at a moment's notice.

As Castro thought that the US would try again and intervene directly, he drew closer to the Soviet Union which provided ample economic and military backing.

### **6 – EX COMM options**

#### First image

October 17<sup>th</sup> (Wednesday)  
Plane landing

#### Last image

Mac Namara and other EX COMM members

#### First words

Isn't anybody working in Connecticut ?

#### Last words

The scenario calls for the blockade of Cuba

**What other option is advocated by EX COMM ? Why is it possible ?**

Naval blockade of Cuba which is an island.

### **7 – Military options**

#### First image

Soldiers on an air base loading missiles on planes → U2 taking other pictures on Thursday October 18<sup>th</sup> 1962

#### Last image

O'Donnell going out, followed by press officer

#### Last words

Ask Bundy - I did, he said to ask you

#### First words

The situation is worse than we thought

**How is the situation worsening ?**

More longer range missiles (IRBM) have been shipped in Cuba (40) → The whole country (except the western coast) is threatened.

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How are the USA preparing for an eventual war ?

Men are mobilising under the cover of military exercises (archive images)

What is stopping Kennedy ?

Soviets will react because air strikes will probably kill soviet soldiers.

How would you describe the relationship between the Kennedy administration and the US army ?

They were tense. The army never forgave Kennedy for his attitude during the Bay of Pigs.

The army was sure of its superiority in the armament race. They didn't think it was a Berlin crisis but an opportunity to act against Cuba and Castro. And they really feel that it could lead to a nuclear war.

### **8 – JFK meets Dobrynin and Gromyko**

First image

Soviet ambassadors coming out of a car (black and white image)

Last image

Kennedy brothers and O'Donnell in Kennedy's office

First words

Mr. Gromyko a statement please

Last words

Well I'm not – Watch this

Which domestic problem is Kennedy's administration starting to face ?

The American press is sniffing something especially since the army baptised the military exercises in Puerto Rico, ORTSAC (that's CASTRO spelled backwards)

Kennedy-Gromyko meeting was planned before the crisis began. Kennedy took the opportunity to remind that according to a previous declaration (September 13<sup>th</sup> 1962), soviet military assistance is only defensive. What was Gromyko's answer to Kennedy's question asking if there were offensive weapons in Cuba ?

There are no offensive weapons in Cuba.

How would Kennedy have reacted if Gromyko had acknowledged the fact that missiles were installed in Cuba ?

The pictures were ready to be shown. They waited in a satchel.

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### 9 – JFK and mayor Daley

#### First image

Friday October 19<sup>th</sup> - Kennedy shaking hands with mayor Daley in Chicago

#### Last image

Bob Kennedy hanging up

#### First words

None

#### Last words

I'll see you tomorrow

#### Why is it so difficult to hide the situation to the press ?

The media were beginning to report troop movement and there were rumours of a possible clash. The President had accepted the idea that airplanes bomb the missile sites and troops land in case the crisis was not over by the end of the month. To that purpose, 549 combat aircraft, 40,000 Marines and 5 divisions, among which the 82<sup>nd</sup> and 10<sup>st</sup> Airborne were on standby in Florida. Trains were delayed, air-force planes were deployed in the south-east. Trains carried tanks and mechanics difficult to hide. Kennedy was still thinking in World War II terms and had hoped to hide everything.

By then, 20 SS-4 launchers had been made operational in Cuba.

#### Which options is finally accepted ?

Blockade is finally decided consensual

#### What other problem emerged ?

China invaded India

Although preoccupied by the war it had been waging against India in the Himalayas since 20 October 1962, --which did not prevent New Delhi from condemning Kennedy's "foolishness" (The Hindustan Times), or the illegality of the blockade (The Statesman)-- China launched, as of 25 October, a large-scale "anti-American campaign" in the main cities where a succession of "mass rallies" and "enthusiastic meetings evinced "the total support given by the people of China to the people of Cuba". Beijing used the crisis to challenge Moscow's leadership of the international Communist movement. Pointing out Khrushchev's errors to Third World countries, the People's Daily, accused the Soviet Union of "revisionism" and Khrushchev of "defeatism", making him responsible for a "Soviet Munich". The crisis did indeed feed the rivalry between the Soviets and China, as they were both engaged in gaining preponderance in Asia and Africa.

### 10 – Quarantine or air strike

#### First image

Press conference with press officer

#### Last image

Kennedy brothers and O'Donnell outside the White House

#### First words

The President has a cold

#### Last words

We've got bigger problems right now

#### Why is this blockade qualified as a quarantine ?

A blockade is an act of war and the USA don't want to appear aggressive. A quarantine is a sanitary measure but in facts, the result is the same.

#### How is this quarantine going to work ?

US vessels surround Cuba and are asked to stop any of the 25 to 30 soviet ships heading for Cuba, 800 miles (1200 km) before they reach the island.

In fact, the ships were to be stationed 800 km from the Cuban coast in order to limit any air attack. Indeed, the soviet migs on Cuba didn't have enough oil to fly 800 km, do any damage and come back. This gave an advantage to the American forces.

These ships are to be inspected and those carrying missiles or weapons are to sail back.



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### What are the advantages and disadvantages of this option ?

It stops new missiles coming in Cuba but doesn't remove those already there.

It gives a chance to the Soviets to withdraw without starting a war.

In case of air strikes, there can be no sneak (surprise) attack

Soviets could decide to launch some missiles instead of taking a chance of losing them.

### Which third option is proposed by the US representative at UNO ?

A deal : USSR removes missiles from Cuba and USA from Turkey. The US base in Guantanamo (Cuba) is evacuated and given back to Castro. This deal would be under cover (hidden) and proposed in UNO.

In fact, the Soviets had been asking this for the last 15 years. If Kennedy had accepted it would have been a great victory for them. But Kennedy rejected it waiting until Monday to decide quarantine or air strike.

## 11 – An explosive scoop

### First image

A party attended by O'Donnell and US ambassador to UNO

### Last image

Times editor on the phone

### First words

Honey I'll be right back

### Last words

Yes M. President

### How did JFK deal with the press ?

JFK told the three national TV networks that he wanted broadcast time in the evening on Monday. Until then they were asked to withhold any information concerning Cuba.

## 12 – Plan DEFCON 3

### First image

Church choral – Sunday October 21<sup>st</sup> 1962

### Last image

Kennedy behind his desk

### First words

### Last words

DEFCON 3

### What does this scene tell us about Kennedy's belief ?

Catholic : first catholic president of the USA

### How do we understand that the situation is becoming tenser ?

Until then, JFK had kept on his schedule and hadn't cancelled any meeting in order to avoid arousing suspicion. But everything is cancelled for Monday October 22<sup>nd</sup>

### What seems to worry JFK ? What did he decide ?

JFK wanted to be sure that all missiles would be destroyed (only 90 %) and he decided to stand all US forces around the world on DEFCON 3. General Le May had decided (in case of air strikes) to bomb all buildings large enough to hide a missile.

## 13 – Uncertain JFK

### First image

Monday, October 22, 1962 - Press officer announcing President's address this very day.

### Last image

O'Donnell closing Kennedy's office door.

### First words

None

### Last words

Wear something nice for the TV. Make sure Jacky picks it.

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### What problem is facing JFK before his address ?

While military forces prepare themselves, the Kennedy administration lost Congress support. Congressmen were favourable to air strikes whereas Kennedy wasn't.

### 14 – President's speech (extraits du speech à travailler sur le texte)

#### First image

O'Donnell entering the press conference room.

#### Last image

Close-up on Kennedy on a TV screen

#### First words

OK everybody I think we're ready

#### Last words

Retaliatory response against the Soviet Union.

### Listen to the speech and fill the gaps

Good evening, my fellow citizens:

This Government, as promised, has maintained the closest surveillance of the **Soviet** military buildup on the island of **Cuba**. Within the past week, unmistakable evidence has established the fact that a series of offensive **missile sites** is now in preparation on that imprisoned island. The purpose of these bases can be none other than to provide a **nuclear strike** capability against the Western Hemisphere.

(...)

Acting, therefore, in the **defence** of our own security and of the entire **Western** Hemisphere, and under the authority entrusted to me by the Constitution as endorsed by the Resolution of the **Congress**, I have directed that the following initial steps be taken immediately:

First: To halt this offensive buildup 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.

(...)

Second: I have directed the continued and increased close **surveillance** of Cuba and its military buildup. (...) Should these offensive military preparations **continue**, thus increasing the threat to the hemisphere, further action will be justified. I have directed the **Armed Forces** to prepare for any eventualities (...)

Third: 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.

### What did Kennedy finally decide ?

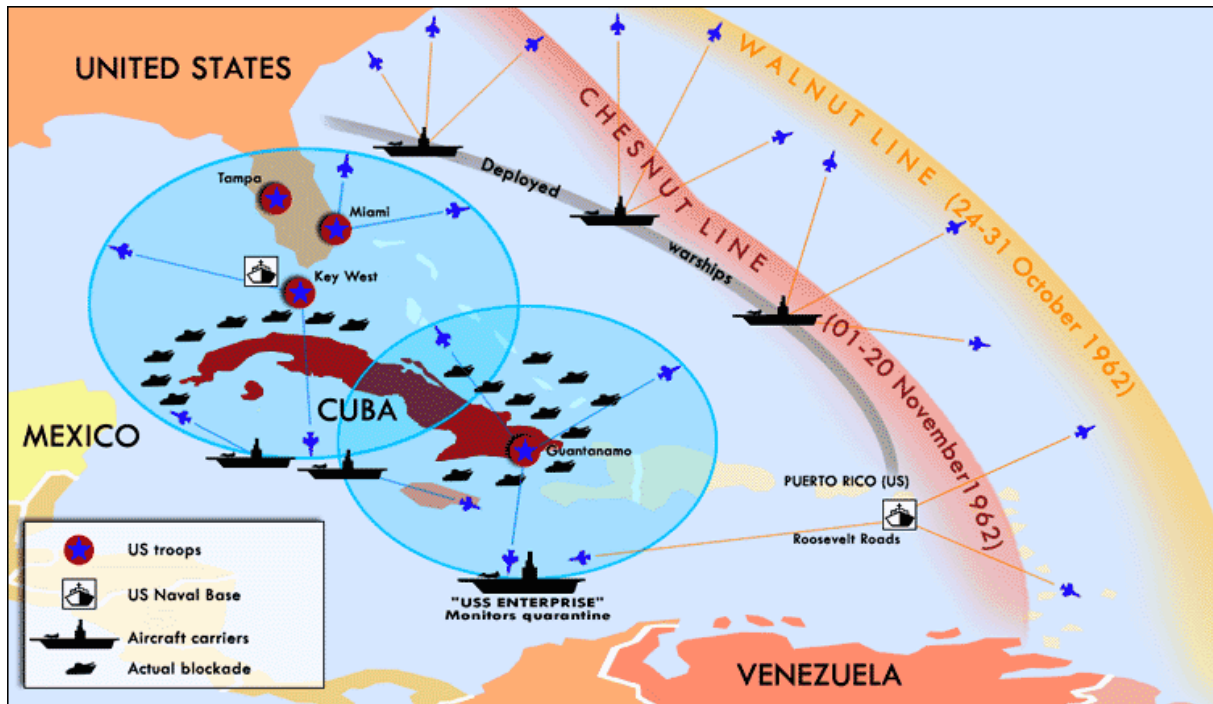
Quarantine

Increase surveillance of Cuba

Military stand by

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Any missile launched from Cuba will be considered as a soviet attack against the USA, justifying retaliatory response against USSR



### 15 – Rules of intervention

#### First image

Tuesday October 23, 1962 – The White House

#### Last image

JFK and O'Donnell in JFK's office

#### First words

None

#### Last words

Those chains of command en at one place :  
me.

#### **How did the Soviet respond ?**

They used international regulations : freedom of the seas.  
They decided to run the blockade

#### **What did the American Navy set up to prevent this ?**

Russian speaking personal was on every US vessel. When seeing a soviet ship they put on radio contact to ask them to reduce their speed and accept an inspection team on board.  
If weapons were found the soviet ship has to turn back or accept to be towed (remorquer) to the next port.

If refusal (of inspection or towage) warning shots were fired before the rudder (gouvernail) was shot.

→ that was the long-time normal procedure during a blockade. But in 1962 there was a new element : the risk of a nuclear war. Therefore, Kennedy wanted to be informed of everything and decide each move in case a ship didn't stop.

#### **What other measures were set up by the army ?**

Low-level photography runs over Cuba. But an airforce is ready to respond to any probable attack on this plane.

#### **How was it understood by the Kennedy administration ? How did it react ?**

The plane is sure to be shot. The army is setting a trap to force the administration to order the air strikes and get rid of the missiles and invade Cuba. We don't know today if it's really true (although the

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army had a harder position) but in 1962 some people in the White House thought that the army wanted war at any cost.

Triple check what the Chief says and does and make sure nothing happens to the spy plane.

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### **16 – Low level flight**

#### First image

O'Donnell behind a door looking at the switchboard operators

#### Last image

Close up on pilot in war conference room

#### First words

White House

#### Last words

It was a cake walk Sir

#### **Why do you think the mission was planned during daytime and not night-time ?**

Night-time would have been safer for the pilots. But to take good pictures they had to drop brilliant flares (fusées éclairantes) which could be mistaken with bombs. So these planes flew in pairs, just after dawn or just before sunset.

#### **What happened during this low level flight ?**

The plane which flew at 100 meters was shot at but managed to go back to its base.

#### **Why did the major-chief summon the pilot ? What did he say ?**

The major-Chief was looking for a causus belli. The pilot lied, saying he had run into a flock of birds (sparrows). The major-chief didn't have a good reason to air strike.

### **17 – On the brink of disaster**

#### First image

Kennedy walking in with O'Donnell and other advisors

#### Last image

Costner queuing for confession

#### First words

Mr President the OAS meeting starts in an hour

#### Last words

None

#### **What is OAS ?**

Organisation of the American States created in 1948 by 21 American states in order to promote democracy and promote human rights.

#### **Why does Kennedy need its approval ?**

Quarantine, a concept listed in the OAS pact and less drastic than blockade, did not mean total isolation of the enemy nation. But quarantine could be considered as an act of war if any state disapproved. The USA need a mandate.

#### **What was the issue ?**

The OAS approved the resolution unanimously (because of the violation of Rio agreement passed in 1947 : a treaty to prevent and repel threats and acts of aggression against any of the countries of America).

In fact, in Latin America, there were different point of views. Throughout Latin America there were anti-American demonstrations followed by rioting. But, generally, public opinions could not understand how the Cuban regime could strike an alliance with a superpower. The media fuelled their doubts, insisting on the danger of nuclear war.

The quarantine became effective on Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> 1962. Cuba remains a member, but its government has been excluded from participation in the OAS since 1962.

#### **How did the American react ?**

They stored supplies, reminded the kids to duck and cover, opened the underground shelters (archives). They prepared themselves to face the unthinkable. A lot of them confessed.

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### **18 – Straight in the eyes**

#### First image

Wednesday October 24<sup>th</sup> - The White House and a wall covered with clocks (the Pentagon).

#### First words

Gentlemen can you hear me ?

#### Last image

An American officer looking to a soviet vessel through binoculars

#### Last words

We were eyeball to eyeball and I think the other fellow just blinked.

#### **When the quarantine started, what did the soviet ships ?**

Soviet ships went on and a soviet submarine was detected on the sonar. It was protecting the freighters, sailing between two of them.

In fact, there were 3 submarines equipped with nuclear heads and they were instructed to launch their missiles in case of American attack.

#### **What will happen if the American force the sub to surface ?**

Crew will be executed in USSR

Risk of military response

→ the soviet ships stopped and some turned around

### **19 – Plan DEFCON 2**

#### First image

A man taking a phone – the CIA man and Bundy coming to JFK

#### First words

Mr. President

#### Last image

Kennedy brothers in JFK's office

#### Last words

Soviets pull theirs out of Cuba

#### **Is the crisis finished ?**

6 ships seemed to continue on Cuba (probably loaded with food)

#### **What did the American army try to do ?**

Provoke the Soviets by ordering military exercises next to their vessels

They gave the order to go on DEFCON 2 (close to a war declaration)

→ they signalled an escalation unwanted by the Kennedy administration.

#### **What could the Kennedys do ?**

Fire the major Chief but that would let think that the invasion threat wasn't real or that a coup d'etat was possible.

Kennedy finally decided to try the deal proposed by the American ambassador in UNO. He asked for Walter Lippman (the journalist who invented the concept cold war)

### **20 – A moral fight**

#### First image

A peace demonstration in front of the White House – Thursday, October 25<sup>th</sup>

#### First words

What do you think of the Lippman column this morning ?

#### Last image

O'Donnell going after Bob Kennedy

#### Last words

Bobby

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According to O'Donnel, how would the world understand the deal ?

The Americans sell one of their allies for their own safety ?

What were the Soviets doing at the same time ?

Accusing the Americans at the UNO of refusing negotiations.

What was the American answer ?

Fight back in UNO and win international support.

### **21 – Facing world opinion**

First image

US ambassador entering the meeting room in UNO

Last image

Mac Namara on the phone

First words

We call for the world to condemn this American provocation, we people of Romania standing solidarity with the people of Cuba.

Last words

How the hell do you loose a goddam tanker.  
What the hell is going on over there ?

What was the Soviet strategy in UNO ?

Rally round their allies (satellite countries)

Accuse the USA of wanting a new war although there were no evidence of missiles in Cuba.

Refuse to answer direct question.

→ Soviets try to stop US ambassador showing evidence of missiles in Cuba. But the representative of Chile gives his time to the USA who present evidences with photos.

What was the new problem ?

A soviet ship passed the line overnight

### **22 – Crossing the line**

First image

Friday, October 26<sup>th</sup> - Soviet ship (Grozny)

Last image

Close up on the admiral

First words

Hail him again

Last words

Mac                      Namara's                      diatribe

How did the army react ?

Follow the rules of engagement : start with star shells fired over the ship.

How did Mac Namara react ?

Secretary of defence reminded violently (he wasn't sleeping except on a couch and only ate hamburgers) that only JFK could order shots towards soviet ships which could mistake star shells with bullets (after the crisis, admiral Anderson was promoted ambassador in Portugal).

The blockade is a language, a new vocabulary, JFK communicating with Khrushchev.

### **23 – The Russian go-between**

First image

Launching of a rocket from the US base of Vandenberg (Sweden ?)

Last image

Soviet spy leaving the café

First words

Who the hell authorised this missile test ?

Last words

I'll see what I can do

## The Cuba missile Crisis – Thirteen days

### Why was a nuclear war so close at that time ?

Because the army wanted to attack (→ an American small-boat is sent to inspect a Lebanese ship to show the Soviets that they would go on with their policy) whereas the Kennedy administration looked for a peaceful issue.

### Which opportunity sprung suddenly ?

A soviet spy (Khrushchev's war buddy) asked a journalist (John Scali) if Kennedy would agree to a deal : withdrawal of missiles in Cuba if the USA promise never to invade the island and try to destitute Castro. Americans agree if UNO supervises the dismantling within 48 hours.

## 24 – First letter from Khrushchev

### First image

The White House – Saturday October 27<sup>th</sup> at night

### Last image

O'Donnell leaving his house

### First words

None

### Last words

OK I'll be right there – You're beautiful

### Khrushchev sent a ten pages back channel letter confirming the spy's offer. What was JFK's decision ?

Consider this deal

## 25 – Second letter from Khrushchev

### First image

Bob Kennedy speaking to O'Donnell

### Last image

Kennedy and his staff.

### First words

It looks like Fomin was a ploy (leurre) after all

### Last words

Now gentlemen, if anyone has a great idea,  
now is the time.

### What is going wrong ?

The second letter from Khrushchev was not written by him. CIA thinks that he was thrown over or controlled by a more vindictive part of the Politburo or KGB .

Some missiles are operational and all will be in 36 hours. Moreover they have also deployed battlefield nuclear weapons in Cuba.

### What did Kennedy decide ?

He asked the army to prepare the air strikes on Monday morning, followed by the invasion.

## 26 – Major Anderson

### First image

O'Donnell sitting at his desk with a phone in his hand

### Last image

Bundy talking to O'Donnell

### First words

Major Anderson there is phone call for you

### Last words

A plane is missing Kenny. We're presuming  
the pilot is dead.

### At which moment did the war seem inevitable ?

When a Cuban missile shot down a US U2.

On the other hand, intelligence was more than necessary to help the Kennedy administration decide on the course of events. 400 reconnaissance flights had been sent over Cuba since the beginning of 1962.

The question was : should the American start a war because a plane they sent over blockaded Cuba was shot by a soviet missile launched from Cuba.



## The Cuba missile Crisis – Thirteen days

### **27 – Race against the clock**

First image

Civil and military staff in JFK's meeting room

Last image

Bob leaving

First words

None

Last words

What if it was you two who invited that second letter by raising the possibility of a trade

**What's the soviet excuse for this shutdown ?**

An accidental launch.

**What was the US army's next move ? Did it succeed ?**

Send a US U2 over soviet territory → It was escorted back to the frontier by soviet MIGs.

Advocate immediate bombing of the SAM site which shot down the US plane over Cuba → Kennedy's refusal is accepted by the Major Chief (probably because he didn't want further investigation on the plane which accidentally flew over USSR). In fact it was one of the few flights which were responsible for air analysis after nuclear tests. The plane was armed with nuclear missiles because the army was on DEFCON 1. But the Soviets didn't realise it and the US plane was escorted back to its aerial space.

**What did the Kennedy administration decide ?**

Trade Cuba's missiles for Turkey's missiles (because they're obsolete). Those Turkish missiles were more psychological than efficient. It secured Italy and Western Europe.

The program had started at the end of 1955. In 1958 General De Gaulle refused that they be deployed on French soil. Instead, they were installed in Italy and in Turkey.

Their installation in July-August 1962 on the Cigli base, near Izmir was the result of an agreement reached with Turkey in October 1959, but the 15 Jupiters soon proved obsolete for lack of mobility.

JFK had decided to dismantle them without warning the Turks, who were not consulted either when they were actually removed in April 1963. Those in Italy were dismantled in 1963, thus meeting the demand of the Rome government who had shown cautious, embarrassed solidarity with the US in so far as Italy was within range in case of Soviet retaliation.

The 60 intercontinental Thor missiles, deployed on 20 British bases since 1958, were also removed between November 1962 and August 1963.

### **28 – First agreement**

First image

Advisors in JFK's office

Last image

Bobby and O'Donnell in the car driving to the soviet embassy

First words

M. President we only have 30 hours left

Last words

Take on left

**What is Kennedy's final decision ?**

Accept the first letter (missiles removal against no invasion) and ignore the second. Propose to withdraw Turkey's missiles 6 month from now and demand that this latter condition remains secret. → Americans will know if Khrushchev is still in power and this proposal could calm down the hard line of the soviet government.

Ask for an answer before Monday or else it's war (but then if the Soviets decide to refuse they could attack first).

### **29 – Face to face**

First image

Soviet embassy in Washington where Bobby Kennedy is to meet the Soviet ambassador.

Last image

O'Donnell at home

First words

You smell that ? They're burning their documents. They think we're going to war.

Last words

If the sun comes up tomorrow it's only because of men of good will. That's all there is between us and the devil.

## The Cuba missile Crisis – Thirteen days

### How do you understand Bobby's proposal to the Soviet ambassador ?

Both countries had to get out of this potential nuclear conflict without losing face. Each had to appear as a winner.

This version of Bobby and the Ambassador's meeting was described in Bobby's book. But according to the Ambassador (Dobrynin) Bobby came to see him twice (October 23 and 27), telling him that the Kennedy administration was losing ground against the army and the public opinion who wanted to invade Cuba. So Khrushchev thought it was an appeal. Moreover, Khrushchev was upset because the Soviet general in Cuba had shot down an American U2. He didn't want to be the one who started an eventual war. Finally, one of the Soviet spy had said that Kennedy was to make a speech on 5 P.M. and said that would be on Moscow's time. So Khrushchev felt he had to answer very quickly to Kennedy's proposal through ambassador Dobrynin.

### 30 – A new era

#### First image

Sun or nuclear mushroom rising

#### Last image

Kennedy brothers and O'Donnell outside the White House

#### First words

This is radio Moscow. Premier Khrushchev has sent a message to President Kennedy today (Monday October 29<sup>th</sup>)

#### Last words

Ken we're out here

### How did this end for each country ?

#### USA :

Since Khrushchev accepted the US deal, Kennedy's advisors felt they could do anything in the world.

Only 1 person died

The Soviets began dismantling their launchers the very next day. The operation was completed on 9 November.

But there still was some cause for tension: Kennedy had insisted that the Soviet Il-28 bombers given to Cuba be removed too.

#### USSR :

On Saturday, 28 October 1962, Nikita Khrushchev addressed the Supreme Soviet: "We must withdraw in front of the danger of a global thermonuclear war". But he also gloated on the Soviet victory : there still was a Soviet satellite a few miles from the American border.

#### CUBA :

Angered because he had been kept out of the negotiations by his Soviet allies, Castro refused to submit. It took him 22 days to come around, during which time US nuclear forces remained on alert.

On 21 November, the Ilyushin bombers were taken back to the Soviet Union and the quarantine was over. The epilogue came only 30 years later, in 1993, when the last Combat Brigade troops sent to Cuba in 1962 were withdrawn from Cuba.

#### CHINA :

China reaped the benefits and rivalled the Soviet Union in the eyes of Socialist and Third World countries.

#### FRANCE :

The crisis, confirming the De Gaulle-abhorred Soviet-US condominium, widened the transatlantic gap, since the USA had not consulted with the Europeans.

While admitting that "the two K's had handled the crisis with absolute mastery", the left-wing, intellectual weekly France Observateur, in its 1 November issue, came to the bitter conclusion that "the world belongs to whoever is in a position to destroy it".

## The Cuba missile Crisis – Thirteen days

### GERMANY :

In West Berlin, there was public concern about a backlash that might have an impact on the status of Berlin. Thus, Der Tagesspiegel endeavoured to prove that "Cuba and Berlin" could not be "swapped", unlike missiles deployed on bases in the Caribbean and in Turkey. The editorialist explained that Berlin was not "a base of operations but the stronghold of freedom". Stressing JFK's firm stand, he came to the conclusion that "22 October 1962 had turned the tables after 13 August 1961", that ill-fated day when the Wall was erected in the face of indifferent Allies.

JFK's pusillanimous attitude when the Wall was built had taught Chancellor Adenauer a bitter lesson. He was worried, and feared that Berlin might bear the brunt of a backlash and lie exposed to a Soviet operation comparable to the 1948 blockade. The Cuban crisis confirmed his opinion that the security of the Federal Republic should not depend on the US exclusively. He came to the conclusion that political and military ties with France should be strengthened. This was materialized by January 1963, when the Élysée agreements were signed.

### What were the consequences on the Cold War ?

From a didactic point of view, the crisis taught US and Soviet leaders how to cope with situations of extreme tension that could end in thermonuclear war. The Cuban episode was a model of crisis management: the point was how to have the other side back down without losing face.

It also pointed out the discrepancy (divergence) between the risks taken and what was actually at stake: Cuba was a vital issue for the USA whereas it was only a side one for Khrushchev who could, thus, afford to show some restraint.

The Americans and the Soviets came to realize that the Cuban crisis transcended their ideological differences and pointed to a common pursuit : the prevention of a global nuclear war.

East-West relationships took a turn for the better: détente was on the agenda for 17 years (1962-1989). The Soviets referred to it as "peaceful coexistence" :

- signature of many Soviet-US agreements such as the 1963 Treaty banning atmospheric nuclear tests, the 1968 nuclear non-proliferation Treaty and the 1972 SALT I treaty concerning ballistic missiles. The flip side of it was a resumed conventional arms race.
- The hotline : The idea that there ought to be a hotline between the White House and the Kremlin was a direct consequence of the Cuban crisis. It was discussed by JFK as early as 12 December 1962. It wasn't a telephone but a teletypewriter was activated on 30 August 1963. It was used for the first time during the June 1967 Arab-Israeli war.

### 31 – JFK' speech

#### How would you analyse JFK's leadership in this crisis ?

JFK's leadership is described as involved but not over-weening. RFK explains, for instance, that his brother would often withhold opinions in meetings, knowing that others would tend to parrot his ideas rather than offer honest appraisals.

#### How was the US army caricatured in this movie ?

The military leaders on the council are criticized as war-mongering although they were viewed sympathetically by RFK

#### Some information on the movie

*Thirteen Days* (2000) is a film directed by Roger Donaldson about the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, seen from a US perspective. Most of the scenes take place in the White House, focusing on the decision process involved, based on limited knowledge, with president John Kennedy and his brother fighting against the military who are constantly pushing for an invasion of Cuba as a reaction to the installation of missiles there by the USSR.

*Thirteen Days* is the second movie about President Kennedy in which Kevin Costner has a lead role as someone other than Kennedy (as Kenneth O'Donnell), the first being *JFK*. It is also the second movie in which Steven Culp plays Robert F. Kennedy, the other being *Norma Jean & Marilyn*.

However in the movie, the role of Kenneth O'Donnell has been greatly exaggerated as he plays a much larger role in the film, than what he did in reality. This is because the real Kenneth O'Donnell's son contributed with a lot of money for the production of *Thirteen Days*, while requesting that his father's character would be given a more important role. In real life history, O'Donnell was never present at the top level White House meetings with Kennedy during the missile crisis.