

The Cuban Missile Crisis

Political geography can have far reaching effects on the history of a country. The cold war that almost got hot is a prime example. In 1962 the former Soviet Union and the United States, rivals in the aftermath of World War II, had a serious confrontation. The confrontation was over Cuba. In 1959, Cuba had become a Communist nation with close ties to the Soviet Union. In 1962 the Soviets secretly built a missile base in Cuba for launching nuclear missiles. President John F. Kennedy demanded that Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev remove the missile base immediately. Kennedy also ordered a U.S. air and naval blockade of Cuba to prevent Soviet weapons from reaching the island. People throughout the world feared that the Cuban Missile Crisis, as it came to be called, would lead to world-wide nuclear war.

Finally, Kennedy and Khrushchev reached agreement. Khrushchev agreed to dismantle the Soviet missile base, remove other Soviet weapons located there, and halt construction of future bases in Cuba. In return, the United States agreed to end the blockade and not invade Cuba once the Soviets left the island.

Read the explanations of the crisis provided by President Kennedy and Premier Khrushchev, then study the map of the crisis area. Answer the questions that follow.

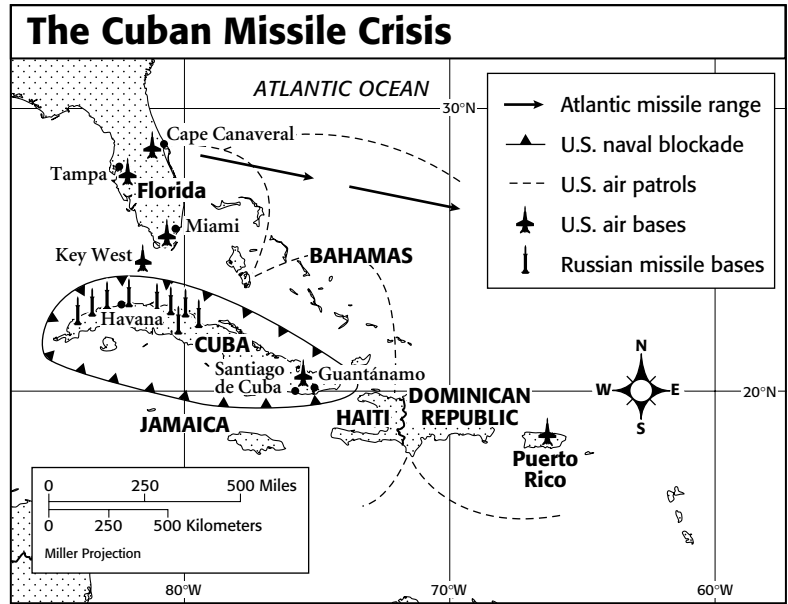
KENNEDY

“Our government, as promised, has maintained a close eye on the Soviet military buildup in Cuba. Within the past week, unmistakable evidence has established the fact that a series of offensive missile sites is now being prepared there. The purpose of these bases can be none other than to provide a nuclear strike capability against us and our allies (friends) in the Western Hemisphere.”

KHRUSHCHEV

“You want to make your country safe. This is understandable; but Cuba wants the same thing, too. All countries want to make themselves safe. But how are we and our allies to feel safe when your government has surrounded us with military bases? Your rockets are situated in Italy and are aimed at us. Your rockets are situated in Turkey. You are worried about the missiles in Cuba because Cuba is close to the coast of America. However, Turkey is right next to us. We are so close that our guards and their guards can look at each other!”

Chapter 6, Critical Thinking Activity, continued



1. Which U.S. coast and state is Cuba closest to? Name the state and the cardinal direction of the coast.

2. Name two places where the United States had air bases in the Caribbean.

3. Where did the Soviet Union have missile bases in the Caribbean?

4. Where was the U.S. naval blockade located? What was the purpose of the blockade?

5. Briefly state both views held by Kennedy and Khrushchev.

