

CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS CHRONOLOGY SEPTEMBER AND EARLY OCTOBER 1962

A. AS SEEN BY THE USSR

August 30, 1962

- Khrushchev met with the Cuban emissary, Che Guevara. Khrushchev continued to resist Cuba's request for a defense treaty, but assured Cuba that if the US invaded, the Soviet Baltic fleet would respond.² Khrushchev believed that the US would accept and not respond to the presence of Soviet missiles in Cuba.

September 4, 1962

- Khrushchev accepted Kennedy and British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan's August 27 proposal to ban nuclear tests in the atmosphere, underwater and in outer space.

September 5, 1962

- Khrushchev learned the US had discovered anti-aircraft missiles in Cuba. His reaction was to speed up the delivery before the US learned more.

September 6, 1962

- Khrushchev summoned US Interior Secretary, Stuart Udall, to his villa. Udall had been touring Soviet hydro-electric stations. Khrushchev said that western troops had to leave Berlin and that military traffic would no longer be allowed to Berlin, though civilian traffic would be allowed. He led Udall to believe that the Soviet government would sign a peace treaty with East Germany. Khrushchev claimed that JFK didn't have the courage to solve the Berlin question (in the way Khrushchev wanted) so he would force him to sign a peace treaty with East Germany or go to war. Khrushchev admitted he had provided Cuba with modern weapons, but said they were for defense. If the US attacked Cuba, he said, the USSR would attack a nearby country where the US had bases (e.g., Turkey or in Europe.)³

September 6, 1962

- The Soviet Minister of Defense, Marshal Rodion Malinovsky proposed to send additional weapons to Cuba to depart by September 15: 10-12 bombers capable

of carrying nuclear weapons; 6 atomic bombs; 18 cruise missiles armed with nuclear warheads; and 8-12 “Luna” rockets with nuclear warheads. These additional weapons were considered “tactical” as their purpose was to protect the more strategic weapons, in the event of attack and ground invasion.

September 7, 1962

- Khrushchev met with Robert Frost. Frost’s focus was on proposing that the US and USSR should be engaged in a peaceful and respectful “noble rivalry.”⁴
- Khrushchev approved sending 6 bombers and atomic bombs, plus the Luna rockets. The Soviet objective was now to be equipped for conflict – not merely to deter an invasion or achieve nuclear parity.

September 8, 1962

- China shot down a U-2 over its territory.
- Malinovsky signed new instructions to Commander Pliev of the Cuban Task Force that he could use nuclear weapons to counter an invasion upon receiving orders from Moscow. Targets should be important US sites. Nuclear submarines could also target the US. Instructions to allow Pliev to make the decision himself, in case communications with Moscow were not possible, were prepared, but not signed.

B. AS SEEN BY THE US

September 8, 1962

- JFK requested authorization from Congress to call up 150,000 troops, if needed.
- Embarrassed by two U-2 incidents, the US State Department asked the CIA to fly only over international waters and not over Cuba, claiming the recent incidents inhibited negotiations on Berlin. A compromise was reached restricting CIA flights to cross over the width of the island where they couldn’t be tracked and shot down. However, “Overflights were not resumed until October 14, allowing the Soviets 5 weeks to deploy nuclear armed missiles in Cuba without being watched by America planes.”

September 10, 1962

- Robert Frost and Stewart Udall returned from the USSR. Upon arrival at New York’s Idlewild Airport, Frost spoke to reporters about his meeting with

Khrushchev, saying Khrushchev thought the Americans were too liberal to fight. Udall later said he didn't believe Khrushchev had said that; Frost was ill and tired when he spoke with reporters. ⁵ JFK was furious with Frost and did not speak with him again.

September 13, 1962

- JFK began his news conference reiterating the conclusion that Soviet shipments to Cuba do not constitute a threat to the Western Hemisphere. In reply to a question, he declared:

“IF CUBA SHOULD POSSESS A CAPACITY TO CARRY OUT OFFENSIVE ACTIONS AGAINST THE UNITED STATES, THAT THE UNITED STATES WOULD ACT.”

September 16, 1962

- CIA chief John McCone was still on honeymoon in France. He had received daily cables reviewing the Cuban situation and worried about the SAMs in Cuba. He cabled his deputy General Marshall Carter “We must carefully study the prospect of secret importation and placement of several Soviet MRBMs which could not be detected by us if Cuban defenses deny overflight.”

September 19, 1962

- A Special National Intelligence Estimate said that Soviet presence in Cuba was for political purposes, to build up the Communist regime and that it was unlikely the Soviets would put nuclear weapons there. The Estimate, prepared by the CIA, and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, Defense, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and NSA, estimated that fewer than 4,000 Soviet troops were in Cuba. ⁶

September 20, 1962

- A Congressional resolution authorized a US invasion of Cuba,
- McCone learned that a CIA source had seen a ballistic missile being moved in Cuba on September 12.

September 28, 1962

- Khrushchev complained of US ships following and harassing Soviet ships and overflights. He said he was ready to work with JFK on a nuclear test ban treaty.

Kennedy replied they should try to meet their target date for the treaty of 1/1/63 but did not mention Cuba. Khrushchev did not reply.

October 9, 1962

- McCone recommended to JFK that U-2 overflights be resumed to check the accuracy of MRBM sightings and the readiness of SAM sites. Kennedy and his advisors believed there would be a 1 in 6 chance of a U-2 being shot down. They couldn't risk having a CIA pilot shot down and captured, so decided to use Air Force pilots. The mission was delayed 3 days to train an Air Force pilot to fly the U-2, and was further delayed by bad weather. The pilot was to fly from California to Florida and stray somewhat over western Cuba. In the event of a mishap, it would not have been a CIA mission.

October 14, 1962

- The U-2 surveyed western Cuba. When reviewed by CIA experts on October 15th, the films revealed that Soviet MRBMs had been deployed.

October 15, 1962

- The New York Times reported on a nationally televised speech in Boston, by former President Dwight Eisenhower, that was attended by 6,000 dinner guests. Eisenhower was campaigning across the country on behalf of Republican Congressional candidates. The headline read "Eisenhower Calls President Weak on Foreign Policy." His criticism was biting and to the point:

EISENHOWER CALLS PRESIDENT WEAK ON FOREIGN POLICY

IN THOSE EIGHT YEARS, WE LOST NO INCH OF WE WITNESGROUND TO TYRANNY, WE WITNESSED NO ABDICATION OF INTERNATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY, WE ACCEPTED NO PROMISE OF PLEDGED WORD OR WITHDRAWAL FROM PRINCIPLE, NO WALLS WERE BUILT, NO THREATENING BASES WERE ESTABLISHED, ONE WAR WAS ENDED AND INCIPIENT WARS WERE BLOCKED.

New York Times, October 15, 1962

C. AS SEEN BY THE USSR

October 4: 60 nuclear charges were delivered.

October 6: Nuclear warheads for two launch sites had been delivered.

October 8: One launch pad was ready; a second was ready October 12 and the entire regiment was battle ready by October 18. Medium-range ballistic missiles (MRBM) could be launched on 10-hours notice, the time required to deliver nuclear warheads to the launch sites.

NOTES

Pages on this site describing events of the Cuban Missile Crises are based primarily on: Serhii Plokhii, *Nuclear Folly: A History of the Cuban Missile Crisis*, W. W. Norton & Company, New York. 2021.

¹ Perhaps Khrushchev's promise was without merit: we have not found evidence that the Soviet Baltic Fleet was nearby. In his *Memoir*, Khrushchev explicitly stated that the USSR didn't use submarine escorts for the delivery of weapons to Cuba.

² This meeting takes place while Udall and Robert Frost are in the USSR.

³ Richard Reeves, *President Kennedy: Profile of Power*, Simon & Schuster, 1993. p. 350.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v10/d433> See paragraph 16 of Special National Intelligence Estimate. In fact, 80,000 had arrived between mid-July and mid-October. p. 123

In the meantime, on September 25, James Meredith, an Air Force veteran sought to be the first Negro admitted to the University of Mississippi. He was blocked by Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett. After extended negotiations between the White House and the Governor, on September 29 Barnett said Meredith should be moved onto the Mississippi campus. 220 unarmed Mississippi State Troopers and 300 federal marshals were holding back about 1,000 angry students and local residents. When the Troopers left unexpectedly, rioting broke out. Military police arrived 8 hour later and Meredith attended his first class with a bodyguard of six federal marshals and soldiers waiting outside in Army trucks. Two men had died, 206 marshals and soldiers had been injured and 200 arrested. (Reeves, pp. 354-364)

SOURCE: <https://www.jfkthelastspeech.org/cuban-missile-crisis-september-1962/>