

# President john f. kennedy: hero or villain assignment

[History](#)



President John F. Kennedy: Hero or Villain BY mwi11271 President John F. Kennedy: Hero or Villain? For thirteen days, the United States' government and citizens waited with abated breath, fearing the nuclear annihilation of their great nation. These thirteen days between October 16 and 28, 1962 are now known as the Cuban Missile Crisis. Briefly this crisis can be explained as a confrontation between two of the world's greatest superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, which nearly instigated a nuclear calamity that could have destroyed both nations.

The two nations had been at odds for years over their differing political ideologies; while the Soviet Union favored communism, the United States was a republic founded on democratic ideals. The provocation for the Cuban Missile Crisis was due to the materialization of a communist Cuba led by Fidel Castro. Desperate to prevent Castro from acquiring too much influence, President John F. Kennedy attempted but failed to secure control of the island nation. This military flop became known as the Bay of Pigs, and it guaranteed both Castro's and Cuba's dominion.

Wary of subsequent attacks, Cuba requested protection from the Soviet Union which was supplied in the form of nuclear missiles; it was this transfer of nuclear weaponry which was declared the foundation of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Delving deeper, it can be argued that the actual cause was President Kennedy's lack of tolerance for communism and arrogant approach. Prior to President Eisenhower dissolving ties to Cuba in the 1960s, the United States considered Cuba to be a tremendous asset. After Castro and his supporters came to power, they acquired mass approval and influence which distressed bureaucrats in the United States.

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Eisenhower established a strategy, later adhered to by the Kennedy administration, to dethrone the communist government and Castro. Kennedy, a new and inexperienced president, stuck to Eisenhower and the CIA's plan of sending fourteen hundred Cuban exiles trained for an invasion into Cuba. On April 17, 1962, the Cuban exiles along with CIA members penetrated Cuban borders at the Bay of Pigs. However, the strategy did not go as planned, and Castro's army defeated and captured the invaders.

It was later exposed that Kennedy had abandoned the aid of Air Force coverage just prior to attacking; if Kennedy had given more support to the mission and investigated the situation in Cuba further, the disaster at the Bay of Pigs may have been averted. As much as the United States tried to undermine Castro and his move to embrace communism in Cuba, the United States' efforts only solidified Castro's influence and increase his search for Soviet assistance. " Similarly, " the incident presented the Soviet Union's Nikita Khrushchev with the comprehension of Russia's nuclear credibility. Retrospectively, it is apparent that the United States should have realized retaliation was in order from Cuba and the Soviet Union. After the Bay of Pigs, " Kennedy's attitude toward Cuba became a matter of pride, almost a vendetta" which led him to persist in the fight to end Castro's regime. With the help of Attorney General and brother, Robert Kennedy, the President sought new ways to restore America's confidence and rid Cuba of Castro. Several assassination attempts failed, and ties with the Soviet Union worsened.

Robert Kennedy reported that “ on October 14, 1962 shortly after nine o'clock, the President called an aide to come to the White House. [The President] said that [the United States] was facing great trouble... [Robert] later learned that a U-2 had just finished a photographic mission, and the CIA had become convinced that the Soviets were placing missiles and atomic weapons in Cuba. This news shocked government officials in the United States, and to deal with the issue, Kennedy arranged an intimate group of advisors called the Executive Committee of the National Security Council or EX-COMM.

The committee's main objective was to find a way to remove the missiles in Cuba. General Taylor, a close aide to Kennedy, “ later characterized the choices: the United States could take them out' through a military strike, ' squeeze them out' through coercive pressure, or ' buy them out' through a negotiated settlement. ” Kennedy and his advisors carefully weighed each option before making an educated decision. Prior to the discovery of missiles in Cuba, there had been several reports of suspicious activity in Cuba which the President had disregarded.

In a CIA document entitled “ Recent Soviet Military Aid to Cuba,” there are several references to Soviet aid in Cuba. One section reports “ as many as twenty Soviet vessels may have already arrived in Cuba since late July with military cargoes. ” There are several similar declassified documents that show a buildup of military power in Cuba prior to the missile crisis. Why then did President Kennedy take so long to discover a major problem like the

missile crisis, is a mystery. When the missiles were first discovered, the first retaliatory measure was the issuance of a blockade against Cuba.

The blockade prevented ships and other vessels from both entering and leaving Cuba, and under international law, "blockades are considered acts of war. In response to the blockades, the Soviets could have challenged the Americans with force, including the use of their nuclear missiles," but luckily for Americans, this did not occur. On October 26, 1962, Khrushchev sent a message to Kennedy offering to make negotiations about the removal of the missiles. In return for their removal, the United States would have to guarantee not to attack or invade Cuba in the future.

Later, the Soviets also demanded the removal of the United States' missiles that were placed in Turkey for the protection of the United States against the missiles in Cuba. Kennedy's reluctance to agree to the communist Khrushchev's request could have caused the Soviets to set off the missiles. After tense discussion with his advisors, Kennedy agreed, and the missiles were removed from both areas; however, the public was not informed of some stipulations within the negotiation until years later.

Kennedy was afraid to lose his reputation of being a tough man who refused to back down, so he did not want the public to know about his negotiations. It only took thirteen days for the crisis to be resolved, but over fifty years later, the situation has not died down. Until recently, the official documents concerning the crisis were still under high security, and even now with their release, new information is still being revealed to the public. President

Kennedy was so concerned with his image as a fierce, young leader that he risked the lives of every United States citizen.

Maps prove that Cuba is less than two thousand miles from at least seven major cities within the United States, and the nuclear weapons in Cuba were in place to destroy them. The crisis would have never escalated to the level that it did if Kennedy had been more tolerant of foreign powers and their ideologies. The Bay of Pigs fiasco could have been prevented altogether if Kennedy had not authorized it which prompted Castro to seek Soviet aid. Even with the Bay of Pigs mission launched, it could have been a success if Kennedy had provided Air Force support as planned which again could have prevented the Cuban Missile Crisis from taking place.

Due to Kennedy's stubbornness and arrogance, he was reluctant to see the obvious signs that an attack was brewing close to home. He was too concerned with his public image to admit he was wrong and only wanted to look good in the eyes of the American public. In the end, nuclear warfare was narrowly avoided, but if Kennedy had been more accepting of differing ideologies and acted less arrogantly, the traumatic Cuban Missile Crisis could have been prevented which leaves us with a question: "president John F. Kennedy: Hero or Villain?"