

THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS: THE ARMAGEDDON LETTERS

Document A: Letter from Prime Minister Castro to Chairman Khrushchev, October 26, 1962

Dear Comrade Khrushchev:

Given the analysis of the situation and the reports which have reached us, [I] consider an attack to be almost imminent—within the next 24 to 72 hours. There are two possible variants: the first and most probable one is an air attack against certain objectives with the limited aim of destroying them; the second, and though less probable, still possible, is a full invasion. This would require a large force and is the most repugnant form of aggression, which might restrain them.

You can be sure that we will resist with determination, whatever the case. The Cuban people's morale is extremely high and the people will confront aggression heroically.

I would like to briefly express my own personal opinion.

If the second variant takes place and the imperialists invade Cuba with the aim of occupying it, the dangers of their aggressive policy are so great that after such an invasion the Soviet Union must never allow circumstances in which the imperialists could carry out a nuclear first strike against it.

I tell you this because I believe that the imperialists' aggressiveness makes them extremely dangerous, and that if they manage to carry out an invasion of Cuba—a brutal act in violation of universal and moral law—then that would be the moment to eliminate this danger forever, in an act of the most legitimate self-defense. However harsh and terrible the solution, there would be no other.

This opinion is shaped by observing the development of their aggressive policy. The imperialists, without regard for world opinion and against laws and principles, have blockaded the seas, violated our air-space, and are preparing to invade, while at the same time blocking any possibility of negotiation, even though they understand the gravity of the problem.

You have been, and are, a tireless defender of peace, and I understand that these moments, when the results of your superhuman efforts are so seriously threatened, must be bitter for you. We will maintain our hopes for saving the peace until the last moment, and we are ready to contribute to this in any way we can. But, at the same time, we are serene and ready to confront a situation which we see as very real and imminent.

I convey to you the infinite gratitude and recognition of the Cuban people to the Soviet people, who have been so generous and fraternal, along with our profound gratitude and admiration to you personally. We wish you success with the enormous task and great responsibilities which are in your hands.

Fraternally, Fidel Castro

QUESTIONS

1. What two things does Castro believe the United States might do within twenty-four to seventy-two hours?
2. Who or what are “the imperialists” that Castro refers to in his letter?
3. What is Castro asking Khrushchev to do when he writes “... if they manage to carry out an invasion of Cuba—a brutal act in violation of universal and moral law—then that would be the moment to eliminate this danger forever, in an act of the most legitimate self-defense. However harsh and terrible the solution, there would be no other.”?

Document B: Letter From Chairman Khrushchev to President Kennedy

Moscow, October 27, 1962.

DEAR MR. PRESIDENT,
I understand your concern for the security of the United States...

You wish to ensure the security of your country, and this is understandable. But Cuba, too, wants the same thing; all countries want to maintain their security. But how are we, the Soviet Union, to [understand] the fact that you have surrounded the Soviet Union with military bases; surrounded our allies with military bases; placed military bases literally around our country; and stationed your missile armaments there? This is no secret. . . . Your missiles are located in Britain, are located in Italy, and are aimed against us. Your missiles are located in Turkey.

You are disturbed over Cuba. You say that this disturbs you because it is 90 miles by sea from the coast of the United States of America. But you have placed destructive missile weapons, which you call offensive, in Turkey, literally next to us.

I therefore make this proposal: We are willing to remove from Cuba the [missiles] which you regard as offensive. Your representatives will make a declaration to the effect that the United States, for its part, . . . will remove its [missiles] from Turkey.

We, in making this pledge, will promise not to invade Turkey. . . . The United States Government will promise not to invade Cuba . . .

The greatest joy for all peoples would be the announcement of our agreement. These are my proposals, Mr. President.
Respectfully yours,
N. Khrushchev

QUESTIONS

1. What deal does Khrushchev propose to Kennedy?
2. What is the tone of this letter? Provide a quote to support your claim.
3. Do you think Khrushchev has the upper hand? Why or why not?

Document C: Letter from President Kennedy to Chairman Khrushchev

Washington, October 27, 1962

Dear Mr. Chairman:
I have read your letter of Oct. 26th with great care and welcomed the statement of your desire to seek a prompt solution to the problem. As I read your letter, the key elements of your proposals...are as follows:

- 1) You would agree to remove these weapons from Cuba under appropriate United Nations observation and supervision; and halt the further introduction of such weapons systems into Cuba.
- 2) We, on our part, would agree...a) to remove promptly the [blockade] now in effect and (b) to give assurances against an invasion of Cuba, I am confident that other nations of the Western Hemisphere would be prepared to do likewise.

There is no reason why we should not be able to complete these arrangements and announce them to the world within a couple of days. The effect of such a settlement on easing world tensions would enable us to work toward a more general arrangement regarding "other armaments", as proposed in your letter.

But the first step, let me emphasize, is the cessation (end) of work on missile sites in Cuba The continuation of this threat by linking these problems to the broader questions of European and world security, would surely [be] a grave risk to the peace of the world. For this reason I hope we can quickly agree along the lines outlined in this letter and in your letter of October 26.

John F. Kennedy

QUESTIONS

1. In this letter Kennedy restates Khrushchev's proposals. Does Kennedy include everything Khrushchev proposed? If not, why might have he left something out?
2. What is the tone of this letter? Provide a quote to support your claim.
3. Do you think Kennedy has the upper hand? Why or why not?

Essential Question: How was nuclear war prevented in the Cuban Missile Crisis?