



## John Kennedy and the Cuban missile crisis

John Fitzgerald Kennedy was president of the USA between 1961-63 and one of the most popular presidents ever. No event tested Kennedy more fully than the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962 and his management of this crisis remains highly controversial.

Many contemporary observers applauded Kennedy for standing up to the Soviet Union. His insistence that Soviet missiles be dismantled and taken away from Cuba earned him widespread support. Those nuclear weapons were a direct threat to American cities.



Some historians have admired Kennedy's restraint in ruling out the options of an air strike against the missile bases or a military invasion of Cuba. Had Kennedy given in to the pressure from his generals and taken military action, a nuclear war between the USSR and the USA might have followed. Instead, in the last months of his presidency, there was a thaw in the Cold War.

On the other hand, Kennedy's handling of Cuba has also attracted criticism. His disastrous attempt to overthrow Fidel Castro during the Bay of Pigs invasion embarrassed the White House and alienated Cuba. Some historians have blamed Kennedy for the missile crisis developing in the first place, claiming that the president made an enemy of Cuba and presented a weak, inexperienced image that encouraged the Soviet Union to take advantage.

Some historians have accused Kennedy of over-reacting, bringing the world to the brink of war by over-dramatising matters. Throughout the crisis, Kennedy had one eye on the important mid-term elections due in November. He could win domestic support by taking a tough line against the Soviets. Did he risk everything to prove he was a strong leader?

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