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This image depicts one of the photos taken by a U-2 pilot over Cuba in 1962. Depending on one's point-of-view, the photo reveals either an offensive threat (U.S.) or a defensive base (USSR). If we check-out a description of the photo at *Pravda's* historical archives, we read these words: $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$. Translated into English, that means: "Air defense base in San Cristobal."

McGeorge Bundy, the President's National Security Adviser, learned the bad news Monday night. It was he who first got the call:

The Soviets are constructing offensive missile sites in Cuba.

Eighty million Americans could be dead in ten minutes if the Soviets, or the Cubans, decided to fire those missiles. The only breath of good news on the subject? The missile launch sites were not completed. Experts thought they would be operational in two weeks.

Instead of telling the President immediately, Bundy wanted more information. He also wanted JFK to get some much-needed rest. He withheld the crucial information until 8:45 a.m. on Tuesday, October 16th. The "Thirteen Days" had begun.

President Kennedy ordered a select group of senior officials to assemble at 11:50 a.m. Thanks to a secret recording system Robert Bouck had installed (at the President's request) in both the Oval Office and the Cabinet Room, a 35-page transcript of those critical discussions is available at the National Archives.

Only the Kennedy brothers knew all the discussions were being recorded.

The evidence was clear: The Soviets were installing medium-range ballistic missiles at separate launch sites. Dean Rusk, the Secretary of State, stated his opinion:

I think we'll be facing a situation that could well lead to general war...

Near the end of this first meeting, the President summarized his position:

We're certainly going to do number one: we're going to take out these, uh, missiles.

How would that be done? One (or both) of two possible scenarios:

...number two, which would be a general air strike. That we're not ready to say, but we should be in preparation for it. The third is the...general invasion.

When would American action take place?

At least we're going to do number one, so it seems to me that we don't have to wait very long. We...ought to be making those preparations.

Unless he changed his mind over the ensuing days, the Commander-in-Chief would order American planes to bomb the missile sites. And he wanted no leaks about his options.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

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See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

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Media Stream

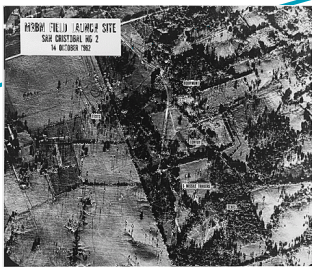


Richard Heyser - Finds Missiles in Cuba

Photo online, courtesy U.S. Library of Congress.

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MRBM Field Launch Site in Cuba - Medium Range Ballistic Missile

Image online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.

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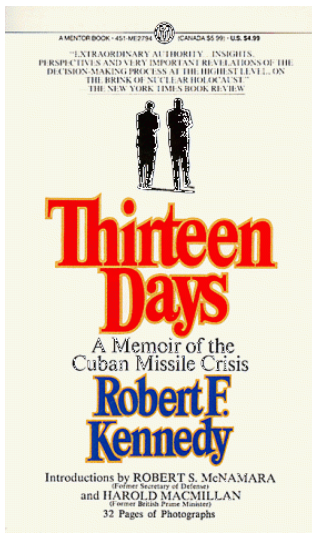


America at Risk - Exposure to Soviet Missiles in Cuba

Image online, courtesy the John F. Kennedy Library and Museum.

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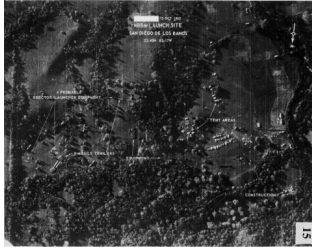
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Thirteen Days - by Robert F. Kennedy

Image of book cover, online courtesy Amazon.com.

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Medium Range Ballistic Missile Launch Site in Cuba

Image online, courtesy the National Security Archive, George Washington University.

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MRBM on Parade in Russia

Image online, courtesy The National Security Archive, George Washington University.

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Soviet Missile Sites in Cuba

Map image online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.

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THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

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Desegregation Riots at Ole Miss, 1962

Universal Newsreel footage, online courtesy U.S. National Archives.

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