



## The 50th Anniversary of the Cuban Missile Crisis

Dr. Gary E. Weir, NGA Chief Historian

On September 2, 1962, the Soviet Union and Cuba jointly announced that the former would send military aid to Fidel Castro's Caribbean island. The Kennedy administration paid close attention to the Castro regime. Would the Russians pay sufficient attention to Kennedy's swift warning that the Soviet Union should not introduce offensive missiles into Cuba?

On October 16 1962, Kennedy discovered a dangerous Russian deception. The surface to air missile sites discovered via photo interpretation days earlier now emerged as merely defensive components of Medium-Range Ballistic Missile and Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missile installations under construction in Cuba. Analysis quickly demonstrated that the specific missiles involved, the SS-4 and SS-5 models, could reach all of the continental United States with nuclear warheads, with the exception of the Pacific Northwest. These were not defensive weapons.

Once the photo interpreters at the National Photographic Interpretation Center discovered the missiles, the president had to decide on a strategy. In spite of the seeming provocation, the Kennedy decided against massive military action and elected to impose a naval quarantine on the island, demanding the removal of the missiles under supervision by the United Nations.

By October 21, the president finalized his quarantine plans and scheduled a televised address to the nation for October 23. After arranging a full briefing via NPIC Director Art Lundahl for former President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Kennedy sent senior representatives to major allies to brief them on the situation and his intentions. As the Army and Marines prepared at the president's behest for possible invasion if the primary plan failed, Kennedy turned to Chief of Naval Operations Adm. George W. Anderson to enact and enforce the quarantine.

The story of just how the opposing forces resolved the Cuban missile crisis includes backroom diplomacy, the loss of a brave Air Force U-2 pilot, erratic messages from Soviet Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev, appeals from the armed forces on both sides for military action, and the daily brinkmanship of missile sites in Cuba under accelerated construction.

An informal pledge to remove antiquated American Jupiter missiles from Turkey along with a guarantee that the United States would not invade Cuba ultimately led the Soviet leadership to submit completely to Kennedy's demand that they remove their missiles and offensive weaponry under a U.N. verification regime. As Secretary of State Dean Rusk noted, "We were eyeball to eyeball and I think the other fellow blinked."

