

CHAPTER
17

Section 4

GEOGRAPHY APPLICATION: REGION

The Cuban Missile Crisis

Directions: Read the paragraphs below and study the map carefully. Then answer the questions that follow.

In 1962, the world narrowly escaped nuclear holocaust during the Cuban Missile Crisis. The United States and the Soviet Union faced each other in a dispute over Soviet placement of nuclear missiles in Cuba, 90 miles off the coast of Florida.

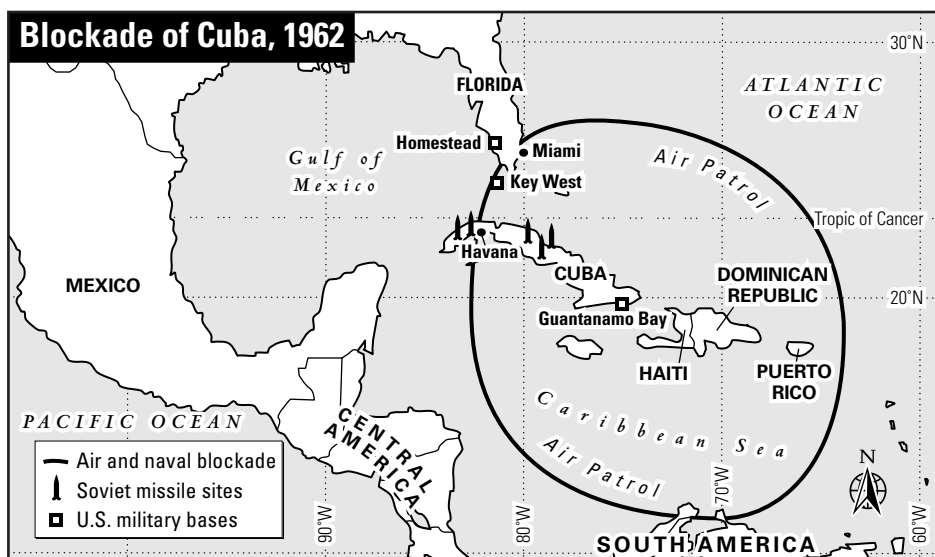
There are several possibilities why the Soviets placed nuclear missiles in Cuba. First, the missiles could protect Cuba from possible U.S. military aggression. Second, the Soviets would gain a strategic advantage on the United States in case of global nuclear war. Finally, the missiles would counter the U.S. installation of missiles in Turkey, near Soviet territory, in 1959.

The U.S. government had an idea Soviets wanted to place missiles in Cuba for some time. However, it was not until August 29, 1962, that a U-2 spy plane confirmed this to President John F. Kennedy. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara proposed three courses of action for the United States. First, it could try to resolve the problem diplomatically by discussing it with the Soviets and the Cubans. Second, it could form an air and naval blockade around Cuba to prevent further shipments of mis-

siles. Finally, it could order an air strike to destroy the missiles and then invade Cuba.

On October 22, Kennedy announced a blockade of Cuba. The United States would seize “offensive weapons and associated matériel” that the Soviets were delivering to Cuba. After six tense days, Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviet leader, agreed to halt further shipments of missiles and to dismantle the existing ones in Cuba. He agreed to this only after Kennedy promised not to invade Cuba. Khrushchev also wanted the U.S. missiles removed from Turkey. In formal negotiations, Kennedy refused but then informally agreed to remove them and did so.

Documents released 35 years later reveal that, unknown to both U.S. and Soviet leaders, Soviet field commanders in Cuba had complete authority to fire their missiles. In addition, U.S. military officials undertook several secret sabotage missions in Cuba, and an American aircraft accidentally strayed into Soviet airspace at the height of the crisis. Any of these situations could have triggered a nuclear war.



Interpreting Text and Visuals

1. Why do you think the U.S. government wanted to remove Soviet missiles in Cuba? _____

2. Describe the area of the U.S. blockade. _____

3. According to the map, how many military bases did the United States have in this area? _____

4. What are some of the reasons for the Soviet placement of missiles in Cuba? _____

5. What options did the United States have to counter the Soviet build-up of missiles in Cuba?

6. What were some of the unforeseen situations that might have started a nuclear war in 1962?

7. Why do you think Kennedy decided to remove U.S. missiles from Turkey? _____
