

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Hour: \_\_\_\_\_



## DBQ 9: COLD WAR AND THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS, 1962

### Historical Background

For 13 days, the Soviet Union and the United States were on the brink of nuclear war. Their hostility was based on the placement of nuclear missile heads in Cuba. The conflict began shortly after the unsuccessful Bay of Pigs Invasion. Nervous about another American attack, Cuba turned to the Soviet Union. In July 1962, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev and Cuban leader Fidel Castro reached an arrangement in which ballistic missiles were placed in Cuba in order to prevent American aggression. Meanwhile, in the United States, the government was denying allegations that it had been paying no heed to the placement of nuclear missiles 90 miles away from Florida. To confirm that the Soviet Union and Cuba were indeed a threat, an American U-2 plane captured aerial photographs of various launch sites. As a response, the United States established a military blockade around Cuba. This tactic was used to stop the Soviet Union from bringing nuclear missiles into Cuba. In addition, the United States wanted the Soviet Union to disassemble the current weapons and send them back home. After several excruciating days of negotiating, Khrushchev and President John F. Kennedy came to a decision. The Soviets would remove their ballistic missile heads from Cuba in exchange for the United States promising to never invade Cuba. In addition, the United States would remove weapons they had placed in Italy and Turkey. The threat of nuclear war was subdued.

**SECTION 1** **QUESTION: How was the Cuban Missile Crisis a catalyst for probable nuclear war?**

The following documents will examine how the Cuban Missile Crisis was a catalyst for probable nuclear war. Analyze each document carefully, and answer the question or questions that follow.





Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Hour: \_\_\_\_\_

### Document A



Range Map for the Cuban Missile Crisis

1. Explain what the red circles on the map represent.

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2. How does this map illustrate a global threat?

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Hour: \_\_\_\_\_

### Document B

...We have unmistakable evidence that a series of offensive missile sites is now being built on that Island... Cuba has been made into an important strategic base by the presence of these long-range offensive weapons of sudden mass destruction. This is an open threat to the peace and security of all of the Americas. Our objective must be to prevent the use of these missiles against this or any other country. We must secure their withdrawal from the Western Hemisphere... I call upon Chairman Khrushchev to halt and eliminate this secret and reckless threat to world peace.

John F. Kennedy's Speech to the American People, 1962

1. According to John F. Kennedy, what "evidence" has been gathered?

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2. How does Kennedy offer a solution to this conflict?

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Hour: \_\_\_\_\_

### Document C



Soviet Ballistic Missile in Moscow, c. 1959-1962

1. What threat does possession of ballistic missile heads pose for the rest of the world?

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2. Who are the people pictured in the upper right-hand corner of the photograph? How are these figures connected to the Cuban Missile Crisis?

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3. Is a nuclear threat still possible in our current society? Why or why not?

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Hour: \_\_\_\_\_

**Document D**

Our purpose has been to help Cuba, and no one can challenge the humanity of our motives aimed at allowing Cuba to live peacefully and develop as its people desire. You say that Cuba worries you because it lies at distance of ninety miles across the sea from the shores of the United States. However, Turkey lies next to us... Do you believe you have the right to demand security for your country and the removal of such weapons that you qualify as offensive, while not recognizing the right for us?

Letter from Khrushchev to Kennedy, October 26, 1962

1. Explain the Soviet Union’s reasoning for providing assistance to Cuba.

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2. According to Khrushchev, why was the United States worried about Cuba?

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3. How does Khrushchev use Turkey to show that the United States was hypocritical?

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Hour: \_\_\_\_\_

### Document E



Fidel Castro and Nikita Khrushchev Hug, 1961

1. How did an alliance between Fidel Castro and Nikita Khrushchev affect the world?

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Hour: \_\_\_\_\_

## Document F

Late tonight R. Kennedy invited me to come see him. We talked alone.

The Cuban crisis, R. Kennedy began, continues to quickly worsen. We have just received a report that an unarmed American plane was shot down while carrying out a reconnaissance flight over Cuba. The military is demanding that the President arm such planes and respond to fire with fire.

“The USA can’t stop these flights, because this is the only way we can quickly get information about the state of construction of the missile bases in Cuba, which we believe pose a very serious threat to our national security. But if we start to fire in response—a chain reaction will quickly start that will be very hard to stop. The same thing in regard to the essence of the issue of the missile bases in Cuba. The USA government is determined to get rid of those bases—up to, in the extreme case, of bombing them, since, I repeat, they pose a great threat to the security of the USA. But in response to the bombing of these bases, in the course of which Soviet specialists might suffer, the Soviet government will undoubtedly respond with the same against us, somewhere in Europe. A real war will begin, in which millions of Americans and Russians will die. We want to avoid that any way we can, I’m sure that the government of the USSR has the same wish.”

Dobrynin’s Cable to the Soviet Foreign Ministry, October 27, 1962

1. After the loss of an American reconnaissance plane, what had the American military requested of the president?

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2. Summarize Robert Kennedy’s view of destroying the nuclear missile bases in Cuba. Use evidence from the passage to support your answer.

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Hour: \_\_\_\_\_

### Document G



U-2 Reconnaissance Photograph of Cuba

1. Explain what the U.S. observed in this photograph.

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2. How did this situation affect the Soviet Union? Cuba? The United States?

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Hour: \_\_\_\_\_



## Document H

I should like you to consider, Mr. President, that violation of Cuban airspace by American planes could also lead to dangerous consequences. And if you do not want this to happen, it would be better if no cause is given for a dangerous situation to arise. We must be careful now and refrain from any steps which would not be useful to the defense of the states involved in the conflict, which could only cause irritation and even serve as a provocation for a fateful step. Therefore, we must display sanity, reason, and refrain from such steps.

Letter from Khrushchev to Kennedy, October 28, 1962

1. What warning does Khrushchev give about continued flights over Cuba?

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### SECTION 2

**ESSAY TOPIC: How was the Cuban Missile Crisis a catalyst for probable nuclear war?**

