Dear Jordan and Karuna,

As mentioned in my last letter to you, this week we start on the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962.

Very briefly in a nutshell (joke, when have I ever told you about any historic event BRIEFLY?!) the Cuban Missile Crisis was a confrontation between the USA and the USSR over the Russian ballistic missiles stationed in Cuba. Although the entire crisis only lasted for two weeks, it was the closest the world came to full-scale nuclear war during the entire duration of the Cold War.

After it became known that American ballistic missiles were stationed in Italy and Turkey, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev and Cuba’s leader Fidel Castro came to an agreement to place nuclear missiles on the island of Cuba. This was a direct threat to the US as these missiles, if fired, could have reached every major US city within twenty minutes (look at the map on page 115 of your textbook to see what I mean).

When this was reported to President [John F. Kennedy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_F._Kennedy), he convened a meeting of the nine members of the [National Security Council](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Security_Council) and five other key advisers in a group that became known as the [Executive Committee of the National Security Council](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Executive_Committee_of_the_National_Security_Council) (EXCOMM). After consultation with them, Kennedy ordered a naval blockade on October 22 to prevent further missiles from reaching Cuba. The US announced it would not permit offensive weapons to be delivered to Cuba and demanded that the weapons already in Cuba be dismantled and returned to the Soviet Union.

After several days of tense negotiations, an agreement was reached between Kennedy and Khrushchev. The Russians would dismantle their offensive weapons in Cuba and return them to the Soviet Union, and the United States agreed that it would dismantle all US-built [Jupiter MRBMs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PGM-19_Jupiter), which had been deployed in Turkey. When all offensive missiles and [Ilyushin Il-28](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ilyushin_Il-28%22%20%5Co%20%22Ilyushin%20Il-28) light bombers had been withdrawn from Cuba, the blockade was formally ended on November 21. The negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union pointed out the necessity of a quick, clear, and direct communication line between the two superpowers. As a result, the [Moscow–Washington hotline](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moscow%E2%80%93Washington_hotline) was established. A series of agreements later reduced US–Soviet tensions for several years until both parties began to build their nuclear arsenals even further.

As you can see, this stand-off was just another example of the type of one-upmanship prevalent between the two superpowers during the Cold War. Neither side wanted to be seen as the one who backed down, neither side wanted to lose face, and neither side was overly concerned with how closely on the edge of an all-out world war they were scuffling. Keeping in mind what we have learnt about how many times over the entire planet could have been destroyed by the nuclear warheads stockpiled in both nations, it is truly frightening to think that the world escaped total annihilation by the thinnest of margins in 1962.

Your outcome task from this topic will be a comparison of the two speeches given by then-President John F. Kennedy, one from September of 1962, just before the missile crisis unfolded, and the other one from the following year, after disaster had been averted and, one can almost assume, all but forgotten. As I mentioned to you before, I’m not too concerned with what format you choose to do your comparison in. It was originally meant to be a poster, but feel free to suggest another medium that is more suitable to our current situation.

So, long story short (told you it wasn’t going to be brief, haha!), have a read through Chapter 4 in your textbook, feel free to do additional research as needed, and then prepare your comparison of the two Kennedy speeches on pages 112 and 122 in your book. Do you feel that his tone and his outlook have changed significantly between September 1962 and June 1963 or are there common thoughts and ideas in both speeches? What reasons do you think there might be for the differences and/or similarities? What do the things Kennedy says in both speeches say about him as a man and as a leader? What of his responsibility towards not just the people of his own country but the population of the entire world?

You will have this week and next week to work on this task. Please email me, and email me lots! I miss our classroom discussions, and I want to hear your thoughts on all the aspects of this topic. Anything that strikes you as important, ridiculous, unbelievable, significant…tell me about it.

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Talk to you soon!

Elisabeth