

DWIGHT EISENHOWER

(1890–1969, P. 1953–1961)

It was clear in 1952 that the nation was looking for a new kind of leader, one who was experienced in international affairs, had a quiet, unassuming type of personality, who understood military affairs, and was not a Democrat. The leader chosen fit all those qualities and more; he was "Ike" Eisenhower.

Eisenhower was born in Texas but was raised in Abilene, Kansas. His father was a mechanic at a creamery, and the family lived in the poor part of town. When Dwight was a boy, he had blood poisoning in his leg, and the doctor wanted to amputate it. Dwight told his brother, Edgar, to stand at the door and keep the doctor from cutting off his leg. The leg improved in time, and Dwight learned how important willpower was.

Eisenhower entered West Point in 1911. He wanted to play football there, even though he was not a very large young man. He injured his knee while playing and could never play again. He graduated from West Point in 1915. He was then stationed in Texas, where he met Mamie Doud, whom he married in 1916. Most of his early jobs in the army entailed being assistants to others with higher rank. He worked for the assistant secretary of war; he then went to the Philippines as an assistant to General Douglas MacArthur. In 1940, he was named chief of staff of the Third Division. Army men found him likeable, dependable, and able, but they paid him little notice. Then in 1941, General George Marshall saw him as a potential leader and picked him to be his assistant.

By 1942, Eisenhower was the commanding general of the European Theater of Operation in World War II. He was given the job of leading the invasion of North Africa, then Sicily, and Italy. Most important of all, he was named the Supreme Commander of Allied Forces and was in charge of the invasion of Normandy on D-Day. He led his men to victory over Germany. After the war, Eisenhower was named army chief of staff and was in charge of cutting the size of the army.

Eisenhower wrote a book, *Crusade in Europe*, which was published in 1948, and he then served as president of Columbia University for two years. In 1950, he was picked to lead NATO by President Truman. With the war in Korea going badly, both parties wanted Eisenhower as their presidential nominee in the 1952 election. Eisenhower decided he was a Republican.

The election of 1952. The Democrats chose Governor Adlai Stevenson of Illinois as their candidate. He was a very thoughtful, competent man, but he often spoke above the heads of his audience. The two leading Republican candidates were Eisenhower and Senator Robert Taft from Ohio. The more conservative Republicans preferred Taft, but they were overrun by the more liberal Republicans who felt Eisenhower could give the party a great victory in November. The Republican mottoes were: "It's time for a change" and "I like Ike." Eisenhower carried all but nine states, and he won the election 442–89 in electoral votes. For the first time since 1933, a Republican was living in the White House.

EISENHOWER AS PRESIDENT (first term). Eisenhower appointed business leaders to most jobs in his administration. Each was responsible for running his or her department, and



was required to send reports to him on what was happening. Whenever anything went wrong, it was the cabinet member, not Eisenhower, whom the public blamed. The key people around the president were John Foster Dulles, secretary of state; Charles Wilson, secretary of defense; and Sherman Adams, his chief of staff. Many problems arose during his first term in office.

The most pressing problem was ending the war in Korea. Eisenhower fulfilled a campaign promise by going to Korea and meeting officers and enlisted men there. The peace talks came to an end after months of arguing. The new line between North and South Korea was very close to where it was when the war started, wavering along or near the 38th parallel.

At home, Senator Joe McCarthy conducted hearings into charges that Communists had sneaked into high positions. People were brought before his committee, and many were accused of being Communists; because of that, many in government, the movie industry, and even Congress were ruined. Eisenhower said he didn't want to get into the gutter with McCarthy. However, after McCarthy accused the army of hiding Communists, a new set of hearings attacked McCarthy himself. He was censured (officially criticized) by the Senate in 1954; he died in 1957.

One of Eisenhower's first appointees was Earl Warren as chief justice of the Supreme Court. In 1954, the Supreme Court handed down the *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* decision, which said segregation in education violated the 14th Amendment of the Constitution. Some states began allowing black and white students to attend school together, but others refused, which led to trouble in southern schools for years to come.

Another way African-Americans were segregated was on buses. In 1956, Rosa Parks, a black woman, was tired after a day at work and refused to give up her seat to a white man on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama. She was arrested, and blacks refused to ride city buses until they were treated more fairly. The leader of the bus boycott was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In 1956, the Supreme Court ruled that segregation was banned from buses as well.

Other significant issues were addressed. Taxes were cut, more people were made eligible for Social Security, student loans were given to college students, and the building of interstate highways began.

Two serious international problems occurred simultaneously. Egypt decided to take over the Suez Canal, which was owned by British and French investors. The United States was disturbed when paratroops were sent to the Canal by the British and French governments. At the same time, the Russians sent troops into Hungary to put down a revolt against the unpopular Communist government.

Eisenhower's health also became a great concern. He suffered a major heart attack in 1956 but was recovering by the time of the election. In 1956, he easily defeated Adlai Stevenson again.

EISENHOWER AS PRESIDENT (second term). The president faced a number of serious issues during his second term, some at home and some from troubles around the world.

The most serious problem at home was ending segregation of schools in some southern states. Eisenhower did not approve of segregating students, but he thought a gradual approach was best; rushing people into doing something they opposed only brought more friction. On the other hand, he knew the Constitution had to be enforced.

In 1957, nine black students were to be admitted to Little Rock, Arkansas's, Central High School. Riots broke out, and the governor called up the National Guard to keep the black

students from attending. After the U.S. District Court ordered the Guard removed, there was little protection for the black students when they came back to school. Riots broke out; Eisenhower federalized 10,000 Arkansas National Guardsmen and then sent in 1,000 paratroopers to keep order.

Progress was very slow, and stubborn opposition caused trouble in many places in the South. When Eisenhower left office, there were still no African-Americans attending school with whites in four states, and less than two percent attended with whites in seven others.

Foreign affairs. The most dangerous situation for all Americans was the Cold War. The threat of a war using atomic and hydrogen weapons terrified some people so much they built bomb shelters behind their homes and stocked them with food and water.

In 1957, the Russians launched the world's first man-made satellite, *Sputnik I*. The United States was stunned. The following year, NASA was formed to begin a strong U.S. space program, and the federal government put money into school science programs.

The Russians felt they had the upper hand now, and they told the West it must give up Berlin in six months or the Russians would turn it over to the East Germans. The NATO members joined together and made it clear they were not going to turn over Berlin. The Russian leader, Nikita Khrushchev, realized they meant business and started a public relations effort to show that Russia was a peaceful nation. Khrushchev came to the United States and other western nations as well to show his good intentions.

A summit meeting of world leaders was scheduled for Paris in 1960. Just before the summit took place, an American U-2 spy plane was shot down 1,200 miles inside Russian territory. Eisenhower said he knew about the flight, and Khrushchev broke up the summit.

A new problem was developing closer to home. The Communist Fidel Castro took over in Cuba, and he let the United States know he was going to take over U.S.-owned businesses in Cuba. Eisenhower allowed Cuban refugees to be trained to overthrow Castro.

Eisenhower remained popular to the end of his terms in office, and the United States remained strong and prosperous.



The Eisenhower Years

In 1952, as the Korean War raged on, Americans faced another presidential election. Dwight Eisenhower, known simply as “Ike” to the public, soon became the leader in the presidential race. Ike had been one of America’s greatest generals in World War II and remained very popular with the American people. Eisenhower promised that if elected, he would go to Korea to find a solution to the stalemate. He easily won the election.

The Korean War had become a **stalemate**. The last two years of the war are known as “The Battle of the Hills” because of the terrain the men fought in. Large battles were fought for small chunks of territory around the 38th parallel. (See map on page 85.) When Eisenhower visited, he saw that the options were limited. American troops had fought well, but they faced a dedicated enemy defending well-entrenched battle lines. To win the war, the United States would have to take drastic action. Eisenhower did not wish to use nuclear weapons. He did not wish to directly attack China or the Soviet Union. He chose instead to negotiate a settlement. The negotiations took a long time, and thousands of men continued to fight and die as they continued. On July 27, 1953, the Korean War finally ended. Korea remained divided at the 38th parallel.

Eisenhower served two terms as president and led America to prosperous times. The era of McCarthyism with its suspicion of communist infiltration was soon ended, and American life returned to normal. America experienced great economic growth. Cold War tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union were reduced when Joseph Stalin died on March 5, 1953. Like Truman, President Eisenhower believed that Stalin was a tyrant who could not be trusted. Stalin’s successors, Georgi Malenkov and Nikita Khrushchev, introduced some **reforms** in the Soviet Union and seemed less threatening to American leaders. Khrushchev even visited the United States to promote good will in 1958. Although the nuclear arms race continued, war between the two superpowers no longer seemed **inevitable**.

There was, however, still conflict between the superpowers. Reforms initiated by Khrushchev in the Soviet Union gave encouragement to the people of Eastern Europe. Many Eastern Europeans wished to become independent of Russian control. In 1956 the people of Hungary revolted against communist rule, but Soviet troops were sent to crush the rebellion. Thousands of Hungarians were killed. Although Eisenhower sympathized with the rebels, there was little that the United States could do to help them without starting a major war. Hungary remained under communist control, with a government closely tied to the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union continued to seek to expand its influence. In the Middle East, the countries of Egypt and Syria received large amounts of Soviet aid. These countries developed close relations with the Soviet Union as a result. The people of Indochina



Dwight Eisenhower

(Vietnam) continued to revolt against their French rulers, and the rebels received large amounts of aid from the Soviet Union and China. Eisenhower countered these moves by providing for a strong national defense backed by equally strong **rhetoric**. Eisenhower talked tough, but desired to avoid a major war.

The Soviet Union also took the lead in space exploration during the Eisenhower years. On October 4, 1957, the Soviet Union launched the world's first **satellite**, named *Sputnik*. One month later they sent up another satellite, which carried a dog named Laika. The launch of the satellites shocked Americans. American leaders feared that the Soviet Union had developed superior rocket technology. They feared that the Soviets would turn the technological advances to military purposes. In 1958 the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) was established to advance America's exploration of space. Soon, America was also sending satellites into orbit. Within a decade, America surpassed the Soviet Union in space exploration capabilities.

Think about It

1. Stalin's death greatly changed relations between the United States and the Soviet Union. Americans perceived the Soviet Union to be less of a threat after Stalin died. Often, we form our opinions of other nations by what kind of people we perceive their leaders to be. Do you think it is fair to judge a nation and its people by the type of leader they have? Why or why not?
2. When the Hungarians revolted against their communist leaders, many people in America wished that the United States could help the Hungarians. Eisenhower chose not to, knowing that if the United States assisted the Hungarian rebels it could lead to war with the Soviet Union. Did we have an obligation to help the Hungarians? Was helping Hungary worth the risk of war? Why or why not?
3. The launch of *Sputnik* shocked the American people. Americans had always believed that the communist countries couldn't develop technologically advanced products. People never imagined that the Soviet Union could actually be *ahead* of the United States in space exploration. How do you think people reevaluated their opinions of the Soviet Union after *Sputnik* was launched?

Dictionary Exercises

Find definitions to the following words:

1. Stalemate
2. Reform
3. Inevitable
4. Rhetoric
5. Satellite

JOHN F. KENNEDY

(1917–1963, P. 1961–1963)

On a cold January day in 1961, millions watched on television as John F. Kennedy, the youngest man ever to be elected president, took his oath of office. In his inaugural address, he challenged the nation and world: "And so, my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country. My fellow citizens of the world: ask not what America can do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man."

The tensions and struggles of that time have been forgotten by those who remember the glitter of youth during those years. The Kennedy years have often been called "Camelot," when the young new king and his beautiful wife presided over the Round Table, and brave knights went out to slay dragons. There were certainly battles fought and much drama, but good did not always win.

John Fitzgerald Kennedy was born on May 29, 1917, in Brookline, Massachusetts, to a life in politics. On his mother's side, his grandfather had been mayor of Boston, in the U.S. House, and had been defeated in a Senate race by Henry Cabot Lodge. His father, Joseph, was very active in politics as well as business, and he had been appointed to head the Securities and Exchange Commission by President Roosevelt; Joseph Kennedy was later named ambassador to Great Britain. All the Kennedy sons were groomed to become successful in politics. Their names were Joe Jr., John, Robert, and Edward (Ted).

John Kennedy graduated from Harvard in 1940. While his record was not spectacular, his senior thesis, *Why England Slept*, was published. The thesis indicated his belief that weakness produces a dangerous foreign policy.

During World War II, Joe, Jr. was killed in a bombing run over Germany. John had volunteered for the navy and was given command of PT-109, a patrol torpedo boat. It was rammed by a Japanese destroyer. Even though he was badly injured, John towed a crew member five hours to an island, using a strap he held in his mouth. The crew was rescued four days later, and after his recovery in the hospital, Kennedy was discharged with a Navy and Marine Corps Medal.

In 1946, Kennedy ran for the U.S. House from a Boston district and easily won. In 1952, he challenged Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., for his Senate seat and won by a small margin. He never fit into the Senate mold, but his sights were set on a higher office. In 1956, he tried for the vice presidential nomination but was defeated. However, his effort helped his name to become well known across the nation. While he was recovering from a spinal operation in 1956, he wrote *Profiles in Courage*, which won the Pulitzer Prize.

The election of 1960. In 1960, Kennedy was able to overcome other challengers for the Democratic nomination: Hubert Humphrey and Lyndon Johnson. For vice president, he chose Lyndon Johnson, Senate majority leader from Texas. His Republican opponent was Vice President Richard Nixon. Although Nixon did not personally use the religion issue, many Protestants



feared a Catholic would follow orders from the Pope. Kennedy said his duty was to the nation, not to the church.

During the campaign, the first televised debate between the candidates took place, and Kennedy seemed more impressive than Nixon to many people. When the votes were counted, Kennedy had barely won 303–219 in electoral votes. A shift of 23,000 votes in three key states would have elected Nixon instead of Kennedy.

KENNEDY AS PRESIDENT. Kennedy aroused enthusiasm for public service among many young people. His emphasis was on getting things done, and those around him shared his enthusiasm. Among these "New Frontiersmen" as they were called were Robert MacNamara (secretary of defense), Douglas Dillon (a Republican and secretary of the treasury), Dean Rusk (secretary of state), and Kennedy's brother, Robert (attorney general). The public was enchanted with Kennedy's family, and they took countless pictures of his wife, Jacqueline, and their children, Caroline and John, Jr. The Kennedys were pictured at home wearing sweatshirts and playing touch football, as well as in formal clothes attending a concert. Articles about anyone in the Kennedy clan were often published in the United States as well as around the world.

Kennedy won many over with his big smile and clever wit. When a young person asked him how he had become a hero, he said: "It was involuntary; they sank my boat." When some protested about Robert Kennedy being named attorney general without ever having practiced law, Kennedy answered: "I can't see that it's wrong to give him a little legal experience before he goes out to practice law."

Civil rights. The most troubling domestic issue of the time was civil rights. The most prominent civil rights leader was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. His approach was peaceful, but firm. If any violence occurred during a demonstration, it would be by the opponent; therefore his actions would turn the nation against himself. The NAACP, the oldest civil rights group, was very effective in courts, winning cases against discrimination. A new group, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) used sit-ins and other means to break segregation in bus transportation and at lunch counters.

At first, Kennedy was reluctant to tangle with the southern Democrats in Congress, but where he could act, he did. He increased the numbers of African-Americans in better government jobs: 36 percent in the middle-grade jobs and 88 percent in the top-grade jobs. When CORE "freedom riders" were attacked by mobs at bus depots, 600 deputy U.S. marshals were sent to restore order. The Interstate Commerce Commission ordered segregation ended in terminals.

When the governor of Mississippi refused to admit James Meredith, a well qualified Air Force veteran, to the University of Mississippi, Robert Kennedy obtained a court order forbidding the governor to interfere. The governor ignored the order. When Meredith arrived on the campus with federal marshals, they were attacked by a mob. President Kennedy federalized the National Guard and order was restored; but by that time, two had been killed and hundreds were injured. In Birmingham, civil rights workers led by Dr. King tangled with crowds at stores and restaurants that refused to serve African-Americans. Police Commissioner "Bull" Connor used clubs, police dogs, and fire hoses to stop street demonstrations.

Kennedy's patience was running out when Governor George Wallace personally blocked blacks from entering the University of Alabama. Kennedy federalized the Alabama National Guard and forced Wallace to back down. Kennedy asked Congress for stronger civil rights laws. Civil rights leaders organized the March on Washington, which brought 250,000 to a dramatic rally at the Lincoln Memorial.

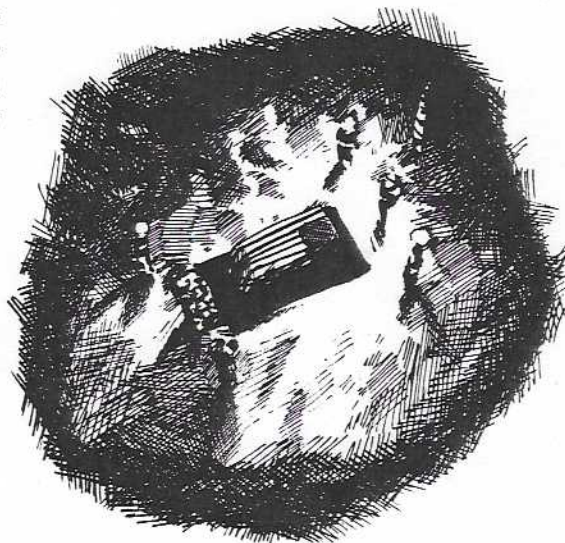
Foreign policy. Cuba gave Kennedy his greatest embarrassment as well as his greatest victory in a test of wills with Fidel Castro and Nikita Khrushchev during the Bay of Pigs invasion and the Cuban Missile Crisis. When Kennedy learned that Cuban refugees had been trained for an invasion of Cuba, he was assured by the CIA that they were ready. He gave the green light for the invasion but told them the United States would provide no aid if the attack faltered. They landed April 17, 1961, and 1,000 were captured. The invasion was a complete failure.

Khrushchev, Russia's leader, must have decided that the United States was in weak hands, and he again threatened to turn West Berlin over to East Germany. Kennedy did not budge on this issue, and asked Congress for the power to call up reserves. He then increased the number of draftees and told the United States: "We seek peace, but we shall not surrender." Instead of merely threatening, Russia built a wall around West Berlin. Kennedy sent 1,500 more troops into Berlin. The Russians backed off, and the crisis passed.

The Cold War reached a climax when in 1962, the Russians planned to put nuclear weapons on missiles based in Cuba. The missiles had a range of up to 2,000 miles, which could easily reach many of the major cities in the United States. The United States put a blockade around Cuba and threatened to search any ship within a zone around the island. The tension grew as Russian ships carrying missiles came close to the blockade, but at the last minute they were ordered to return home. To help prevent future crises, the "hot line" was installed that summer between the White House and the Kremlin.

The war in Vietnam continued despite the line that had been drawn in 1954. The pro-American South Vietnamese government was unpopular with the public there. To win the war, the United States was beginning to play a more important role. Kennedy sent well-trained troops, the Green Berets, to show the South Vietnamese army how to fight more effectively.

On November 22, 1963, while in a motorcade in Dallas, Texas, the president was shot by a gunman from the window of a six-story building. Kennedy was rushed to the hospital, and he died minutes later. His body was flown to Washington as a stunned nation watched. The gunman, Lee Harvey Oswald, was captured, but on November 24 he was shot and killed by a nightclub operator Jack Ruby. Kennedy is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.



Kennedy and Khrushchev

John F. Kennedy won a close election for the presidency in 1960. Although his term in office was tragically cut short, his leadership skills and youthful energy made him one of America's most admired presidents. Kennedy was a great believer in America's obligation to lead the world's democratic nations. A dedicated cold warrior, he considered America to be the defender of the free world. Kennedy was an inspiring speaker, especially for America's young people. He raised the American people's expectations about what they could accomplish individually and what the American people could accomplish as a nation.

Nikita Khrushchev had gradually risen to a position of power in the Soviet Union. He was among several men who aspired to lead the Soviet Union following Stalin's death in 1953. By 1957 he had defeated all of his rivals and assumed control as the head of state of the Soviet Union. Khrushchev never held the dictatorial powers that Stalin had, but he was still a very powerful man. He acted as a reformer in the Soviet government. He publicly **condemned** many of the things that Stalin had done. While the Russian people were still denied many freedoms, life under Khrushchev was better than it had been under Stalin. Although Khrushchev wished to avoid open warfare with the United States, he was a gambler by nature. When opportunities arose to increase Soviet power and prestige, he tended to act **impulsively**.

The Kennedy-Khrushchev era was a time of crisis and compromise. Although the most famous crisis during the era occurred over the issue of missiles in Cuba (discussed in the next chapter), many other issues threatened the peace. As in the past, one of the issues causing disagreement was the future of West Berlin. Located in the middle of East Germany, the city of West Berlin remained under the control of West Germany. (See map on page 84.) This rather strange arrangement had persisted since the end of World War II when American, British, and French troops occupied the western half of the former German capital city. As the Cold War evolved and the two halves of Germany were officially separated, West Berlin remained a free city within communist East Germany. The Soviet Union wanted West Berlin to become part of communist East Germany, while the United States refused to cede control of the city. The United States had always declared that they would fight to keep control of West Berlin.

While West Berlin was an issue of confrontation to the two superpowers, it presented another problem to East Germany's leader, Walter Ulbricht. Every year, thousands of East Germans were crossing the border into West Berlin, leaving communist East Germany. East Germany was soon suffering from a shortage of skilled workers. Economic conditions in East Germany were worsening, and by July 1961 a thousand people a day were leaving



John F. Kennedy

the East. In August, Ulbricht received Khrushchev's approval for a plan to erect a wall around West Berlin. On August 13, East German troops erected barbed wire barriers around West Berlin. A huge concrete and steel wall soon followed, effectively **isolating** West Berlin from the East. Khrushchev had effectively acknowledged that West Berlin would remain free, but he had made it impossible for the people of East Germany to leave. The Berlin Wall soon became a symbol of **repression**—of a people forced to accept communism.

Another trouble spot was Southeast Asia (Vietnam and Laos). Communist **insurgents** were continuing to increase their power. Many of Kennedy's advisors considered Southeast Asia to be of great strategic importance to the United States. Kennedy agreed to send military advisors to Southeast Asia, assisting the governments of Laos and South Vietnam. (See map on page 86.)

Despite their many disagreements, Kennedy and Khrushchev also found some common ground. In 1963 both leaders signed the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. Both sides agreed to discontinue testing atomic weapons in space and in the earth's atmosphere. The treaty showed that both sides were willing to negotiate and to take the first steps toward ending the arms race.

On November 22, 1963, President Kennedy was killed by an assassin's bullet while riding through downtown Dallas. His short presidency had a lasting impact on American politics.

Think about It

1. John F. Kennedy was an inspirational leader and hero, especially to the nation's young people. Can you name any leaders today who inspire the American people?
2. Imagine that you are the East German leader Walter Ulbricht and that your skilled workers are leaving the country for West Berlin. Would you build a wall around West Berlin as he did? What other methods might you use to keep skilled workers from leaving your country?

Dictionary Exercises

Find definitions to the following words:

1. Condemned
2. Impulsively
3. Isolating
4. Repression
5. Insurgents

Crisis in Cuba

Cuba is a small island nation in the Caribbean. (See map on page 84.) To most Americans, it was known as a vacation spot full of casinos and sandy beaches. For decades, it had been ruled by **corrupt** governments. In the 1950s, a variety of revolutionary groups began to rebel against Cuba's corrupt dictator, Fulgencio Batista. When Batista was finally driven from Cuba in 1959, a new government was installed by Fidel Castro, one of the revolutionary leaders. Though not yet a communist, Castro had anti-American feelings. Having always revolted against those in power, Castro resented the American dominance of Latin America. He was angered by the fact that American leaders had supported Batista instead of the revolutionaries. President Eisenhower was disturbed by Castro's anti-American attitudes. Near the end of his term as president, Eisenhower began to make plans to assist a revolt against Castro.



Fidel Castro

Castro became more radical as he increased his power. He chose to **nationalize** all Cuban property owned by American corporations. He accepted aid from the Soviet Union. He removed moderate leaders from his government. Soon, he declared that he was a communist and that Cuba would become a communist country.

In 1960 John F. Kennedy was elected president. In the presidential campaign, he had asserted that he would be tough on communism. He had stated that it was the duty of the United States to lead the fight against communism. Suddenly, the United States was faced by a communist leader in a nearby island country. In the last months of his presidency, Eisenhower had made plans to land Cuban exiles in Cuba to overthrow Castro. The leaders of the exiles expected the Cuban people to join them in the revolt. After being told of the plans, Kennedy elected to put them into action.

On April 17, 1961, the Cuban exiles landed in Cuba at the Bay of Pigs. However, instead of inspiring a popular revolt among the Cuban people, they were quickly defeated. Most of the exiles were captured by Castro's troops after a short fight. The Bay of Pigs disaster became an extreme embarrassment for Kennedy and for America. After the experience, Kennedy became more resolved to take a strong stand against communism. Castro became convinced that the United States would attempt to invade Cuba.

Castro turned to the Soviet Union for assistance. He asked them for a variety of military and economic aid. More importantly, he asked that the Soviets place nuclear missiles in Cuba to deter an American invasion. Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviet leader, carefully considered Castro's request. Khrushchev did not wish to provoke Kennedy into starting a major war, but he did want to protect his new Cuban allies from an American invasion. Khrushchev decided to send the missiles. On October 14, 1962, an American plane photographed the missiles being installed in Cuba. The discovery of the Cuban

missiles triggered what is now known as the Cuban Missile Crisis. This crisis was the closest that the world has come to having a nuclear war.

President Kennedy and his advisors reacted strongly to the news that Cuba was receiving nuclear missiles. Many options were considered, including bombing the missile sites and invading Cuba. On October 22, Kennedy made a dramatic speech on television. He announced that the U.S. navy would impose a **blockade** around Cuba to prevent any more Russian ships from bringing in missiles. He demanded that missiles already in Cuba be removed. He also warned Khrushchev against taking any aggressive action. Reports showing the range of the Cuban missiles were published. The missiles could reach most of the United States. Naturally, Americans were very concerned about this new threat.

Apparently, Khrushchev had misjudged what the American response would be. Both leaders were faced with the possibility of a devastating nuclear war. Kennedy's demands were firm. If they were not met, Khrushchev knew that the United States would probably try to destroy the missiles. If that happened, it might not be possible to avoid a major war. Several events threatened to turn the crisis into a war. On October 24, Soviet ships approached the blockade for the first time. American leaders waited tensely in Washington to see if the ships would stop or if they would try to break through the blockade. Luckily, the ships stopped. Tensions increased a second time on October 27 when a U.S. spy plane was shot down over Cuba. When President Kennedy was informed of the event, he was very disturbed. Again he considered ordering a bombing mission over the missile sites. Unknown to Kennedy, Khrushchev was also upset by the shooting. Castro, not Khrushchev, had ordered the plane to be shot down. Khrushchev feared that events were slipping beyond his control.

As tensions increased, government officials on both sides struggled to come to an agreement. Both Kennedy and Khrushchev wanted to avoid war, but both were also determined not to give in. Finally, on October 28, an agreement was reached. Khrushchev agreed to remove all the missiles from Cuba, and Kennedy promised that the United States would not invade Cuba. Although no formal **treaty** was ever signed, both sides kept their promises. By a very narrow margin, the world avoided a nuclear war.

Think about It

1. The Cuban Missile Crisis could have escalated into a nuclear war. President Kennedy was ready to fight if an agreement wasn't reached. Do you think that the disagreement over missiles in Cuba was important enough to fight a war over?

Dictionary Exercise

Find the definitions to the following words:

1. Corrupt
2. Nationalize
3. Blockade
4. Treaty