

International Baccalaureate

Extended Essay: History

To what extent was President John F. Kennedy's speech to the American public on the 22nd of October, 1962, a justifiable act of brinkmanship?

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Abstract:

After the discovery of Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba on the 14th of October, 1962, U.S President, John. F. Kennedy presented a televised speech proclaiming the enforcement of a strict quarantine on all shipments to Cuba. This historical investigation's objective was to answer the research question "To what extent was President John F. Kennedy's speech to the American public on the 22nd of October, 1962, a justifiable act of brinkmanship?" This question is worth investigating as had this historical act of brinkmanship been handled or responded to differently, perhaps the world may have already witnessed its first full-scale nuclear war.

This investigation analyzed the two dominant forms of historiography surrounding this matter of historical debate. These historiographical perspectives are the Post-Revisionist perspective, typified by John Lewis Gaddis, and the Orthodox perspective, expressed most notably by James Hershberg. The historical context (from 1959 to 1962) of the Cuban Missile Crisis was also explored in this essay to firstly, express why these two historiographical perspectives on the crisis exist, and secondly, determine which point of view is more valid. Aspects of the historical context explored include:

- * The USA's attempts to overthrow Fidel Castro's regime
- * The false assurances from Soviet representatives before the USA's discovery of the missiles
- * The absence of direct foreign threat towards the USA pre-1962

This essay concluded that President Kennedy's speech on October 26th, 1962, was only a partially justified as an act of brinkmanship. Since the missiles were deployed secretly and the USA was unfamiliar to direct foreign threats, Khrushchev must have anticipated a response from the USA after the missiles were discovered. However, President Kennedy's lack of willingness to consider that the weapons were intended to defend Cuba displays ignorance and over-reaction on the Kennedy administration's behalf.

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Table Of Contents

Abstract.....	2
Introduction.....	4
Chapter 1: Post Revisionist Perspective.....	5
* 1.1 Deteriorating Relationship Between the USA and Cuba.....	6
* 1.2 Soviet Re-Assurances of Defensive Intentions.....	8
* 1.3 Analysis.....	9
Chapter 2: The Orthodox Perspective.....	10
* 2.1 The Soviet Union’s Deception.....	11
* 2.2 Analysis.....	13
Chapter 3: Lost In Translation.....	13
* 3.1 Analysis.....	14
Conclusion.....	15
Reference List.....	17

Introduction:

The Cold War, an era of political hostility between the Soviet Union and the United States of America, took place between the conclusion of the Second World War (1945) and the collapse of the Soviet Union (1991). During the 1950's and 60's, the competitive nuclear-arms buildup of these two global superpowers culminated to a singular event in 1962 which is described by historian, Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., as the "most dangerous moment in human history": The Cuban Missile Crisis (Chomsky, 2012). Prior to this historical event, developments in the Cold War such as the enforcement of the Berlin Blockade (1948), deployment of US Jupiter missiles in Turkey and Italy (1961) and the infamous Bay of Pigs invasion (1961), contributed towards the growing tension between the USA and the USSR. On the 14th of October, 1962, the U.S Central Intelligence Agency verified that covert Soviet nuclear missiles were stationed in Cuba, a Soviet-allied, communist nation situated 90 miles from the United States coastline. This discovery instigated thirteen days of political tension and negotiations between these two nations and their leaders, American President, John F. Kennedy and USSR leader, Nikita Khrushchev. In the words of historian, John Swift, at this point in history "World War Three seemed imminent and across the globe terrified people prepared for Armageddon" (Swift, 2002).

On October 22nd, 1962, President Kennedy presented a speech describing the nuclear arms buildup in Cuba. The televised speech reported to the American public the US perspective of the crisis and also revealed the USA's plan to establish "a strict quarantine on all offensive military equipment under shipment to Cuba" (Kennedy, 1962). However, historians have very different interpretations of this act of brinkmanship's justifiability. This matter of historical debate has led to the important question "To what extent was President John F. Kennedy's speech to the American public on the 22nd of October, 1962, a justifiable act of brinkmanship?" This essay will analyze the different perspectives surrounding this question, leading to the author's own conclusion.

Some historians, such as post-revisionist, Gaddis, argue that Kennedy's reaction to the Cuban Missile Crisis was unnecessary. This is because the Cuban nuclear weapons may have been installed by the Soviet Union purely to defend Cuba's security and government. During the crisis, President Kennedy was presented with this explanation, however, he rejected it. Other historians, such as Ernest R. May, Philip D. Zelikow believe that Kennedy's response to the Cuban Missile Crisis was justified. This is because Kennedy and his administration felt that both Soviet representatives and Khrushchev himself had deceived the USA. Kennedy also expressed his definition of the word "offensive weapon" in this speech, and in doing so, depicted the Cuban weapons as being a threat to U.S security.

Chapter 1: Post Revisionist perspective.

In his address to the U.S public on the 22nd of October, 1962, President Kennedy emphasized the "offensive" characteristics of the Cuban missiles. In fact, the word "offensive" was repeated 13 times throughout this speech. For example: "A series of offensive missile sites" and "clearly offensive weapons of sudden mass destruction." Kennedy also described the weapons as "a deliberately provocative and unjustified change in the status quo" (Kennedy, 1962). As these extracts of the speech reveal, the USA was insistent on expressing to the American general public that the missiles were intended to serve an undeniably offensive purpose. However, did the historical context of the Cold War at this point in time truly justify Kennedy's selective judgement of the missiles?

Post-revisionist Historian, John Lewis Gaddis believes that Kennedy's response to the Cuban Missile Crisis was unnecessary. Gaddis's opinion is expressed in his historical recount "The Cold War: A New History", published in 2005. This account was written to presenting a persuasive explanation of why these historical events occurred. The date of publication, 2005, is valuable as this modern date provided Gaddis with more hindsight and access to newly opened archives (especially when compared to Orthodox Cold War historians). The author himself is award

winning, and renowned in his field. However, it is also important to note that this historical source is limited by its purpose to persuade. This results in only Gaddis's limited perspective of the crisis being presented, when this subject is open to different interpretations.

1.1 Deteriorating relationship between the USA and Cuba.

In the words of Gaddis, "Khrushchev intended for missile deployment to spread revolution throughout Latin America" (Gaddis, 2005). An understanding of what motivated Khrushchev to provide Cuba with missiles and why Castro was willing to agree to this controversial plan, will be explored in this section of the essay, providing a deeper insight into the Post-Revisionist historiographical perspective of the crisis.

In January of 1959 the formation of the Cuban government of Fidel Castro was celebrated by many Americans who associated Cuba's prior leader, Fulgencio Batista, with corruption and cruelty (Stein, 2009, p. 33). However, the U.S government remained determined to limit Castro's acts to very specific U.S approved guidelines. Historian, John Swift, suggests that Castro viewed this intervention as "a barrier for Cuba overcoming it's domestic issues" (Swift, 2002), motivating the Cuban leader to halt the USA's interference in Cuban affairs. Castro achieved this by nationalizing U.S owned land and businesses (including factories, casinos and oil refineries) within Cuba. In response to Castro's provocative actions, President Eisenhower on October 19th, 1960, announced an order banning the import of Cuban goods (including sugar) into the United States (Prentzas, 2012). The nation which previously assured "a market for half of Cuba's sugar crops and two-thirds of its foreign exchange" (Falcoff, 1994, p. 111), was no longer consuming Cuban products. Assistance from the Soviet Union was able to soften the negative economic toll this had on Cuba. However, as historian Swift (2002) described, Cuba's "steadily growing ties with the USSR made Castro appear to be a growing threat to US hegemony in the Western hemisphere, which could not be tolerated"

The USA feared that Cuba possessed the potential to act as a major Soviet intelligence platform “in America’s own backyard”, making the Eisenhower administration very nervous (Holland, 1993). During the 20th century, the US public was paranoid towards the communism, fearing that the left-wing ideology threatened the “American ways of life” (Levin, 1971, p. 29). The extent of this paranoia can be seen through the US “Red Scare”, an era of US history during the late 1940’s and early 1950’s in which hysteria, fear, repression and McCarthyism developed in response to the potential threat of Communists within the USA (Red Scare, 2014). The USA’s desire to contain communism outside of the US is exhibited through examples, such as the announcement of the “Truman Doctrine” in March, 1947, which proclaimed the United States would provide aid to nations attempting to resist communism. One such example of this US aid was towards democratic South Korea, during the Korean War (1950-53).

Castro’s resistance against the U.S.A resulted in U.S President Eisenhower ordering the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to orchestrate a series of attacks on Cuba in attempt to overthrow Castro’s regime (Swift, 2007). Cuban exiles (trained by the CIA) demolished Cuban sugar mills and other economic targets. Several published reports illustrated a significant increase in CIA supervised attacks during the winter of 1959-1960 (Chomsky, 2004, p. 80). These aggressive acts provoked Cuba to seek diplomatic assistance from the UN in July of 1960. It has been said that the targeted nation came forward with records of approximately twenty attacks (Chomsky, 2004, p. 81). The outcome of this meeting was an assurance from Henry Cabot Lodge, the U.S Ambassador, that “the United States had no aggressive purpose against Cuba” (Chomsky, 2004, p. 81).

These false words of assurance were followed by the Bay of Pigs invasion of 1961, an attack in which CIA-trained Cuban refugees were sent into Cuba to incite a political uprising to deposit Cuba’s communist government. As John Swift argues, the president during this period, John F. Kennedy was so obsessed with the idea of communism spreading, that it impaired his ability to

make logical decisions (Swift, 2007). The U.S President was determined to keep the White House's involvement in the engineering of this attack strictly covert. However, the invasion's failure publicly humiliated the Kennedy administration and intensified Castro's fear of a future invasion from the USA.

The embarrassment of the Bay of Pigs invasion did not stop US attempts to remove Castro from his position of power. Primary sources, such as a CIA summaries of the objectives of Operation Mongoose, (a CIA program intended to forcibly remove Castro), highlight the CIA's intent to initiate revolution via establishing bases for guerrilla action, sabotaging Castro's military and spreading anti-Castro propaganda to reduce popularity towards the Cuban regime. Reports also reveal attempts to assassinate Castro and significant members of his government. Although the exact amount is disputable, some sources record that during Kennedy's term, the CIA attempted to assassinate Castro 42 times (Condradt, 2012).

1.2 Soviet Re-Assurances of defensive intentions:

Krushchev's desire to supply Cuba with protective armaments was re-affirmed on multiple occasions. Cuban President Dorticós' address to the United Nations General Assembly in October of 1962 is one such example. In this meeting the Cuban representative affirmed "If we are attacked, we will defend ourselves. I repeat, we have sufficient means with which to defend ourselves" (Blight, Allyn & Welch, 2002, p. 493). Furthermore, on September 11th, 1962, a Soviet government statement was made, clarifying the defensive nature of any weapons within Cuba. In the representative's words: "The Soviet Government has responded to the Cuban Government's request to help Cuba with arms...such arms and military equipment are intended solely for defensive purposes." (U.N Security Council, 1962)

1.3 Analysis:

President John Kennedy proclaimed in his speech that the missiles stationed in Cuba were “clearly offensive”. However, as the aforementioned evidence implies, these weapons may have been deployed to serve a purely defensive purpose for Cuba. The aggressive acts of the USA towards Cuba, such as the destruction of Cuban targets and attempts to undermine Castro and his regime, contributed towards Castro’s desire to receive defensive aid. The intention of the weapons to defend has also been supported by the aforementioned statements of Soviet and Cuban spokesmen. Looking at the Cuban Missile Crisis through this frame of mind, President Kennedy’s speech on October 22nd, 1962 should be labelled as an unjustified act of brinkmanship.

On a side note, it is important to question how accurately Kennedy’s language captured his judgement of the missiles. The purpose of the speech was to persuade the US public to support the dangerous policy which the USA was about to pursue. Because of this purpose, one is left to consider whether Kennedy’s labeling of the weapons (as “inherently offensive”) accurately captured his conviction of the weapons, or whether this was merely a dysphemism which enabled Kennedy to cunningly express a threatening, persuasive message. The limitations of this source should be acknowledged when we make the assumption that Kennedy’s claims accurately reflected this political figure’s thoughts and emotions.

John Lewis Gaddis, believes that the missiles were placed in Cuba to protect the nation from future attacks from the United States. Gaddis argues that Khrushchev’s rationale behind the missile deployment was that defending Cuba would be defending a valuable element of the communist network (Gaddis, 2005). Should the U.S have succeeded in their attempts to overthrow the government of Fidel Castro, it would have been a significant strike against the communist revolution worldwide. Gaddis believes what Khrushchev intended was to spread revolution throughout Latin America, and saw Cuba as his portal to achieving this objective. After extensive

research, Historian Stern has arrived at the conclusion that the USA's aggressive acts towards Cuba greatly contributed towards the onset of the Cuban Missile Crisis (Schwarz, 2013).

A point to take into consideration when analyzing Cold War historiography is the advantageous access Post-Revisionist historians have to more historical sources compared to Orthodox historians. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the historical archives in Russia were accessible for the first time for study and analysis. Thus, post-revisionist historians would have had access to more historical evidence to base their interpretation of history upon. Traditionalists would not have had such advantageous access these previously unavailable materials, which is a limitation of their perspective.

However, one large problem with the Post-Revisionist perspective of Kennedy's speech is the question: "Why didn't the Soviet Union provide Cuba with less provocative weapons to defend itself?". Whilst Gaddis is adamant that Khrushchev provided weapons out of concern for Cuba's defense, he also states that in doing so, Khrushchev must have anticipated some form of negative, U.S response if the weapons were discovered (Gaddis, 2005). Khrushchev had the option to install less provocative, shorter range missiles in Cuba to prevent an invasion of American troops. This would have arguably protected Cuba and its revolution whilst not initiating a US response as severe as that of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Chapter 2: The Orthodox Perspective

The "Orthodox" perspective of the Cuban Missile Crisis, often associated with historians such as James Hershberg, Theodore C. Sorensen and Arthur M. Schlesinger, labels President John F. Kennedy's response to the discovery of missiles in Cuba as justified. These historians view the quarantine which Kennedy enforced as the "optimal" strategy to the intolerable Soviet Missiles in Cuba. The Orthodox interpretation of the Cuban Missile Crisis was the most dominant form of

Cold War historiography before Revisionist perspectives began to emerge in the 1960's (Nashel, 1999).

In the words of John F. Kennedy on October 22nd, 1962, "This action [deployment of covert nuclear weapons] also contradicts the repeated assurances of Soviet spokesmen, both publicly and privately delivered... that the Soviet Union had no need or desire to station strategic missiles on the territory of any other nation" (Kennedy, 1962). Kennedy was adamant that the missiles should be removed from Cuba because the characteristics of the missiles were offensive (not defensive), they were deployed covertly, and the weapons violated the honesty of the Western Hemisphere (Weldes, 1999).

These arguments have been used by Orthodox historians to rebut Post-Revisionist claims that the Soviet missiles were intended solely to defend Cuba. Why would the Soviet Union attempt to conceal the missiles if their purpose was well justified? Was Kennedy's labeling of the missiles as offensive actually quite reasonable in this historical context?

2.1 The Soviet Union's Deception

According to a 2007 summary of the crisis titled "Soviet Deception in the Cuban Missile Crisis" written by member of the American CIA, James H. Hansen, in 1962 the USSR launched "Operation Anadyr", a mission designed to deploy nuclear missiles on Cuban soil under a "cloak of secrecy". Several restrictions were placed upon those involved in the deployment of the Cuban Missiles to assure the mission remained covert. For example, troops involved were prohibited from engaging in conversation with outsiders via letters, telegrams and phone calls (Hansen, 2007) It has also been reported by this source that the ships carrying the missiles to the Caribbean Island would often make false official records about their destination, tonnage, and contents to further ensure secrecy (Hansen, 2007).

The purpose of this source was to provide members of the general public, with a persuasive insight into the Soviet Union's deceitful acts during the Cuban Missile Crisis. This source is of value because the publisher of the website is a large government organization, with access to information which other organizations may not have such an advantageous insight to. The modern publication date of this source is another advantage as it would have enabled the author access to a larger array of sources when compared to, for example, historians publishing a similar summary in the mid-1900's. However, this source's author is also a very large limitation. Since this is written and published by a US government organization, purposeful omission of particular facts, censorship of content, and patriotic/political bias are all aspects of this source which limit its validity. These limitations need to be taken into consideration when attempting to reveal the truth when it comes to the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Soviet Ambassador, Dobrynin, assured The US President on September 4th, 1962, that before the US elections, there would not be anything that would aggravate tensions between the two countries (Gooch, Perlmutter, 1982). It was also guaranteed by Dobrynin, on behalf of Khrushchev, that there would be no ground to ground offensive weapons placed in Cuba (Gonzalez, 2002 p. 117). A report published by the Soviet Union on September 11th, 1962, stated that the Soviet Union had no desire to place any "repulsive", "aggressive" nuclear weapons into third-party nations (such as Cuba) (U.N Security Council, 1962 September 12) However, it is important to also note that shortly following this statement, the USSR did claim that if war was unleashed, the Soviet Union would provide defensive missiles to any "peace-loving state".

President John F. Kennedy specifically quoted extracts of this report in his address to American public in his October 22nd speech. He labelled Dobrynin's assurances as "false". Multiple meetings after September 11th resulted in the Soviet Union yet again denying intent to place offensive weapons in Cuba (Hansen, 2007). When it was revealed that Khrushchev lied to the USA, this placed Kennedy in a very difficult situation, as the Kennedy administration were faced

with the question: If the US failed to stand up to Khrushchev in such a outright example of deception, what would he try next? (Weldes, 1999, p. 23).

Analysis:

Because Khrushchev attempted to conceal the Cuban missiles, the U.S.A was adamant that the Soviet Union planned to utilize the weapons in an offensive manner, not a defensive one. Kennedy utilized such evidence to justify his speech on October 26th, 1962.

If as Post-revisionist Gaddis claimed, Cuba's missiles were designed to serve a defensive purpose, why was Khrushchev so determined to keep the missiles undisclosed? Authors such as Ernest R. May and Philip D. Zelikow have addressed this question, believing had of Khrushchev announced his intentions or privately warned Kennedy that he planned to base missiles Cuba, the crisis would have unfolded differently, or, there may have been no crisis at all.

James Hershberg, a professor of History at George Washington University explains that the motive behind the missile deployment was to give "the Americans a dose of their own medicine" (Schachter, McCarthy, 2012, (2.25 seconds)). Hershberg believes Khrushchev placed intermediate range nuclear missiles in Cuba in an attempt to resist the emerging lead the United States was developing in the deployment of strategic missiles. Looking at the Cuban Missile Crisis from this perspective, Kennedy was justified to address the American public after the discovery of these perceived offensive weapons of mass destruction.

Chapter 3: Lost In Translation

At the beginning of his speech, Kennedy described the characteristics and capabilities of the missiles based in Cuba. Two distinct types of installations were described: medium-range and intermediate-range ballistic missiles. The combination of these missiles was reported as being "capable of striking most major cities in the Western Hemisphere". Kennedy concluded his

description of the missiles with the statement: “large, long-range, and clearly offensive weapons of sudden mass destruction” (Kennedy, 1962).

As this description illustrates, President Kennedy viewed strategic weapons and strategic warfare as offensive, and therefore, he would not accept Soviet missiles, especially those deployed in Cuba, proclaiming them to be defensive. This definition very much differs from Khrushchev’s who via a telegram addressed to President Kennedy on the 26th of October, 1962, stated in this telegram “These missiles are a means of extermination and destruction. But one cannot attack with these missiles...only people, troops, can attack. Without people, any means however powerful cannot be offensive” (Kennedy, 2002, p. 313). As these examples reflect, cultural differences played a substantial role in the Cuban Missile Crisis. Historians such as Sergei Khrushchev have observed the importance of this factor, coming to the conclusion that as a result of cultural differences neither Kennedy nor Khrushchev could predict how their actions would be perceived by the opposition (Immell, 2011).

Analysis:

When questioning why President Kennedy reacted how he did to the discovery of nuclear weapons directed towards the USA, it is important to take the historical context of the crisis into careful consideration. Khrushchev’s son, Sergei Khrushchev, described the Cuban Missile Crisis as alternatively a “psychological crisis”. The USA’s geographical location shielded it from major border-related threats and conflict. Excluding events such as its arguable peak of vulnerability, the Japanese attack of Pearl Harbor during the Second World War, the USA had not experienced many circumstances in which its territory had been directly targeted. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union during the 20th century alone had been exposed to three major wars, all of which negatively impacted the nation. The lack of enemies on US borders, is argued by Sergei Khrushchev, to have been the cause of the nations exaggerated response to the discovery of missiles in Cuba (Immell, 2011). The role of cultural differences in the crisis is further conveyed

through how these two leaders possessed very different definitions of the term “offensive weaponry”. Whilst the weapons may have been intended by Khrushchev to be purely defensive, this definition did not align with the Kennedy administration, who perceived the characteristics of these long range, extremely dangerous missiles as intended to serve an offensive purpose. Is it possible that as Sergei Khrushchev argues, cultural difference was the cause of the onset of the Cuban Missile Crisis? That something out of either leaders control may have been the cause of the world coming so close to the brink of nuclear war? If so, how is it possible to label Kennedy’s actions as either justified or unjustified?

Conclusion:

On October 26th, 1962, U.S President, John F. Kennedy, conducted an astounding act of brinkmanship as he informed the world of the Soviet Union’s deployment of “clearly offensive” nuclear missile bases in Cuba. Through analyzing the events which influenced President Kennedy to conduct this act, it has been revealed that this act of brinkmanship was only partially justified.

This act of brinkmanship was unjustified because the President did not take into consideration other probable explanations for the missiles’ deployment. As the critical analysis from historians Gaddis and Stern argue, the USSR provided Cuba with these weapons to defend the nation. The USA’s attempts to undermine Cuba’s communist revolution throughout the early 1960’s justified Cuba’s need for defensive weapons. In addition to this, on multiple occasions, the USSR and Cuban diplomats emphasized that if weapons were to be deployed in Cuba, their purpose would be strictly to defend. Despite these multiple indicators, President Kennedy mistook these defensive weapons for offensive ones.

Alternatively, as historians Hershberg and authors Ernest R. May and Philip D. Zelikow suggested, the USSR’s determination to conceal the nuclear missiles supported Kennedy’s fixed mindset that the weapons were of a threatening nature, hence, justifying this act of brinkmanship.

The discovery of Khrushchev's plans to mislead America via false, deceiving statements throughout early September and October strongly influenced how Kennedy perceived the missiles. Finally, the characteristics of these nuclear missiles and their damage potential played a key role in Kennedy's desire to immediately dismantle the nuclear weapons. Through the differing applications of the word "offensive" used by the Soviet Union and the United States, it appears that these two nations defined this extremely important term very differently to one another.

As Sergei Khrushchev argued, the Cuban missile crisis can be viewed as psychologically inflicted crisis. Kennedy's intolerance of communism, and the unfamiliarity of having the USA directly threatened greatly influenced the United States' "dramatic" reaction to the Cuban Missile Crisis. Whilst Swift condemns John F. Kennedy for letting the attitude towards communism impair his good-judgement, those such as Gaddis exhibit empathy towards the USA, scolding Khrushchev's lack of consideration for the US's predictable negative reaction to the crisis. Taking this evidence and varying historical analyses into consideration, it has been revealed that President Kennedy's act of brinkmanship of October 26th, 1962, was only a partially justified. Khrushchev couldn't have expected the USA not to react to the crisis, especially due to the covert characteristic of the missiles and the USA's lack of historical direct foreign threats. However, Kennedy's lack of consideration for alternate explanations for the nuclear weapons, such as the viewpoint of Castro, was a significant mistake made by the American President during this critical period of Cold War history.

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John F. Kennedy - America's first Catholic president. Kennedy had many things to do during his short presidency. He helped African Americans in their fight for equal rights. He also sent US advisors to Vietnam because the Communists threatened to take control of it. JFK promised to put a man on the moon before the Soviets. His main problem, however, was Cuba. In 1961 the Soviet Union put missiles, which could attack the US, on the island. When Kennedy threatened to start a war, the Russians removed their missiles. On November 22, 1963 JFK's presidency ended when he rode in his open car through On September 12th, 1962, President John F. Kennedy ascended a podium in front of a large crowd gathered at Rice University in Houston, Texas, and prepared to give a speech that would dramatically shape the direction of the United States' efforts over the following decade. Indeed, his speech would mark the beginning of a bold new era for humanity; an era of exploration and innovation in outer space. President Kennedy needed to forge a new direction for the United States, one that would excite and energize the American public and reestablish American eminence in global affairs. And so, on that day in September, 1962, he did just that, powerfully declaring that the United States would "go to the Moon before the decade was out." John Fitzgerald Kennedy was born May 29, 1917 in Brookline, Massachusetts to Rose Elizabeth Fitzgerald Kennedy and Joseph Kennedy Sr. He was the second of nine children born into the prominent Irish Catholic family. Nine children? 22. A Field of Heavyweights. After Fidel Castro overthrew the American-backed Cuban President General Fulgencio Batista, Eisenhower gave the go-ahead to the CIA in early 1960 to train 1,400 Cuban exiles to eventually lead an invasion of Cuba. The plan was handed down to JFK after he was elected. Under his sanction, the invasion took place on April 17, less than two months after he became president.