

The Arms Race

The Cold War continued, and so did the arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union. An **arms race** is a race to build more and better weapons than your enemy.

Both the United States and the Soviet Union built atomic bombs. These bombs were also known as nuclear (NU-klee-er) weapons. The Soviet Union had exploded its first nuclear weapon in 1949. Then, in the 1950s, scientists in both countries developed hydrogen bombs, or H-bombs. Each H-bomb was 1,000 times more powerful than the atomic bombs that had been used to end World War II.

In preparation for a Soviet nuclear attack, Americans built underground shelters. Students of the 1950s and 1960s were taught how to “duck and cover” beneath their desks in case of a bombing. Local governments stored up medicine, food, and supplies for their citizens should a war break out on American soil.

Many Americans worried about the race to build such powerful weapons. “Where will it lead us?” asked President Eisenhower. Still, American leaders felt that it was important to

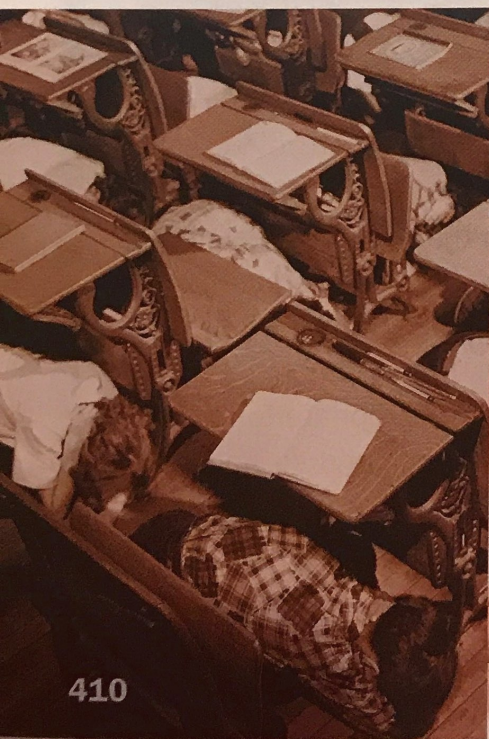
stay ahead of the Soviet Union in the arms race. A great deal of government money went to defense contractors who provided the weapons to the military. The United States Navy and Army grew rapidly. The strategy was simple—if the United States had more powerful weapons than the Soviets, the Soviets would be afraid to attack. Therefore, the United States continued building nuclear weapons, hoping they would never be used.

REVIEW Why did the leaders of the United States feel it was important to stay ahead in the arms race? **Summarize**

The Cuban Missile Crisis

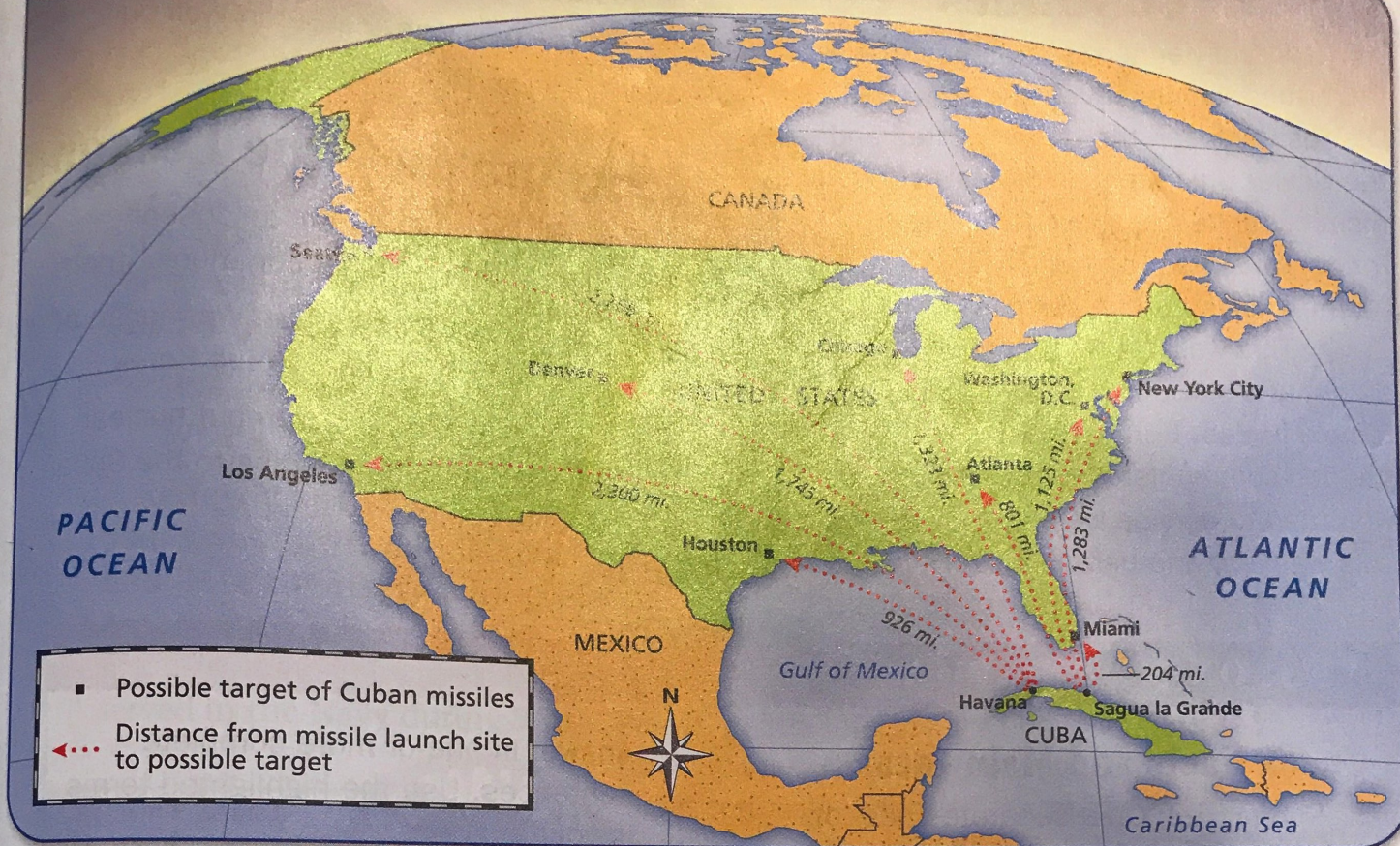
In 1959 Fidel Castro led a successful revolution in Cuba. With the support of the Soviet Union, Castro formed a communist government. Cuba became the first communist nation in the Western Hemisphere. This alarmed many Americans, including **John F. Kennedy**, who was elected President in 1960. You will read more about Kennedy in the Biography on page 413. Like Truman and Eisenhower before him, Kennedy spent much of his time dealing with Cold War conflicts.

► During the 1950s schools held “duck and cover” drills (left) and some families built bomb shelters (below).





Range of Soviet Nuclear Missiles



► The Soviet Union set up several nuclear missile sites in Cuba. The two largest sites are shown.

MAP SKILL Use a Map The range of the nuclear missiles set up in Cuba was 300–3,400 miles. Which important United States cities could be reached by the missiles?

The most dangerous of these conflicts was the **Cuban Missile Crisis**. In October 1962 American spy planes discovered that the Soviets were setting up nuclear missiles in Cuba—just 90 miles from the coast of Florida. On the night of October 22, Kennedy went on television to tell Americans the frightening news. He insisted that the Soviets must remove their missiles from Cuba. He declared that the United States Navy was going to block Soviet ships from bringing any more weapons to Cuba.

For the next few days, people all over the world watched the news with increasing fear. As Soviet ships approached Cuba, it looked like the world's two superpowers were moving closer and closer to nuclear war. Finally, the Soviet ships turned back. The Soviets agreed

to remove their missiles from Cuba.

The crisis was over. However, both American and Soviet leaders realized how close they had come to fighting a disastrous war. In a speech in Washington, D.C., Kennedy spoke of the importance of working toward peace. Of the Americans and Soviets he said:

“Our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children’s future.”

REVIEW Why did people watch the news with fear during the Cuban Missile Crisis?

Main Idea and Details