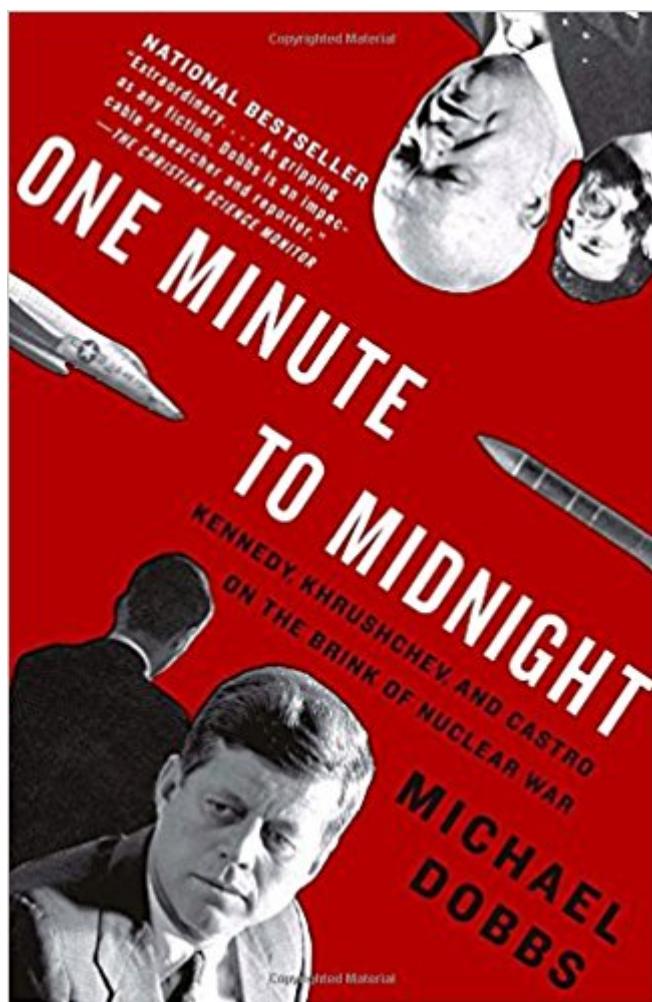


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# One Minute To Midnight: Kennedy, Khrushchev, And Castro On The Brink Of Nuclear War



## Synopsis

In October 1962, at the height of the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union came to the brink of nuclear conflict over the placement of Soviet missiles in Cuba. In this hour-by-hour chronicle of those tense days, veteran Washington Post reporter Michael Dobbs reveals just how close we came to Armageddon. Here, for the first time, are gripping accounts of Khrushchev's plan to destroy the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo; the handling of Soviet nuclear warheads on Cuba; and the extraordinary story of a U-2 spy plane that got lost over Russia at the peak of the crisis. Written like a thriller, *One Minute to Midnight* is an exhaustively researched account of what Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. called "the most dangerous moment in human history," and the definitive book on the Cuban missile crisis.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Washington Post reporter Dobbs (*Saboteurs*) is a master at telling stories as they unfold and from a variety of perspectives. In this re-examination of the 1963 Bay of Pigs face-off between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R., Dobbs combines visits to Cuba, discussions with Russian participants and fingertip command of archival and printed U.S. sources to describe a wild ride that "contrary to the myth of Kennedy's steel-nerved crisis management" was shaped by improvisation, guesswork and blind luck. Dobbs's protagonists act not out of malevolence, incompetence or machismo. Kennedy, Khrushchev and their advisers emerge as men desperately seeking a handle on a situation no one wanted and no one could resolve. In a densely

packed, fast-paced, suspenseful narrative, Dobbs presents the crisis from its early stages through the decision to blockade Cuba and Kennedy's ordering of DEFCON 2, the last step before an attack, to the final resolution on October 27 and 28. The work's climax is a detailed reconstruction of the dry-mouthed, sweaty-armpits environment of those final hours before both sides backed down. From first to last, this sustains Dobbs's case that crisis management is a contradiction in terms.

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The 1962 Cuban missile crisis is probably the single most analyzed episode of the cold war. In the past decade, declassified American and Russian documents have proved that a nuclear exchange was even closer than most scholars had previously realized. Dobbs, a reporter for the Washington Post, has used those sources as well as numerous new ones gleaned from two years of research in the U.S., Cuba, and Russia. Although nothing presented here will change the overall view of the crisis, Dobbs presents new and often startling information that again confirms that the thirteen days in October brought the world to the edge of an unprecedented cataclysm. Dobbs spends little time describing the characters of the key players, but he does convey a sense of men under immense stress as events threaten to outstrip their ability to cope with them. This is a well-written effort to explain and understand our closest brush with nuclear war. --Jay Freeman --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Reading more like a political thriller, this book will put into perspective those few weeks in October 1962, how the world was on the brink of annihilation, even more so than anyone realized. With the release of much declassified information, the truth of this chapter of history is revealed.

Misinterpretation and outright deception belonged to many whose "memories" became the accepted truth since that time, until now. Even more disturbing is that, since much of the truth was suppressed by Kennedy's inner circle, decisions by future presidents were influenced by their belief of what those false "memories" were. Had the truth been known, and some people had not influenced the "truth" for their own personal gain, the U.S. and the world would today be a very different place. I can't help but applying the lessons of this book to the events taking place this Labor Day weekend 2013, namely the decisions being made now on whether to attack Syria, because of their possible use of poison gas on their own people. Will an alternate truth be made available 50 years from now, based on future declassified material? I came away with a much-enhanced respect for John Kennedy and Mikhail Khrushchev, and for any world leader in a position to make those literally

earth-shattering decisions. A good book to order with this would be Sheldon M. Stern's, "The Cuban Missile Crisis in American Memory: Myths versus Reality", published in 2012. Don't buy any older "histories" of this episode, as it would be obsolete.

This is an outstanding story about the Cuban missile crisis. This is real life reporting and a novel could not replicate the actual and potential terror of how this story was evolving. In short--it was worse than any of us living during the crisis even imagined. Most of the US officials were unaware of the degree that Cuba was armed with nuclear weapons. It is an important read, at this time, demonstrating how an informed and thoughtful POTUS guided us away from a nuclear confrontation. Fortunately, the Soviet leadership shared similar insights.

This book reads like a novel. It is more exciting than any novel can be because it is based on truth and a story so frightening that it compels you to read it through to the last page, and so you must. Every page has detailed information, much of which is new, and the plots and subplots reel you in for the ride of a book reader's lifetime. I promise you that you won't put this one down. The story of this book is familiar to all that are alive. In the fall of 1962, the leadership of the Soviet Union with the complicity of Fidel Castro decided to secretly install offensive nuclear weapons on the island of Cuba. They were successful until U-2 over flights of Cuba in October produced detailed photographic evidence of the Soviet plan. The details of the story have been in conflict for almost 50 years as different authors have molded the story to fit their opinions. If you read Harvard historians, John Kennedy (JFK) comes out very much the hero. Other authors have different slants. It is my contention that Michael Dobbs in One Minute to Midnight has come the closest to the historical truth that we are going to see for many years. The MECHANICS of the Book Dobbs has decided to write the book in a chronological sequence during the 13 day sequence of what is now called the Cuban Missile Crisis. This is a chilling minute by minute account. This is neither a memoir, nor what would be termed a scholarly study. Dobbs has attempted to humanize the story, and show the people involved on both sides. It is perhaps true that the human side of this story has never been told, and certainly not to the extent you are witnessing here. As the 13 days progresses, more and more space is devoted to the events of each day. Thus only a chapter is devoted to the first day of the crisis. A great deal of space is devoted to October 27, 1962, which is now known as Black Saturday in the Kennedy White House. During that day, Fidel Castro sent a telegram to Nikita Khrushchev enthusiastically pushing the Russian Premier to unleash the Soviet arsenal against America. By the end of that day, JFK and the Russian Premier would come to terms in a deal that would give up

American missiles in Turkey for the dismantling of the Soviet missiles in Cuba. What happened during the 13 days is absolutely spellbinding, and is perhaps the most important event to happen in human history. War with the USSR would have meant the nuclear destruction of all mankind. Those that did not perish immediately would have died along with most of civilization from the resultant fallout which would have lasted for years. The question we should all ask ourselves is what were they thinking? Here are just a few of the things you will learn from this incredibly well written and vital book:<sup>\*</sup> Unbeknownst to the United States the Soviet Union had brought tactical nuclear weapons to Cuba. They were prepared to use them against an American invasion force. This means that one weapon could easily wipe out 15,000 to 30,000 American soldiers. At least one such weapon was within 15 miles of America's Guantanamo Bay naval base, and positioned for use.<sup>\*</sup> Certain Russian submarines were equipped with nuclear tipped torpedoes. One torpedo could wipe out an American aircraft carrier or even most of the fleet accompanying a carrier. One such Russian sub was forced to surface due to American depth charges. The Russian captain could have used his weapons and unleashed a nuclear exchange.<sup>\*</sup> Dobbs is probably the first writer to actually inspect the hundreds of cans of raw photographic footage that has been declassified. Some of this footage is in conflict with the memories of some of the participants of the crisis and Dobbs goes through the discrepancies.<sup>\*</sup> It is now deemed to be archaic to believe that there was no direct communications link between the White House and the Soviet Union. At times it took as long as 18 hours for JFK to dictate a communication and for it to be delivered to Khrushchev and translated into Russian.<sup>\*</sup> Diplomats in the Russian Embassy in Washington had to send a telegram by calling for a bicycle messenger when communicating with Moscow.<sup>\*</sup> Our naval ships in the waters off Cuba sometimes required hours to decipher orders from Washington. What pours through this book is the overriding notion that at any time small events had the capability of ballooning up into a major crisis that by itself would trigger a total nuclear exchange. The Joint Chiefs were constantly edging towards invasion and war. JFK was successful in holding them back but knew that at some point, he might lose control over the situation, and events. The same was true for Khrushchev. The Cuban Missile Crisis has been war gamed hundreds of times, and more often than not the result has been WAR. In the early 1990's a series of joint conferences were held with participants from Russia, Cuba, and America attending to find out what they could about the crisis. During an early conference it became public that there were scores of Russian missiles already active in Cuba that the US did not know about. They were under local control of the Soviet army technical missile crews. This means that if the US had invaded Cuba it is understood that these crews would have launched their missiles at America causing a full retaliatory response by the US against Russia's homeland. The unthinkable would

have become reality.CONCLUSION:If you have a love for history that is extraordinary in a book that is about as interesting as anything you will ever read than pick up a copy of One Minute to Midnight, and be prepared to be mesmerized. Just start on it early in the day because you might not want to go to sleep that night. Thank you for reading this review.Richard C. StoyeckMy Own THOUGHT:I would like to leave you with this thought that has troubled me for years. I have discussed it with history professors at Harvard who are fully conversant with the crisis. None have ever given me anything but stares, so perhaps you can give it a try.Why when JFK first became alert to the installation of the weapons did he NOT CONFRONT Khrushchev privately and demand the removal or else war? By confronting the Premier publicly he boxed Khrushchev into a corner which humiliated the Russian leader and could have easily led to war. Our weapons throughout this period were overwhelming. It simply makes no sense given the historical circumstances. Have a great read.

This book provides an outstanding, in-depth account of the Cuban missile crisis, one that confirms some of the mythology we believe about it and repudiates other aspects of the mythology. One that provides a great deal of detail that has never seen the light of day before -- the result of the author's diligent efforts to interview the remaining players, large & small, to read now unclassified materials from the US, Soviet Union & Cuba. Perhaps the most important contribution of the book is to show how the crisis has been misused by subsequent generations, and political leaders, in their own explanations of policy. Secondarily, the book shows that we were closer, rather than farther (at least in my reading) to a nuclear conflagration, than legend suggests. And finally, the book shows the real chaos that is present in these kinds of situations, frankly all kinds of fateful decisionmaking situations. I highly recommend this book.

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