

Cuban Missile Crisis Letters To Be Revealed, Sources Say

1962 Kennedy-Khrushchev Correspondence

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The U.S. and Russian governments are preparing to release key letters between President John F. Kennedy and Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev sent in the aftermath of the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, U.S. and private sources said yesterday.

It was not clear whether the release would be simultaneous. "We're in the final stretches," said a U.S. official, commenting on the preparations for making the documents public.

The official, asking not to be identified, said the Kennedy letters may contain some clarifications of the agreements Washington and Moscow reached in late October 1962 when the crisis was resolved.

No other conflict during the post-World War II era brought the superpowers closer to nuclear war than the crisis that grew out of the Soviet decision to deploy nuclear-armed weapons to Cuba, 90 miles off the coast of Florida. A week of unprecedented international tension ended when Khrushchev agreed to

dismantle Soviet missiles in Cuba in return for a promise by Kennedy not to invade Cuba. Kennedy also agreed to call off a U.S. blockade of the island.

At issue are several Kennedy letters to Khrushchev that were sent between Nov. 3 and Dec. 14, 1962. One official said some of the letters have remained classified because they contain references to Berlin, a major point of U.S.-Soviet conflict during the Cold War period.

Officials said the government's decision to release the Kennedy letters is linked to a long-planned conference on the missile crisis that the Cuban government is holding in Havana starting next Thursday. U.S., Soviet and Cuban officials who participated in the crisis are scheduled to attend.

Philip Brenner of American University has been seeking release of the Kennedy letters for some time, and officials acknowledged that his efforts influenced the administration's decision to make them public.