

valuable intelligence on the anemic state of the Soviet nuclear program. For all of Khrushchev's bravado, the Soviets had only six operational ICBM missiles by 1960.<sup>129</sup> The Eisenhower Administration badly fumbled their response by initially asserting that the plane was conducting meteorological research but had strayed off course.

Giddy for the chance to expose Washington's blatant lie, Khrushchev paraded **Gary Powers**, the plane's pilot who had miraculously survived the crash, before the international media. In a massive propaganda coup for the Soviets, Powers publicly apologized after admitting that he had engaged in espionage for the CIA. Powers was convicted of espionage by a Soviet court and imprisoned for nearly two years. The incident cast a pall over U.S.-Soviet relations, spoiled the Four Powers Summit, and led Khrushchev to steer Soviet foreign policy in an even more confrontational direction. At the UN in October, Khrushchev interrupted a speech critical of the Soviet Union by repeatedly banging his shoe on the table in front of him.

### ***The 1960 U.S. Election***

Eisenhower was already a lame-duck president at the time of the U-2 incident, which amplified Cold War tensions in an election year. Striking a hawkish tone, the Democratic candidate, a young Senator from Massachusetts named **John F. Kennedy**, stridently criticized the Eisenhower Administration's management of the Cold War. Kennedy's main line of attack centered on the erroneous claim that a growing "missile gap" threatened America's national security. Kennedy's Republican opponent, Vice President Nixon, was not accustomed to having to defend his anti-communist credentials or prove his foreign policy toughness. In televised debates, both candidates endorsed a robust and muscular Cold War strategy, and in truth little separated the two men's assessment of the state of world affairs.

In November, Kennedy narrowly defeated Nixon in one of the closest presidential elections in American history. At forty-three-years-old, Kennedy was the youngest president elected in history and the first Catholic to occupy the nation's highest office. Kennedy inherited a series of simmering conflicts across the globe, which demanded immediate attention. Kennedy, aware that many viewed him as a foreign policy novice, boasted that his administration represented America's "best and brightest."



*John F. Kennedy casts his ballot in the 1960 presidential election. Kennedy narrowly defeated Richard Nixon in one of the closest presidential elections in American history.*

Kennedy quickly clashed with Khrushchev when the Soviet leader, eager to test the new president's will, reissued his previous Berlin ultimatum at a tense summit held in Vienna in June of 1961. Kennedy held firm and asked Congress for an additional \$3.2 billion in defense spending.<sup>130</sup> Later that summer, with Moscow's blessing, the East Germans began construction of a permanent barrier in Berlin that would finally stem the tide of refugees fleeing to the West. The **Berlin Wall** dashed hopes for German reunification but also crudely removed a perennial source of conflict. Outside of Europe, turmoil continued unabated. In Cuba, Congo, and Vietnam, Kennedy was forced to manage complex events set in motion by his predecessor while confronting the closest brush with nuclear war of the entire Cold War.

## **NEW FLASH POINTS**

### ***Cuba***

#### **The Cuban Revolution, 1959**

Since the nation's independence in 1898, the Caribbean island of Cuba, had remained closely linked politically,