

## Section B

# The Cuban Missile Crisis

### Background to the Cuban Crisis

After the increase in tension that had taken place throughout the 1950's, the cold war was now firmly underway. The Americans believed firmly that it was necessary to their security to stop the expansion of communism wherever it occurred. During the 1960's this led them to the brink of a nuclear war over the stationing of Soviet missiles on Cuba. Cuba is an island country that is only 100 miles away from America.

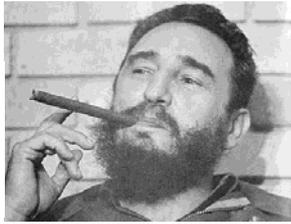
### The USA's role in Cuba

In 1898 the Americans had helped the Cubans win independence from Spain. This meant that the Americans played a major part in Cuban affairs ever since. American companies had large shares in Cuban companies especially in mining and agriculture. In 1934 the Americans helped the Cuban military Officer Batista come to power. His government was corrupt and repressive and many Cubans saw it as a symbol of American power.

### The Cuban Revolution

In 1959, Batista was overthrown by Fidel Castro. Castro promised to help the poor and began appointing communists to his government. He became a communist himself. In 1960 Castro signed a treaty with the Soviet Union in which Cuban sugar would be swapped for Soviet machinery and economic aid.

**Castro**  
Leader  
of Cuba



**Kennedy**  
President  
of the  
USA



**Kruschev**  
Soviet leader



### The USA reaction

The USA were extremely unhappy with this because they were worried that its companies might lose a lot of money and the Soviets could put weapons on Cuba to threaten the USA.

In 1960 the USA stopped buying sugar (Cuba's main crop). In retaliation, Cuba nationalised (took over) all American owned companies. In 1961 America broke off diplomatic relations with Cuba.

### The Bay of Pigs – April 1961

In 1961 the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) organised Cuban exiles (Cuban people who had left because of Castro) to invade Cuba to try and bring back Batista. The CIA trained them and President Kennedy supported it secretly. The idea was that the Cuban people would rise up against Castro and help the exiles once they landed.

A force of 1400 exiles invaded at the Bay of Pigs in April 1961 but were met by 20 000 Cuban soldiers who quickly put the invasion down. They were very well armed and trained partly due to Soviet help. The exiles and America had also underestimated Castro's popularity and grip on power in Cuba.

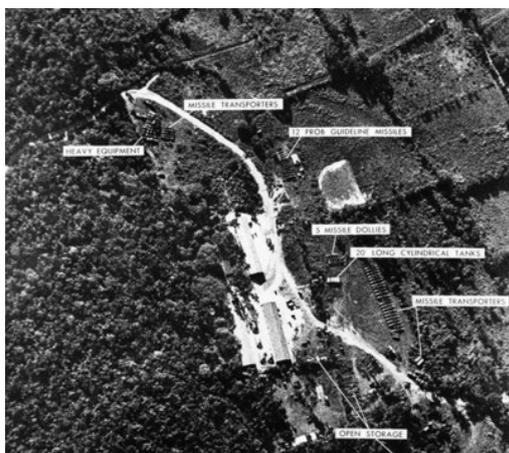
### Consequences of the Bay of Pigs

This invasion convinced Castro that he needed more help from the Soviet Union. He asked the Soviet Union publicly for help with weapons to defend Cuba. In September 1961 Khrushchev announced that he would send weapons to Cuba to help it and within months Castro had many of the latest Soviet weapons.

### Why did the Soviet Union decide to put nuclear weapons on Cuba?

America was worried that the Soviet Union would station nuclear weapons on Cuba. Khrushchev told Kennedy that he wouldn't put nuclear missiles on Cuba. However, he had decided that although he would not give nuclear weapons to the Cubans, he would put Nuclear Weapons on Cuba secretly if he could do. He did this for a number of reasons.

1. The Americans had more missiles and nuclear weapons than the Soviet Union. The Americans also had nuclear missiles in Turkey which had a border with the Soviet Union. By putting nuclear missiles on Cuba, Khrushchev would be narrowing the gap in weapons between the Soviet Union and American.
2. He might be able to use them as a bargaining tool. If he agreed to remove Soviet missiles from Cuba then he might be able to get some concession out of the USA.
3. To defend a fellow communist country from the threat of the capitalist USA.



Pictures from a US spy plane showing where the missile sites were.



# Events

- 14 Oct:** U2 spy-plane takes pictures of Missile bases in Cuba - experts tell Kennedy he has 10 days before they are operational.
- 16 Oct:** Kennedy set up a Committee of the National Security Council to advise him.
- 22 Oct:** Kennedy [announced](#) that he was mounting a naval blockade of Cuba. B52 nuclear bombers were deployed, so that one-eighth of them were airborne all the time. That night, Oleg Penkovsky – a Western spy working in Russia – was arrested. His last message read; ‘Soviet attack imminent’.
- 23 Oct:** Khrushchev explained that the missile sites were ‘solely to defend Cuba against the attack of an aggressor’. 20 Russian ships were heading for Cuba.
- 24 Oct:** Khrushchev [accused](#) America of piracy. He warned that Russia would get ready ‘a fitting reply to the aggressor’.
- 25 Oct:** The first Russian ship reached the naval blockade. It was an oil ship and was allowed through. All the other Russian ships (carrying missiles) turned back. Secretly, the US government offered to remove US missiles in Turkey in exchange for those in Cuba.
- 26 Oct:** Russia was still building the missile bases, and Kennedy started planning amilitary attack on Cuba - until, at 6pm, Khrushchev sent a [telegram](#) to Kennedy, offering to dismantle the sites if Kennedy would lift the blockade and agree not to invade Cuba - the Americans comment: ‘the other fellow just blinked’. The Kennedy brothers saw the Russian ambassador, and again mentioned removing the missiles in Turkey.
- 27 Oct:** Before Kennedy could reply, Khrushchev sent another [letter](#), demanding that Kennedy also dismantle American missile bases in Turkey. On the same day, a U2 plane was shot down over Cuba. It looked as if war was about to happen. Kennedy ignored the plane incident. He also ignored Khrushchev’s second letter – he wrote simply that would lift the blockade and agree not to invade Cuba if Khrushchev would dismantle the missile bases. He also offered secretly to dismantle the Turkish missile bases.
- 28 Oct:** Khrushchev agreed. The crisis finished.
- 20 Nov:** Russian bombers left Cuba, and Kennedy lifted the naval blockade.

## New Words

**Nationalise:** where the government takes over a business/ industry.

**Naval blockade:** to not allow ships to come or go from Cuba.

**Exiles:** people who have had to leave or have been thrown out of a country because of their political beliefs

## Missiles on Cuba

On 14<sup>th</sup> October 1962 a US spy plane took pictures of what looked like missile bases being built. Some were near competition and ready to fire within 7 days. More ships were sailing to Cuba with missiles aswell. Kennedy was in a really difficult position. He knew that the Soviets would not remove the missiles easily. He couldn’t attack the missile sites or Cuba because this would start a war and nuclear weapons would probably be used. This was becoming a deadly game. Who would blink first?

### Kennedy’s Options:

1. **Nuclear Strike?** It would cause a nuclear war.
2. **Conventional attack?** There were Russian troops in Cuba, and it would probably lead to a war with Russia.
3. **Use the UN?** Too slow.
4. **Do nothing?** The missile bases were too dangerous.
5. **Blockade?** This would stop the missiles getting to the missile bases, but it was not a direct act of war.

### What did Kennedy do?

Kennedy decided to blockade Cuba to stop Soviet ships landing their missiles. He told the Soviets that if their ships attempted to go through the blockade then the USA would sink them. This would lead to war.

Kruschev said that the Soviet Union would not turn its ships round and accused Kennedy and the USA of piracy. The world held its breath as 20 Soviet ships steamed towards the blockade.

When the Soviet ships got to the blockade they turned around and went home. It seemed like the crisis was over.

### Missiles still on Cuba

However, there were still missiles on Cuba. Kruschev wrote to Kennedy and told him that if the blockade stopped he would remove the missiles. This seemed really positive for America. However, on the 27<sup>th</sup> of October he sent another letter saying that he wouldn't remove the missiles until the USA's missiles in Turkey were withdrawn.

The same day a US spy plane was shot down over Cuba. The world held its breath again. It looked as though a war was about to begin. Kennedy told Kruschev that he would remove the blockade if the Soviets withdrew the missiles but if they didn't, an attack would follow.

On the same day, Robert Kennedy, the Presidents brother went to see the Soviet ambassador in Washington and told him quietly that the USA would strongly consider removing its missiles from Turkey in a short space of time. This was on condition that this was kept secret from the rest of the world.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> October 1962 Kruschev said that he would order the removal of the missiles. He kept his word. The crisis was over.

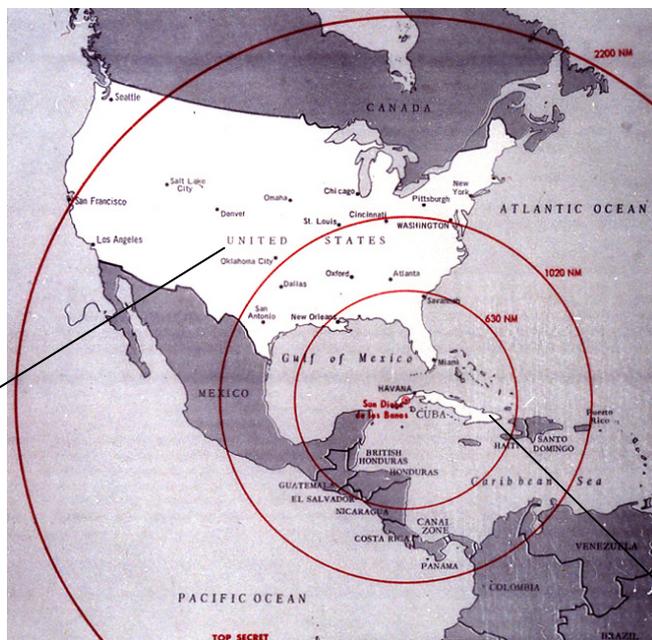
### Who won?

The USA claimed that they had won because they got what they wanted. The missiles had been removed from Cuba and it looked to the rest of the world like Kruschev had backed down. This improved Kennedy's reputation as he was the man who had faced down the Soviets and won.

No-one really knew about the secret negotiations to remove American missiles from Turkey.

The Soviets claimed that they had won. Cuba was now a communist country allied to the Soviet Union only a few miles from America. The USA would not really dare to get involved with it again. However, Kruschev had lost face both at home and with other countries. He was removed from his job a few years later partly because of this.

Some people say that neither side really won or lost. The two sides learned from the crisis and to try and stop future crisis from happening. A hotline between the Kremlin and the Whitehouse was set up and in 1963 a nuclear test ban treaty was signed. The world never came as close to nuclear war again. Relations on the whole between the two countries started to get better after the Cuban Missile Crisis.



The United States

This map shows where the different Soviet missiles would be able to reach

Cuba

## **Revision Questions**

1. Who were the leaders of America, the USSR and Cuba at the time of the Cuban missile crisis?
2. Why was America so closely involved with Cuba?
3. When did Fidel Castro come to power in Cuba?
4. What did his 1960 trade agreement with Russia say?
5. What did Castro do to America companies in 1961 which angered America?
6. What was the name for the failed invasion of Cuba in 1961?
7. Why was it an embarrassment for Kennedy?
8. Why did it fail?
9. What did a U2 spy-plane discover on Cuba in October 1962?
10. Why did America fear the Soviet Union having missiles on Cuba?
11. What were Kennedy's FIVE options, and which did he choose?
  
12. What did Khrushchev accuse America of?
13. What deal was done between Kennedy and Khrushchev?
14. What event during the crisis (27 Oct) almost caused a nuclear war?
15. What did the two leaders set up after the Missiles Crisis to prevent another such crisis?
16. What agreement began the thaw in 1963?

## **Practice Exam Questions**

*Use the space below to bullet point your answers. Give yourself half an hour to do a 4,6,10 question.*

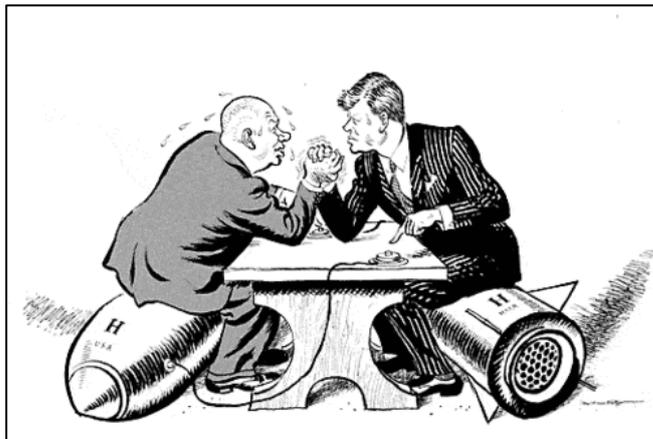
**What events between 1959 and January 1961 led to the USA to break off diplomatic relations with Cuba? (4)**

**Describe the events of the Cuban Missile Crisis. (4)**

**Explain why Khrushchev sent missiles to Cuba in 1962. (6)**

**Explain why the Bay of Pigs invasion failed. (6)**

**How successful was Kennedy in dealing with the problem of Soviet missiles in Cuba? Explain your answer. (10)**



**This British cartoon of 29 October 1962 shows Kennedy and Khrushchev arm-wrestling for power, sitting on nuclear weapons. The caption read: 'OK Mr president, let's talk'**

**Source A**

**Study source A**

**What is the message of this cartoon? Use the details of the cartoon and your own knowledge to explain your answer.**

Empty box for student response.