



The reaction of Robert Kennedy, attorney general of the United States, when he learned on Tuesday, 16 October 1962, that Soviet nuclear missiles had been deployed in Cuba, just 90 miles off the coast of Florida, was understandable: “Oh shit! Shit! Shit! Those sons of bitches Russians.” In both public and private, Russian officials had assured their American counterparts that the Soviet military build-up in Cuba that had begun in the summer was no threat to the United States, because it would not include nuclear missiles capable of striking American territory. In fact, Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev had decided in the spring to dispatch nuclear weapons to Cuba for a variety of reasons. Among them was a desire to defend his ally, Fidel Castro – the communist revolutionary who had taken the reins of power in Cuba three years earlier – from an anticipated US attack, and to close a nuclear gap that was heavily in America’s favour.

Cuban Revolution and the Cuban Missile Crisis

Readings: Text pp. 186-193 in Hodder- *The Cold War*
PDF reading packet

Key Terms: Brinkmanship, John F. Kennedy, Nikita Khrushchev, Fidel Castro. Bay of Pigs, ICBM, SAM’s, U2, Blockade, Quarantine, Monroe Doctrine,

Guiding Questions:

- *Was the Cuban Missile Crisis a triumph of US Brinkmanship or a triumph for *Backdoor Diplomacy?*
- *Which “side” emerged as the victor following the Cuban Missile Crisis? Cite a counterargument to this.*
- *What were the consequences of the Cuban Missile Crisis?*

The Cuban Missiles Crisis – Causes

1. Superpower Tension

All the tensions that had grown up between Russia's assertive 'peaceful competition' and Kennedy's promise to be tough on Russia – including the space race, the arms race and nuclear testing, American funding of anti-Communists in Vietnam and Laos, the failed Vienna summit (1961) and the Berlin Wall.

2. Fidel Castro's Cuba

In 1959, the Communist Fidel Castro took power in Cuba. This was very threatening to the USA because it was right next to America. In 1960, Castro made a trade agreement with Russia, whereby Cuba sent sugar to Russia, in return for oil, machines and money. This frightened the Americans more, and in 1960 they stopped trading with Cuba. In retaliation, Cuba nationalised all American-owned companies

3. The Bay of Pigs.

In April 1961 the CIA encouraged, funded and transported an attempt by anti-Castro Cuban exiles to invade Cuba. It failed miserably, greatly embarrassing Kennedy. In September 1961, therefore, Castro asked for – and Russia publicly promised – weapons to defend Cuba against America.

On **14 October** an American U2 spy-plane took pictures of a nuclear missile base being built on Cuba. Kennedy's advisers told him he had 10 days before Cuba could fire the missiles at targets in America.

Kennedy decided he had to act (see Source A).

New Words

nationalise: where the government takes over a business/ industry.

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

Source A

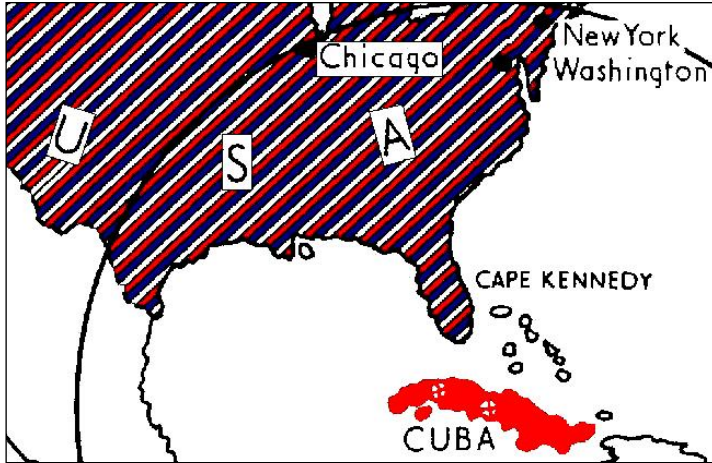
We will not needlessly risk world-wide nuclear war in which even victory would be ashes in our mouths – but neither will we shrink from that risk when it must be faced . . . I call upon Chairman Khrushchev to stop and dismantle this secret, reckless and provocative threat to world peace.

Speech by President Kennedy on American TV, 1962.

← The danger of the missile bases.

Task

Prepare a 15-minute



essay: 'Why was there a crisis about Cuba in 1962?

Source B

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.

The Cuban Missiles Crisis

- 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.
- 23 Oct: Khrushchev accused America of piracy. He warned that Russia would get ready 'a fitting reply to the aggressor'. 20 Russian ships were heading for Cuba.
- 24 Oct: The first Russian ship reached the naval blockade. It was an oil ship and was allowed through. The other Russian ships (carrying missiles) turned back. However, Russia was still building the missile bases.
- 26 Oct: Khrushchev sent a letter to Kennedy, offering to dismantle the sites if Kennedy would lift the blockade and agree not to invade Cuba.
- 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.
- 28 Oct: Khrushchev agreed. The crisis finished.
- 20 Nov: Russian bombers left Cuba, and Kennedy lifted the naval blockade.

Did you know?

Kennedy did not publicly agree to dismantle missile bases in Turkey. But in a secret telephone call, he told Khrushchev that – while he couldn't agree to dismantle Turkish bases in a 'tit-for-tat' agreement – the USA did not see any need for them and that they would be dismantled soon.

Tasks

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Prepare a 15-minute essay: 'Describe the events of the Cuba Crisis of 1962.2. Copy 'The Results of the Cuba Crisis'. |
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The results were:

1. Khrushchev lost prestige – he had failed. Particularly, China broke from Russia.
2. Kennedy gained prestige. He was seen as the man who faced down the Russians.
3. Both sides had had a fright. They were more careful in future. The two leaders set up a telephone 'hotline' to talk directly in a crisis. In 1963, they agreed a Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.
Cuba was the start of the end of the Cold War.
4. Cuba remained a Communist dictatorship, but America left it alone.