

The Cuban missile crisis 1

By the end of the next two spreads you should be able to describe and explain:

1 the events of the Cuban Revolution and American reactions to it

2 a the causes **b** the events **c** the consequences of the Cuban missile crisis

3 the roles of Kennedy and Khrushchev in it

The USA and Cuba

The Cuban revolution, 1959

- 1** Fidel Castro seizes power from the American-backed dictator, Batista, who has run a corrupt and unpopular regime.
- 2** Castro and his followers aim to
 - a** improve Cuban prosperity, especially of peasants working on the land and in the sugar mills of American-owned companies
 - b** end corruption and terror in Cuban politics
 - c** help oppressed people in other countries in the region.
- 3** Castro
 - a** appoints Communists to the Government
 - b** signs a trade agreement with the USSR. In return for Cuban sugar, the USSR will provide oil, machinery and economic aid (1959)
 - c** nationalizes all American companies (July 1961).

The American response

- 1** The USA was hostile to Castro because
 - a** as the dominant power in the region it **i** expected to control governments in the Caribbean and South America
 - ii** feared Castro's ideas might spread
 - b** although Castro himself was not yet a Communist, he had Communist supporters
 - c** he was receiving Soviet support
 - d** his policies threatened American companies.
- 2** The USA decided to
 - a** refuse to buy Cuban sugar (July 1960)
 - b** end all trade with Cuba (Oct 1960)
 - c** cut off diplomatic relations (Jan 1961)
 - d** support Cuban exiles in an attempt to dislodge Castro.
- 1** In Florida, the CIA forms a group of exiled Cuban politicians into a committee to take over from Castro.

The Bay of Pigs operation, April 1961 A force of Cuban exiles, backed by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), failed in an attempt to invade Cuba and depose Castro. Although the Americans denied involvement in the operation, which had been set up under President Eisenhower and then approved by Kennedy, it was a humiliation for the new President.



- 2** In Guatemala, the CIA trains a force of Cuban exiles.
- 3** 1,400 exiles land, supported by US bombers flown by Cubans.
- 4** Castro's forces easily defeat the invaders, capturing over 1,200.

Communist Cuba

- 1** Castro
 - a** declares himself a Communist (Dec 1961)
 - b** asks the USSR to provide arms in order to defend Cuba against a possible American attack following the Bays of Pigs failure.
- 2** Khrushchev
 - a** agrees to provide arms
 - b** announces this publicly (Sept 1961)
 - c** secretly decides to turn Cuba into a Soviet nuclear missile base.

The American response

- 1** Increased fear in the USA at
 - a** having a Soviet-backed Communist state on its doorstep
 - b** the spread of Communism in its own region.
- 2** Kennedy
 - a** says the USA will isolate Cuba
 - b** warns the USSR not to put nuclear missiles in Cuba.

Superpower tension

By 1962 this was high as a result of:

- 1** Kennedy's commitment of the USA to fresh efforts in the defence of freedom (Jan 1961).
- 2** The Berlin crisis and the building of the Wall (page 69).
- 3** The acceleration of the arms race which followed.

Why did Khrushchev send missiles to Cuba?

- 1** No one is certain. He ran a high risk that the USA would discover the missiles but probably **a** hoped they would be in place before this happened
- b** calculated Kennedy would make a weak response.
- 2** Possible motives were to
 - a** defend Cuba following the Bay of Pigs operation
 - b** bargain for the removal of US missiles in Turkey
 - c** bargain for the Western powers to leave Berlin
 - d** catch up with the USA in the arms race by placing missiles where they could hit their targets more accurately
 - e** score points off Kennedy by placing missiles on the USA's 'doorstep'.

What was Kennedy's reaction?

The problem

- 1** Kennedy wanted to remove all the missiles from Cuba.
- 2** His advisers told him he had ten days before the missiles were ready for use.

The choices

- There were three possible courses of action:
- 1** A nuclear strike on the sites. But the USSR would almost certainly strike back.
 - 2** A conventional bombing raid followed by an invasion. This would almost certainly lead to fighting with Soviet troops already on Cuba and start a war.
 - 3** A naval blockade to stop the USSR from transporting more missiles to Cuba and to force them to remove those already there. This carried the least risk of war.

The decision

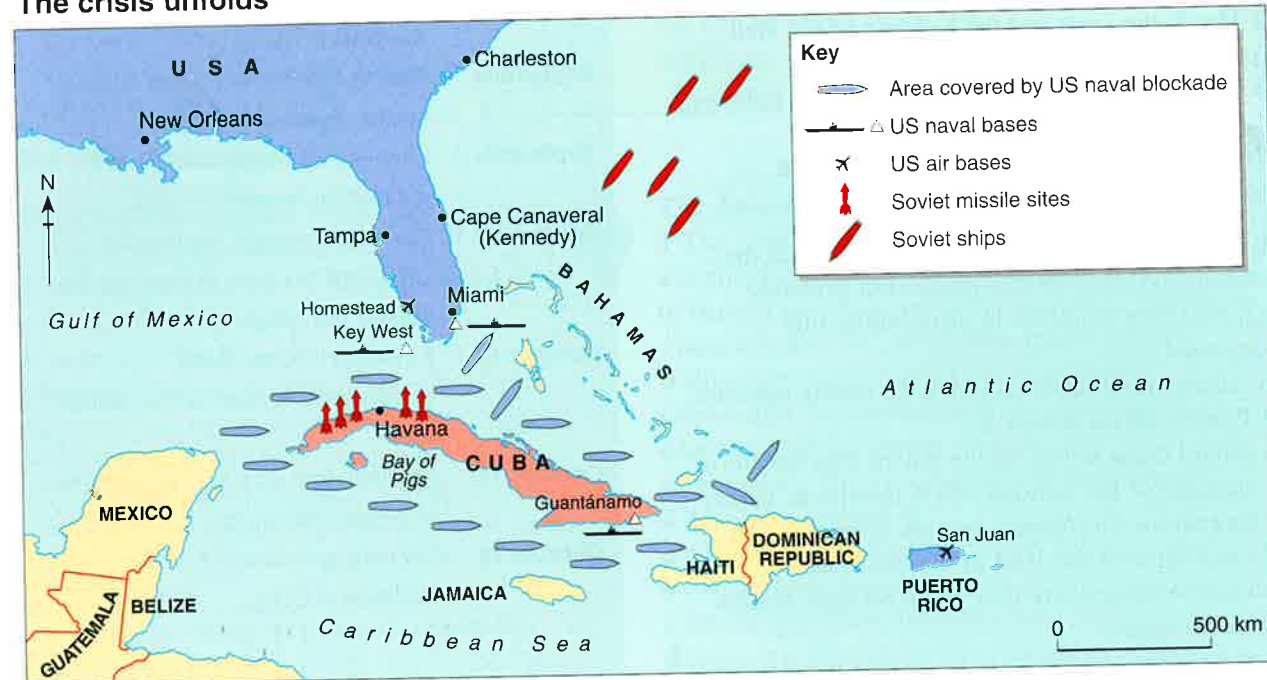
- 1** A naval blockade. All ships carrying weapons to Cuba to be turned back.
- 2** Armed forces placed on alert.
- 3** The USSR was told that the USA would retaliate to any missile launched from Cuba against a Western nation.

1962

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|---------------------|---|
| August | US spy-planes observe Soviet weapons in Cuba. |
| September | Khrushchev secretly starts to send nuclear missiles to Cuba. |
| September 4 | Kennedy warns the USSR not to put nuclear missiles in Cuba. |
| September 11 | Soviet government assures the USA it will not base nuclear missiles outside the USSR. |
| October 14 | American U-2 spy-plane photographs nuclear missile launch sites. |
| October 16 | Kennedy sets up a special committee to decide what to do. |
| October 22 | Kennedy announces a naval blockade of Cuba. |

The Cuban missile crisis 2

The crisis unfolds



The Cuban missile crisis, 1962

October 22

On American television Kennedy 1 announces naval blockade of Cuba 2 says he cannot accept Communist missiles in an area known to have a special relationship with the USA 3 calls Soviet actions 'provocative'.

October 23

Soviet government says 1 the USSR is simply helping Cuba to defend itself 2 the USA is interfering with Cuba's affairs b engaging in piracy by stopping ships c pushing the world towards nuclear war.

October 24

Soviet vessels reach US blockade and stop. One oil tanker is allowed through unsearched. The rest turn back.

October 26

Khrushchev sends a letter to Kennedy saying that the USSR could remove the missiles if the USA 1 lifts its blockade 2 guarantees not to invade Cuba.

October 27

1 Khrushchev sends a second letter adding as a third condition that the USA should remove its missiles from Turkey. Kennedy cannot accept this. 2 An American U-2 is shot down over Cuba. Kennedy is urged to take military action, but resists. 3 Another U-2 flies into Soviet airspace. Kennedy apologises publicly. 4 Kennedy a decides to agree to the terms of Khrushchev's first letter and to ignore the second one. b secretly sends message to Moscow that he will withdraw US missiles from Turkey.

October 28

Khrushchev agrees to remove missiles from Cuba.

Khrushchev

1 claimed he had achieved his aim of preventing an American invasion of Cuba
2 was attacked by China for backing down in the face of American threats
3 lost face at home because of his misjudgement. The episode probably contributed to his downfall two years later.

Kennedy increased his reputation at home and worldwide by
1 managing to avoid a war
2 forcing Khrushchev to back down.

The consequences of the crisis

Superpower relations

1 Realising how close to war they had come, and the difficulty of communicating quickly in a crisis, Kennedy and Khrushchev agreed to set up a hotline between the Kremlin and the White House.
2 Both leaders attempted to improve relations. The Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (page 67) was one result.

Cuba

1 Although the USSR had been forced to remove its missiles, it continued to try to influence countries in the Caribbean and South America.
2 Cuba remained a Communist country dependent on Soviet aid and protection.



- 1 What were the USA's aims in dealing with Cuba after 1959?
- 2 Why did Kennedy believe he had to make the USSR remove its missiles from Cuba?
- 3 a List those actions taken during the missile crisis by i the USA ii the USSR which appeared to make the crisis more serious.
b In each case explain why this was so.
- 4 a List those actions taken during the missile crisis by i Kennedy ii Khrushchev which helped to resolve the crisis.
b In each case explain how it did this.