

# WHO WON THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS?

## BACKGROUND: why did Cuba become a problem for the USA?

From 1933-1959, a right-wing dictator called Batista ruled Cuba. The Americans bought sugar, Cuba's main crop; they also controlled much of Cuba's economy. Batista was overthrown by the Marxist Fidel Castro in 1959. The USA did not like Castro and refused to trade with Cuba, as a result Castro seized American assets in Cuba and made an alliance with the USSR.



## THE BAY OF PIGS 1961

President Kennedy tried to overthrow Castro in April 1961. 1,400 Cuban rebels and exiles, with the support of the CIA, launched an invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs. The attack was a disaster and failed dismally, the rebels were met by 20,000 Cuban troops. Castro killed or captured nearly all of them within days. The fiasco convinced Castro that the USA was enemy; he now turned to the USSR for protection.



## THE IMPACT OF THE INVASION

- Kennedy looked weak and was criticised for the failed attempt to defeat Communism in their own back yard.
- It strengthened Castro's position in Cuba and suggested that as much as the USA hated communism in Cuba, they would not become directly involved.
- Castro and Khrushchev became very suspicious of American policy and intentions towards Cuba.
- After the Bay of Pigs invasion, the USSR openly began to supply arms to Cuba. By September 1962 it had thousands of Soviet missiles, patrol boats, tanks, radar vans and jet fighters, plus 5,000 Soviet technicians to help maintain the weapons.

## HOW DID THE USA GET INVOLVED IN CUBA BETWEEN 1959 AND 1961?

- The relationship became frosty but without direct confrontation.'
- In January 1961 the USA broke of diplomatic relations.
- In April 1961 The US supported a direct invasion - the Bay of Pigs.' 'To starve Castro into submission.
- The US banned the buying of sugar and then banned all trade with Cuba (Oct 1960).

TIP: Be careful with the dates for these types of questions!!!

**Explain why the USA became concerned over events in Cuba between 1959 and 1961. (8)**

## Why did the USSR become involved in Cuba?



- They hoped to turn Cuba into a Soviet missile base.
- To use Cuba to bargain over US missiles in Turkey. If he had missiles in Cuba he could agree to remove them if the USA removed their missiles from, Turkey.
- To gain the upper hand in the arms race.
- 'In the context of the Cold War, he was trying to see how strong the USA really was and to test the new President Kennedy who already looked weak after the Berlin Wall
- Khrushchev was anxious to defend Cuba against a possible US attack. It was the only Communist state in the Western hemisphere, and had willingly become Communist. In addition Cuba was in the US's 'backyard'. It was ideal to try to encourage Communist development in South America.

## Why did Khrushchev put missiles on Cuba?

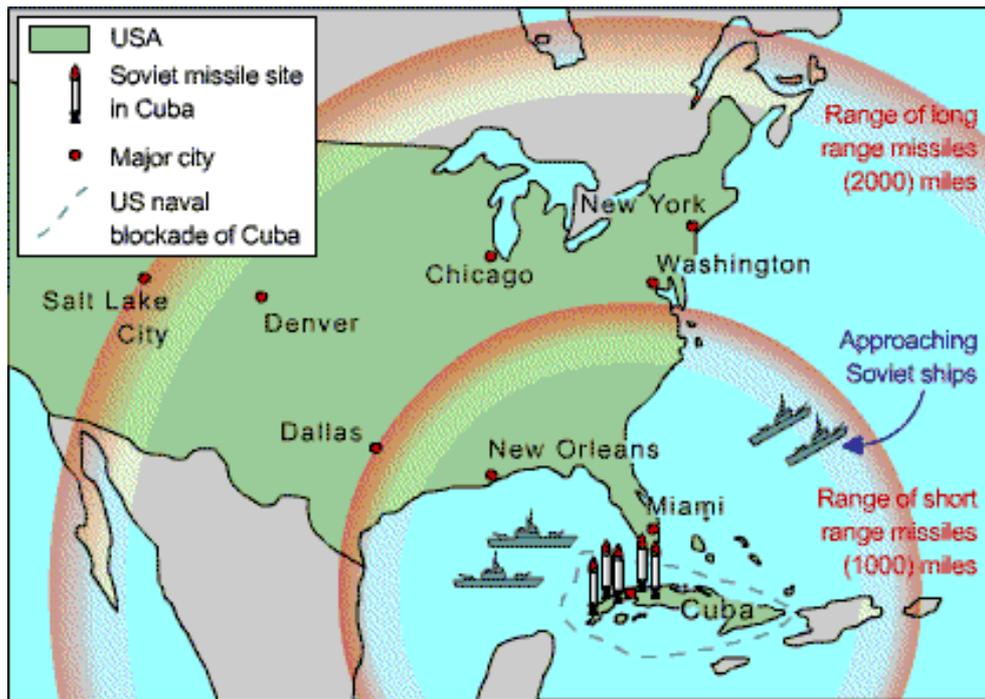
- **Missile Gap**- Khrushchev was worried that the USA had more long range missiles than the USSR. The USA even had missiles in Europe and Turkey. By putting medium range missiles in Cuba (virtually America's backyard) it would begin to even the gap between them.
- Khrushchev hoped to strengthen his own position within the USSR- people in the USSR were criticising Khrushchev and he thought that by placing missiles on Cuba and forcing concessions out of President Kennedy he would gain prestige. Kennedy had already been seen to win the arms race and this damaged Khrushchev's credibility.
- Khrushchev wanted to defend Cuba- it was the only Communist state in the West and had willingly turned to Communism. Just by existing Cuba was good for the USSR, it made the USA look bad having Communist state right under their nose.

## THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS 1962

Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> October- American U2 spy plane flew over Cuba and took photographs of missile sites that were being built by the USSR. Some sites had been finished and others were still being built, but could be ready in 7 days. They also reported that twenty Soviet ships were currently on the way to Cuba carrying missiles.

**Kennedy had several options:**

1. Do nothing
2. Surgical Air attack
3. Invasion
4. Diplomatic Pressure
5. Blockade



## THE EVENTS

**16<sup>th</sup> October**- Kennedy informed of the missiles and Ex-Comm is formed

**20<sup>th</sup> October**- Kennedy decided to blockade Cuba

**22<sup>nd</sup> October**- Kennedy announced the blockade and told the USSR to remove missiles from Cuba

**23<sup>rd</sup> October**- Kennedy gets a letter from Khrushchev saying that Soviet ships will not observe the blockade

**24<sup>th</sup> October**-the blockade begins- 20 Soviet ships approach the blockade, slow down and turn around.

**25<sup>th</sup> October**-despite the ships turning around, work continued on the missile sites in Cuba

**26<sup>th</sup> October**- Kennedy received a letter from Khrushchev- it said the missiles on Cuba were defensive, but if the USA would promise not to attack Cuba, he would remove the missiles.

**27<sup>th</sup> October**- Khrushchev sent a second letter- he revised his proposals, he would only remove missiles from Cuba if the USA removed their missiles from Cuba.

**27<sup>th</sup> October**- Kennedy replies to Khrushchev saying that he would accept the terms of the first letter and if the USSR do not withdraw he will attack

**28<sup>th</sup> October**- Khrushchev replied to Kennedy-he would remove missiles from Cuba

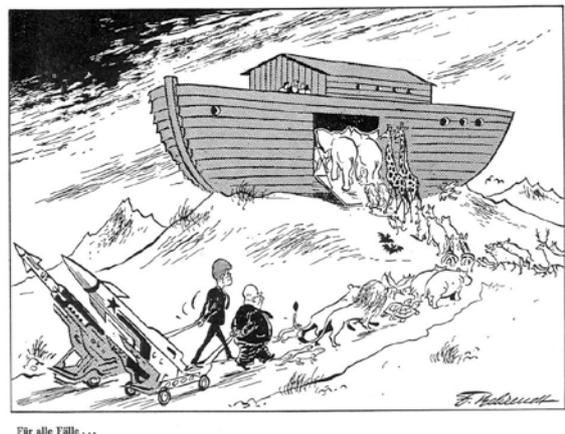
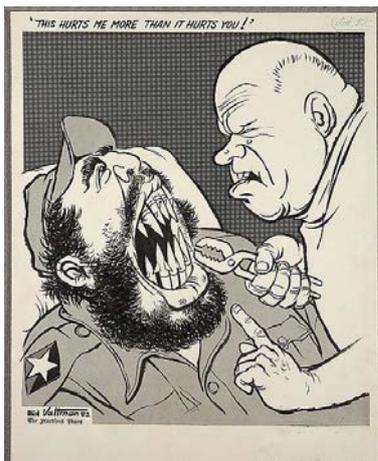


## WHAT WERE THE RESULTS OF THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS?

- War had been averted and the two leaders had worked together, to prevent future incidents they installed a hot-line- phone line from the White House to the Kremlin to resolve future issues
- Led to a period where tensions between the two countries decreased and lessened- this was called détente.
- The missiles were removed from Cuba and the immediate threat to US security.
- Missiles from Turkey were removed privately, but Kennedy publicly announced that he would leave Cuba alone.

## Why was Kennedy successful in dealing with Cuba?

- Kennedy formed a team of advisers who gave him a number of options from which to choose.
- He introduced a blockade of Cuba.
- Kennedy decides on a delay and ignored the second Khrushchev letter.
- The twenty Soviet ships closest to the zone turned around.
- Kennedy stood his ground. He did not let himself be over- influenced by his advisers or by Khrushchev. He made clear to Khrushchev what would happen in his response to the first letter.



# WHO WON THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS?



## The USA

- Kennedy's reputation-it looked like he had stood up to Khrushchev and made him back down
- Kennedy had also stood up to the hardliners in his government- he refused to immediately invade or go straight to war

On the other hand,

- He did have to move the missiles from Turkey and his NATO allies were unhappy about this
- Kennedy had to accept that Castro and Cuba would remain Communist (so close to the USA) and this was seen as a defeat.



## The USSR

- Khrushchev was able to highlight his role as a peacemaker
- Cuba remained Communist and a valuable ally, the USA had not been able to change this
- USA were withdrawing missiles from turkey- a major threat so close to the USSR



On the other hand,

- Khrushchev had been forced to back down and removed the missiles from Cuba- the Soviet military did not like this.
- Khrushchev had still not dealt with the missile gap- it never caught up with the USA despite developing ICBMS
- 1964 Khrushchev was forced from power- most people believe his failure in the Cuban Missile Crisis contributed to this.

## Cuba

- Castro was upset by the deal the USSR made with the USA- he had to put up with it because he needed the USSR as an ally
- Cuba stayed Communist and was highly armed- the nuclear missiles were removed but Cuba became an important base for Communists in the area
- Castro kept control of American companies, it still remains a source of tension with the USA today, and they still refused to trade with Cuba.



## Exam Practice

Typical 4 mark questions -

- Describe American involvement at the Bay of Pigs
- Describe relations between Cuba and the USA between 1959-61
- Describe the USA's response to Castro's seizure of Cuba
- Describe the Bay of Pigs
- Describe how Cuba changed under Castro

Typical 6 mark questions -

- Explain why President Kennedy took action against Soviet missile bases in Cuba in 1962
- Explain why Khrushchev sent missiles to Cuba
- Explain why the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion caused problems for the USA
- Explain why the Soviet Union became involved in Cuba
- Explain Kennedy's options after missile sites were discovered in Cuba.

Typical 10 mark questions -

- How far was the Cuban Missile Crisis a failure for the USSR?
- The USA gained more from the Cuban missile crisis than the USSR. How far do you agree?
- 'The Cuban Missile Crisis was a victory for the Soviet Union' How far do you agree with this statement.
- 'Kennedy handled the missile crisis better than Khrushchev did' How far do you agree?
- 'The USA was more responsible for causing the Cuban missile crisis than the USSR' How far do you agree?

