



A 1960 Soviet cartoon. The notice held by the US Secretary of State says to Castro in Cuba: 'I forbid you to make friends with the Soviet Union.'

- 2 Why was Cuba so important to the USA?
- 3 Why do you think the Americans chose to equip Cuban exiles rather than invading themselves?
- 4 Why did the invasion fail?

SOURCE 21

I believe there is no country in the world... whose economic colonisation, humiliation and exploitation were worse than in Cuba, partly as a consequence of US policy during the Batista regime. I believe that, without being aware of it, we conceived and created the Castro movement, starting from scratch.

President Kennedy speaking in 1963.

- 5 What do Sources 21 and 22 suggest about the success of the USA's policy of containment?

Case study 2: the Cuban missile crisis, 1962

It was against the background of the arms race that Cuba became a major flashpoint of the Cold War.

Background

Cuba is a large island just 160 km from Florida in the southern USA. It had long been an American ally. Americans owned most of the businesses on the island and they had a huge naval base there (see Source 24). Then in 1959, after a three-year GUERRILLA campaign, Fidel Castro overthrew the American-backed dictator Batista. With a new pro-Communist state in what it regarded as its own 'sphere of influence' this was going to be a real test of the USA's policy of containment.

How successful were the early attempts at containment?

1959–1961

For two years Cuba and the USA maintained a frosty relationship but without any direct confrontation. Castro took over American-owned businesses in Cuba, but he let the USA keep its naval base. Castro assured Americans living in Cuba that they were safe. He said he simply wanted to run Cuba without interference. However, from the summer of 1960 he was receiving arms from the Soviet Union and American spies knew this.

January 1961

The USA broke off diplomatic relations with Cuba. Castro thought that the USA was preparing to invade. It did not, or not directly, but it was clear that the USA was no longer prepared to tolerate a Soviet satellite in the heart of its own 'sphere of influence'.

April 1961

President Kennedy supplied arms, equipment and transport for 1400 anti-Castro exiles to invade Cuba and overthrow him. The exiles landed at the Bay of Pigs. They were met by 20,000 Cuban troops armed with tanks and modern weapons. The invasion failed disastrously. Castro captured or killed them all within days. To Cuba and the Soviet Union, the failed invasion suggested that the USA was unwilling to get directly involved in Cuba. The Soviet leader Khrushchev was scornful of Kennedy's pathetic attempt to oust Communism from Cuba.

Looking back, President Kennedy said he thought that US policy in Cuba – backing the hated dictator Batista – had itself been responsible for the strength of Communism in the first place (see Source 21). Historians too argue that the Bay of Pigs fiasco further encouraged the spread of Communism. On the one hand, it suggested to the USSR that Kennedy was weak. On the other hand, it made Castro and Khrushchev very suspicious of US policy.

SOURCE 22

I think he [Khrushchev] did it because of the Bay of Pigs. He thought that anyone who was so young and inexperienced as to get into that mess could be beaten; and anyone who got into it and didn't see it through had no guts. So he just beat the bell out of me.

If he thinks I'm inexperienced and have no guts, until we remove those ideas we won't get anywhere with him.

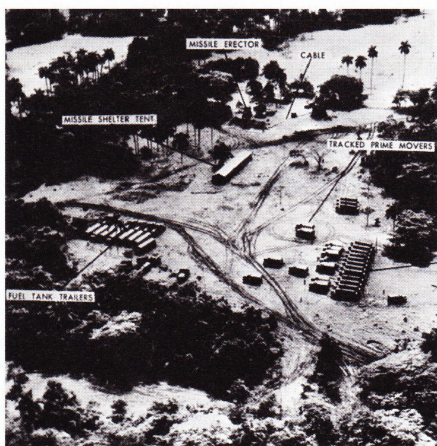
Kennedy speaking after a meeting with Khrushchev in 1961. Khrushchev had been very aggressive towards Kennedy.

What was the Soviet Union doing in Cuba?

After the Bay of Pigs fiasco, Soviet arms flooded into Cuba. In May 1962 the Soviet Union announced publicly for the first time that it was supplying Cuba with arms. By July 1962 Cuba had the best-equipped army in Latin America. By September it had thousands of Soviet missiles plus patrol boats, tanks, radar vans, missile erectors, jet bombers, jet fighters and 5000 Soviet technicians to help to maintain the weapons.

The Americans watched all this with great alarm. They seemed ready to tolerate conventional arms being supplied to Cuba, but the big question was whether the Soviet Union would dare to put nuclear missiles on Cuba. In September Kennedy's own Intelligence Department said that it did not believe the USSR would send nuclear weapons to Cuba. The USSR had not taken this step with any of its satellite states before and the US Intelligence Department believed that the USSR would consider it too risky to do it in Cuba. On 11 September, Kennedy warned the USSR that he would prevent 'by whatever means might be necessary' Cuba's becoming an offensive military base – by which, everyone knew, he meant a nuclear missile base. The same day the USSR assured the USA that it had no need to put nuclear missiles on Cuba and no intention of doing so.

SOURCE 23



Photograph of Cuban missile sites taken in October 1962. The labelling was added by the Americans.

- 1 Compare Source 17 on page 345 with Source 24. Describe how the Soviet missiles on Cuba changed the Cold War balance of power.

SOURCE 25

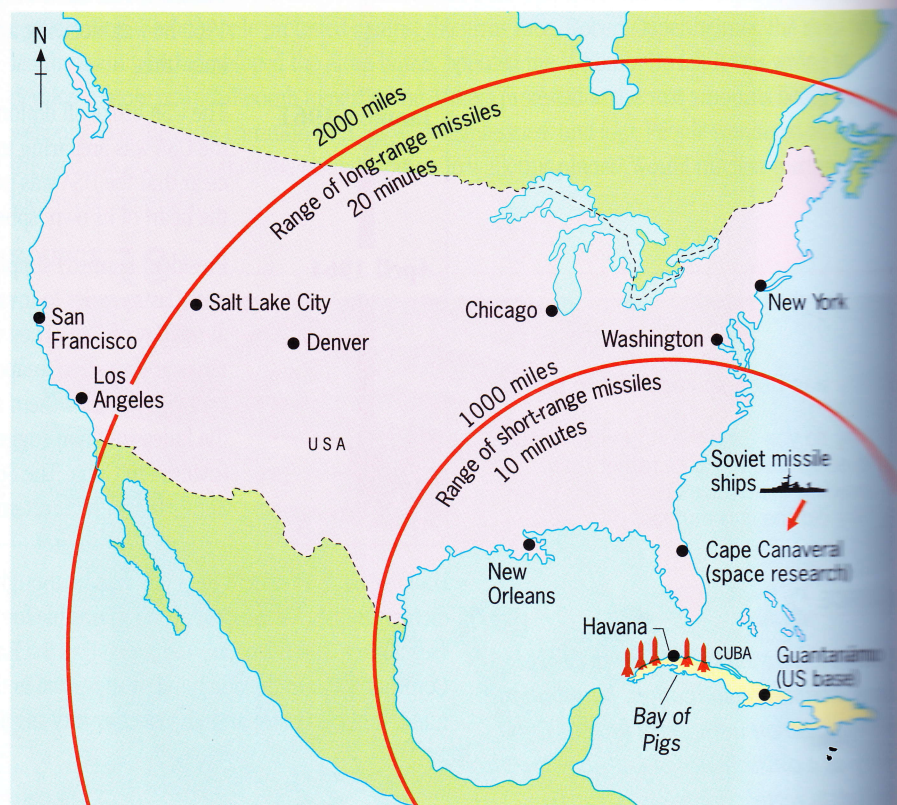
[Estimates were that the] missiles had an atomic warhead [power] of about half the current missile capacity of the entire Soviet Union. The photographs indicated that missiles were directed at certain American cities. The estimate was that within a few minutes of their being fired 80 million Americans would be dead.

President Kennedy's brother, Robert Kennedy, describing events on Thursday 18 October in the book he wrote about the crisis, *13 Days*.

The October crisis

On Sunday, 14 October 1962, an American U-2 spy plane flew over Cuba. It took amazingly detailed photographs of missile sites in Cuba. To the military experts two things were obvious – that these were nuclear missile sites, and that they were being built by the USSR.

SOURCE 24



Map showing the location of Cuba and the range of the Cuban missiles.

More photo reconnaissance followed over the next two days. This confirmed that some sites were nearly finished but others were still being built. Some were already supplied with missiles, others were awaiting them. The experts said that the most developed of the sites could be ready to launch missiles in just seven days. American spy planes also reported that 20 Soviet ships were currently on the way to Cuba carrying missiles.

What happened next?

Tue 16 October

Sat 20 October

Mon 22 October

Tue 23 October

Wed 24 October

Thu 25 October

Fri 26 October

Sat 27 October

Sun 28 October

President Kennedy is informed of the missile build-up. Ex Comm formed.

Kennedy decides on a blockade of Cuba.

Kennedy announces the blockade and calls on the Soviet Union to withdraw its missiles. 'I call on Chairman Khrushchev to halt and eliminate this reckless and provocative threat to world peace . . . He has the opportunity now to move the world back from the abyss of destruction . . . withdrawing these weapons from Cuba.'

Kennedy receives a letter from Khrushchev saying that Soviet ships will not observe the blockade. Khrushchev does not admit the presence of nuclear missiles on Cuba.

The blockade begins. The first missile-carrying ships, accompanied by a Soviet submarine, approach the 500-mile (800 km) blockade zone. Then suddenly, at 10.32 a.m., the 20 Soviet ships which are closest to the zone stop or turn around.

Despite this, intensive aerial photography reveals that work on the missile bases in Cuba is proceeding rapidly.

Kennedy receives a long personal letter from Khrushchev. The letter claims that the missiles on Cuba are purely defensive, but goes on: 'If assurances were given that the USA would not participate in an attack on Cuba and the blockade was lifted, then the question of the removal or the destruction of the missile sites would be an entirely different question.' This is the first time Khrushchev has admitted the presence of the missiles.

Khrushchev sends a second letter – revising his proposals – saying that the condition for removing the missiles from Cuba is that the USA withdraw its missiles from Turkey. Kennedy cannot accept this condition.

An American U-2 plane is shot down over Cuba. The pilot is killed. The President is advised to launch an immediate reprisal attack on Cuba. Kennedy decides to delay an attack. He also decides to ignore the second Khrushchev letter, but accepts the terms suggested by Khrushchev on 26 October. He says that if the Soviet Union does not withdraw, an attack will follow.

Khrushchev replies to Kennedy: 'In order to eliminate as rapidly as possible the conflict which endangers the cause of peace . . . the Soviet Government has given a new order to dismantle the arms which you described as offensive and to crate and return them to the Soviet Union.'

SOURCE 26



- 1 Kennedy described Wednesday 24 October and Saturday 27 October as the darkest days of the crisis. Use the information on this page to explain why.
- 2 Do you think that nuclear war was ever a possibility in this crisis?
- 3 Is Source 26 a Soviet or an American cartoon? Explain your answer by referring to details in the cartoon.

A cartoon published in 1962

Working with a partner, list any evidence you can find for and against each of the explanations in Source 27. Choose the explanation(s) that you think best fit what you have found out about the crisis. Explain your choice.

Why did the Soviet Union place nuclear missiles on Cuba?

It was an incredibly risky strategy. The USSR must have known that it would cause a crisis. What's more, the USSR made no attempt at all to camouflage the sites, and even allowed the missiles to travel on open deck. This has caused much debate as to what Khrushchev was really doing. Historians have suggested five possible explanations (see Source 27).

SOURCE 27



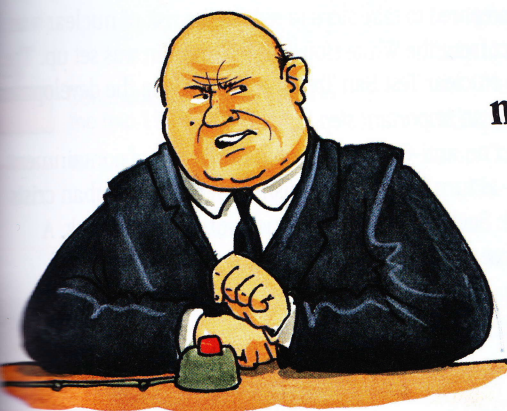
To bargain with the USA
Khrushchev wanted the missiles as a bargaining chip. If he had missiles on Cuba, he could threaten to remove them in return for some American concessions.



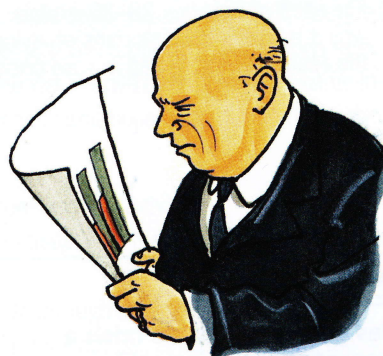
To test the USA

In the strained atmosphere of Cold War politics the missiles were designed to see how strong the Americans really were – whether they would back off or face up. The Soviet Union wanted to test out Kennedy.

Why did the Soviet Union put the missiles on Cuba?



To trap the USA
The missiles were a trap. Khrushchev wanted the Americans to find them and be drawn into a nuclear war. He did not even try to hide them.



To get the upper hand in the arms race

Khrushchev was so concerned about the missile gap between the USSR and the USA that he would seize any opportunity he could to close it. With missiles on Cuba it was less likely that the USA would ever launch a 'first strike' against the USSR.



To defend Cuba

The missiles were genuinely meant to defend Cuba.

Some possible explanations for the Soviet decision to place missiles on Cuba.

SOURCE 28

[In 1961] we increased our military aid to Cuba. We were sure the Americans would never agree to the existence of Castro's Cuba. They feared, and we hoped, that a Socialist Cuba might become a magnet that would attract other Latin American countries to socialism. We had to find an effective deterrent to American interference in the Caribbean.

The Caribbean Crisis was a triumph of Soviet foreign policy and a personal triumph in my own career. Today Cuba exists as an independent socialist country right in front of America. Cuba's very existence is good propaganda.

We behaved with dignity and forced the United States to demobilise and to recognise Cuba.

Khrushchev was forced from power in 1964. This extract comes from his memoirs written in 1971.

The outcome

- Cuba stayed Communist and highly armed. However, the nuclear missiles were withdrawn under United Nations supervision.
- Both leaders emerged with something from the crisis. Kennedy came out of the crisis with a greatly improved reputation in his own country and throughout the West. He had stood up to Khrushchev and had made him back down. Khrushchev was also able to claim a personal triumph. Cuba remained a useful ally in 'Uncle Sam's backyard'. The fact that Khrushchev had been forced to back down was quickly forgotten in Soviet circles. Instead, his role as a responsible peacemaker, willing to take the first move towards compromise, was highlighted.
- Historians agree that the Cuban missile crisis helped to thaw Cold War relations between the USA and the USSR. Both leaders had seen how their game of brinkmanship had nearly ended in nuclear war. Now they were more prepared to take steps to reduce the risk of nuclear war. A permanent 'hot line' phone link direct from the White House to the Kremlin was set up. The following year, in 1963, they signed a Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. It did not stop the development of weapons, but it limited tests and was an important step forward.
- Within the USA, the crisis had an effect on anti-Communist opinion. Critics of containment had wanted the USA to invade Cuba – to turn back Communism. However, the Cuban crisis highlighted the weakness of their case. Such intervention was not worth the high risk. A Communist Cuba was an inconvenience to the USA. A nuclear war would be the end of civilisation.

- 1 How do Sources 28 and 29 differ in their attitudes to the crisis?
- 2 Who do you think won this battle – Kennedy, Khrushchev or neither? Explain your answer.
- 3 For each of Sources 28–30 explain why it is useful for historians studying the results of the Cuban missile crisis.

FOCUS TASK

Was the Cuban missile crisis a success for containment?

- 1 Look back at your chart for the Focus Task on page 341. Make and complete a similar chart for the Cuban missile crisis.
- 2 In what ways was the Cuban missile crisis a greater test for the USA than the Korean War?
- 3 Do you regard the Cuban crisis as a success for containment? In your answer refer to:
 - the failure of direct action (the Bay of Pigs)
 - the potential threat of the missiles
 - the options open to Kennedy
 - what Kennedy gained from the crisis.

SOURCE 29

Even after it was all over [the President] made no statement attempting to take credit for himself or for his administration for what had occurred. He instructed all [his staff] that no interview should be given, no statement made, which would claim any kind of victory. He respected Khrushchev for properly determining what was in his own country's interests and in the interests of mankind. If it was a triumph, it was a triumph for the next generation and not for any particular government or people.

Written by Robert Kennedy in 13 Days.

SOURCE 30

President Kennedy will be remembered as the President who helped to bring the thaw in the Cold War. This was always his aim but only after Cuba did he really act. That crisis left its mark on him; he recognised how frightening were the consequences of misunderstanding between East and West.

President Kennedy was shot dead by a gunman in Texas in November 1963. This is from his obituary in the British newspaper, the Guardian.