

CHAPTER  
**4**

## THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

'Within the past week unmistakable evidence has established the fact that a series of offensive missile sites is now in preparation on [Cuba]. The purposes of these bases can be none other than to provide a nuclear strike capacity against the Western hemisphere ... It shall be the policy of this nation to regard any nuclear missile launched from Cuba against any nation in the Western hemisphere as an attack by the Soviet Union on the United States, requiring a full retaliatory response upon the Soviet Union.'

PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY, 22 OCTOBER 1962<sup>1</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

On 1 January 1959, left-wing rebels under the leadership of Fidel Castro seized control of Cuba. As Castro's ideology and policies veered towards socialism, Castro drew the ire of the United States. Embargo, invasion and assassination attempts followed. Castro was forced to seek economic and military security from another world power: the Soviet Union. Soviet Premier Khrushchev decided to install nuclear missiles on Cuba to intimidate the United States. This was the catalyst for the Cuban Missile Crisis.

The Cuban Missile Crisis was an escalation in the tensions between the two superpowers, which one historian called the 'most dangerous crisis of the Cold War.'<sup>2</sup> Only by standing on the edge of the abyss could the USA and USSR see that their rivalry had taken humanity to the brink of extinction. A period of détente followed, which saw greater communication between the two superpowers, and a tentative step towards placing limits on the most dangerous weapon mankind has ever devised.



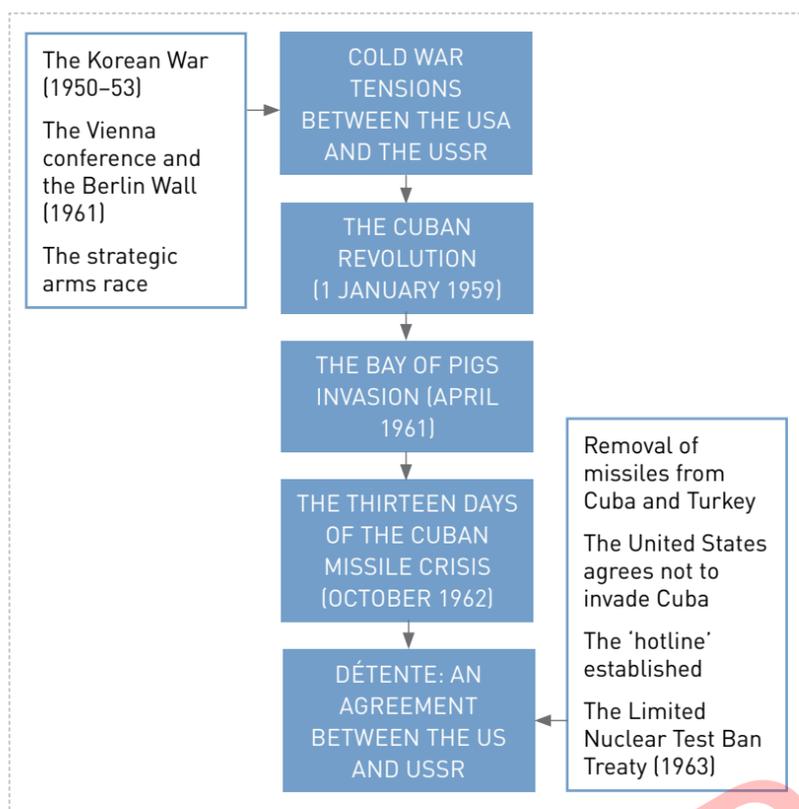
U-2 reconnaissance spy plane photograph of Soviet ships unloading equipment for a nuclear missile base in Cuba.

# OVERVIEW

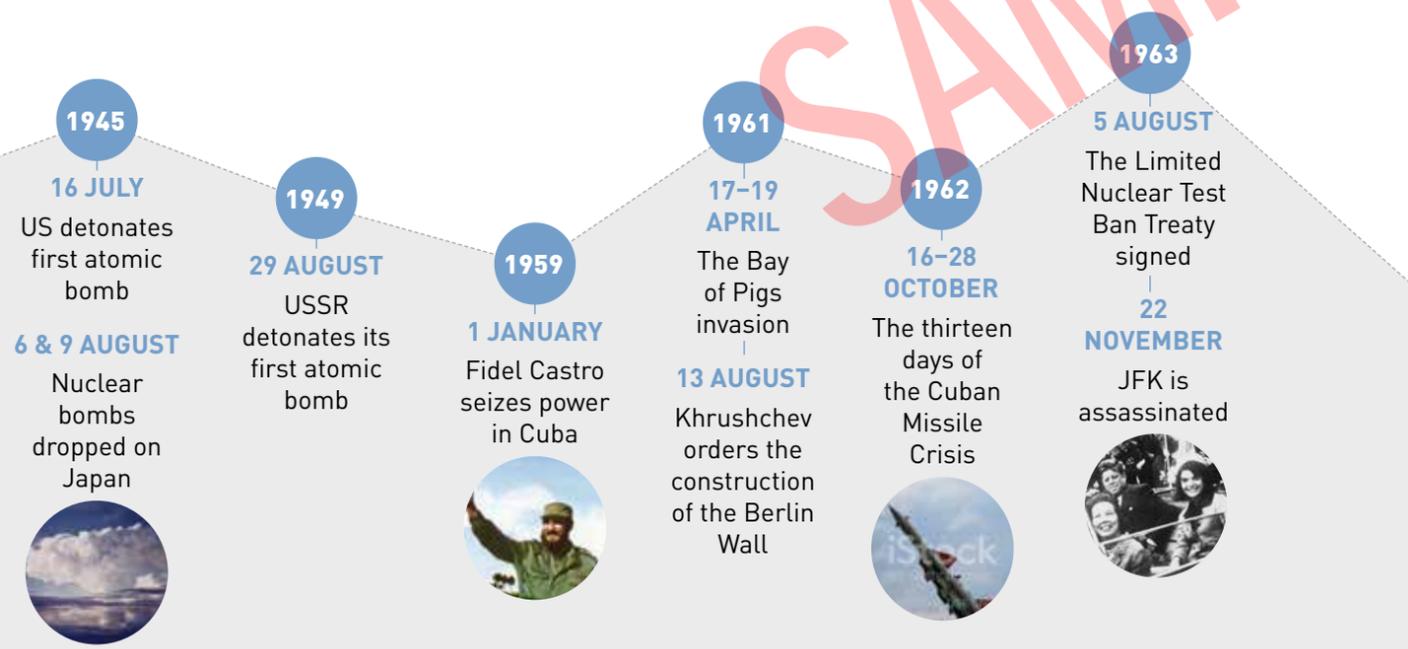
## KEY QUESTIONS

- When did Castro come to power in Cuba?
- Why did the United States put economic pressure on the Castro regime?
- When did Castro adopt socialism and request military support from the Soviet Union?
- Why did the Soviet Union deploy nuclear missiles in Cuba, and how did the United States respond?
- How did the stand-off over the missiles almost lead to World War III?
- How was the Crisis resolved?

## IN THIS CHAPTER / KEY EVENTS



## KEY EVENTS



## KEY PLAYERS

### FIDEL CASTRO

- Leader of Cuba during the Crisis
- Born in 1926; became involved in radical student politics while studying law at university
- Jailed after leading a raid on an army barracks on 26 July 1953
- Released two years later, he organised a small army to take control of Cuba. In 1959 his small group of rebels seized Havana from the corrupt Batista regime
- Castro's left-wing policies incensed the United States and forced him to establish closer links with the Soviet Union
- Agreed to let the Russians install nuclear missiles in Cuba in 1962
- Castro continued to rule Cuba after the Crisis until poor health forced him to step down from office in 2008.



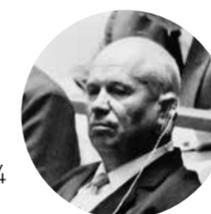
### JOHN F. KENNEDY

- Kennedy—also called Jack or JFK—was president of the United States during the Crisis
- Born in 1917; served in the US Navy during World War II and then entered politics
- He won an extremely narrow election victory in 1960 to become America's thirty-fifth president
- During his term in office he faced a number of international crises: the Bay of Pigs invasion, the construction of the Berlin Wall and the Cuban Missile Crisis
- He was assassinated on 22 November 1963 in Dallas, Texas.



### NIKITA KHRUSHCHEV

- Premier of the Soviet Union during the Crisis
- Pursued a policy of brinkmanship with the United States over the Cold War hotspots of West Berlin and Cuba
- Perceived as having backed down during the Crisis, Khrushchev was forced to resign in 1964
- Died of a heart attack in 1971.



## HISTORICAL INQUIRY

With a partner, create eight to twelve inquiry questions under the general heading of 'The causes and consequences of the Cuban Missile Crisis.' Keep your inquiry questions in mind as you read the information and work through the activities in this chapter. Here are three examples to help you get started:

1. How did the US react to Castro's policies and actions in Cuba?
2. Why did Khrushchev deploy nuclear missiles in Cuba?
3. What were the outcomes of the Crisis for the key leaders and nations involved?

## SKILLS FOCUS

## KEY TERMS

### EXCOMM

Short for 'executive committee.' The government body set up by President Kennedy to advise him on how to respond to the deployment of Russian nuclear missiles in Cuba.

### DEFCON

Short for 'defence condition,' DEFCON refers to the five levels of readiness for war for US military forces. DEFCON 1 means the nation is at war. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, the US Air Force was placed at DEFCON 2.

### ICBM

Abbreviation for 'intercontinental ballistic missile.' A missile with a nuclear warhead that can be fired at targets on the other side of the globe.

### BRINKMANSHIP

The strategy of bringing your opponent to the point of actual conflict, such as a nuclear war, and forcing them to back down in order to gain an advantage.

### DETERENCE

The idea that a nation possesses enough weapons, and the willingness to use them, to convince other nations not to attack them.

### DÉTENTE

The reduction in tension between two nations, taken from the French word for 'release' or 'relaxation'.

### MAD

Acronym for 'mutual assured destruction.' The idea that in the event of a nuclear attack, the target nation will have enough nuclear weapons remaining to destroy its opponent. This theoretically makes nuclear war impossible, as neither side can win.

## THE CUBAN REVOLUTION

**FIDEL CASTRO:** 'A revolution is not a bed of roses. A revolution is a struggle between the future and the past.'

### TROUBLE IN THE TROPICS

Cuba had been a Spanish colony until the Spanish–American War of 1898. While Cuba technically then became an independent nation, it quickly came under the economic and political dominance of the United States. Under the Platt Amendment, the United States reserved the right to intervene in Cuban affairs, with troops if necessary, and supported several corrupt regimes. The United States also maintained a military base at Guantánamo Bay. In 1933, Colonel Fulgencio Batista overthrew the existing government and, as head of the army, effectively controlled the five-man presidential committee. Batista was President of Cuba 1940–44 and, after a long stay in the United States, seized control of Cuba in 1952 through a military coup. This occurred three months before an election Batista feared he would lose. He suspended individual liberties and favoured wealthy landowners over the poor. Batista's regime also brutally suppressed political opponents. In a speech in October 1960, Senator John F Kennedy claimed that 'Batista murdered 20,000 Cubans in seven years'.<sup>3</sup> Batista allowed American businesses to control the Cuban economy and reap enormous profits. He also encouraged the Mafia to establish casinos in the capital city, Havana.

While Batista had the support of a small group of wealthy businessmen and plantation owners, most Cuban people detested the corruption of his regime and by the mid-1950s resistance groups had emerged. One was led by a middle-class law student named Fidel Castro. On 26 July 1953, Castro and a group of his followers attacked an army barracks. The raid was unsuccessful and Castro was captured. After two years in prison, Castro was released and fled to Mexico. He founded a revolutionary group named after the date of the attack on the barracks—the 26th of July Movement—and started planning another attempt to overthrow the Batista regime.<sup>4</sup> He returned to Cuba in 1956 with a small group of followers. Unable to defeat Batista's forces, however, Castro fled to the Sierra Maestra mountains in the south-east of the island.



THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR



THE PLATT AMENDMENT



FULGENCIO BATISTA

#### ➔ SOURCE 4.01

Fulgencio Batista, president and dictator of Cuba.



#### ➔ SOURCE 4.03

MAP SHOWING CUBA'S PROXIMITY TO THE UNITED STATES

#### ACTIVITY

##### SOURCE ANALYSIS

1. Explain why events in Cuba would be carefully watched by the US Government.
2. How would the development of nuclear weapons increase the importance of Cuba in America's strategic thinking?

### BATISTA'S GOLDEN TELEPHONE

Batista gave American companies a great deal of freedom over the way they operated in Cuba. IT&T, an American telecommunications company that controlled all the phone lines in Cuba, was allowed to charge extremely high rates for phone calls. As a sign of their gratitude, IT&T gave Batista a working, gold-plated telephone. It now sits in the Museum of the Revolution in Havana as a symbol of American complicity in Batista's opulence and corruption.



#### ➔ SOURCE 4.02

Batista's gold-plated telephone.

#### ACTIVITY

##### CREATIVE WRITING

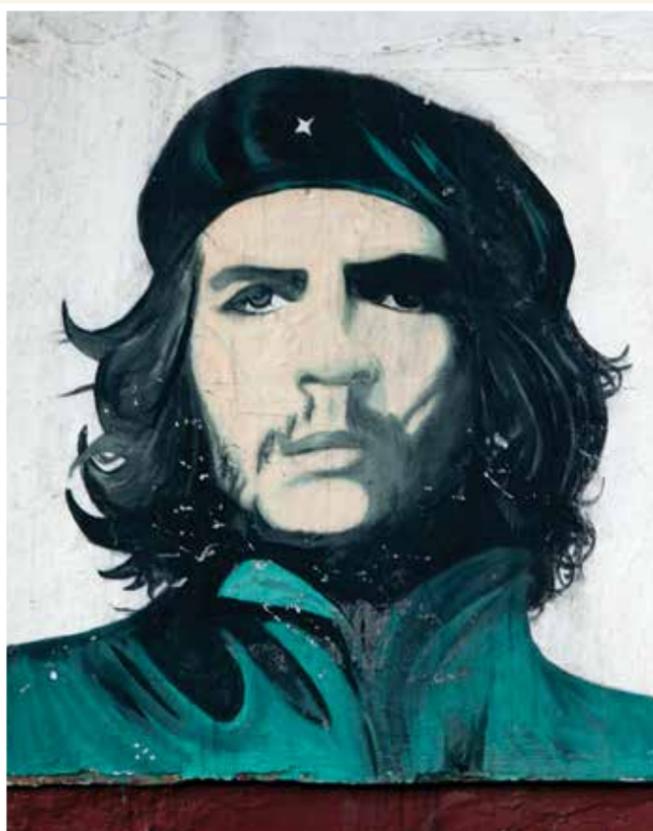
The year is 1961 and you have just been appointed curator of the Museum of the Revolution in Havana. Write the text for a sign to accompany the phone explaining America's exploitation of Cuba since 1898. This should be about 300 words in length.

## CASTRO'S LEFT TURN

Castro's forces waited in the mountains and gathered support while Batista's regime grew more unpopular with the Cuban people. During this time Castro was helped by the Argentinian revolutionary Ernesto 'Che' Guevara. Batista launched a few half-hearted attacks on Castro's positions in May 1958 but they were unsuccessful. In fact, many of Batista's soldiers went over to Castro's side!<sup>5</sup> By late 1958 Castro's forces were ready to advance on Havana. Support for Batista's regime collapsed and the dictator fled to Portugal. There was widespread support in Cuba for Castro when he took control of the country on 1 January 1959, and even some sectors of the US Government approved of the new government in Cuba.<sup>6</sup>

Initially Castro's ideology was vague, as he had never made a clear statement on whether or not he supported Marxism. As American journalist Drew Pearson wondered at the time, 'Where does Castro stand regarding Russia?'<sup>7</sup> Without a doubt, Castro was a nationalist who deeply resented the United States' influence over his country. US interests owned about 80 per cent of Cuba's utilities (water, electricity and telephone services), 40 per cent of its sugar production and 90 per cent of its mining industry.<sup>8</sup> Profits from these industries made US businesses very wealthy while the majority of the Cubans lived in poverty.

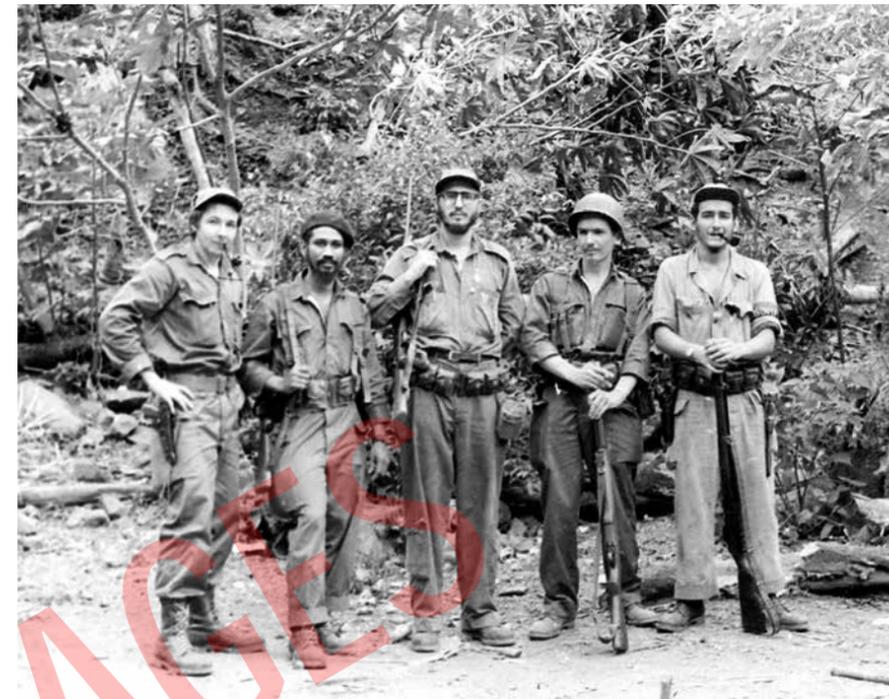
### ERNESTO 'CHE' GUEVARA



Born in Argentina in 1928, Guevara studied medicine but became better known as a Latin American revolutionary who supported left-wing movements and uprisings all over South America. He helped Castro train his guerilla army in the Sierra Maestra mountains and was Castro's Minister of Industry (1961–1965). Guevara left Cuba to foment revolution in Bolivia, but was captured and killed by the Bolivian army in 1967. He is now an icon as a revolutionary and as someone who challenged the status quo. Guevara earned his nickname 'Che' when he and a friend rode motorcycles around South America. Argentinians were known by other Latin Americans to frequently use the word *che*, colloquially meaning 'friend' or 'mate', when they talk.

#### SOURCE 4.04

Ernesto 'Che' Guevara (1928–1967).



#### SOURCE 4.05

Castro with supporters in the Sierra Maestra mountains. Fidel stands in the centre of the group while his brother is on the far left.

### ACTIVITY

#### SOURCE ANALYSIS

1. Identify two elements of the image that suggest Castro is a revolutionary leader.
2. By referring directly to the image and using your own knowledge, explain why there was widespread opposition to Batista's regime.
3. Evaluate how useful this document is in explaining why Castro's revolution was ultimately successful. Refer to other ideas and information in your response.

In spite of fears that he would nationalise all privately owned property and businesses, at first Castro only took over the US-owned and -operated telephone system. He also arrested and executed ex-officials of the Batista regime, many of whom had US supporters. Other ex-Batista officials fled to the United States, where they formed groups that resolved to return to Cuba and overthrow Castro. US President Eisenhower halted shipments of arms to Cuba and also threatened to stop purchasing Cuban sugar. This would have been a disaster for the Cuban economy, as it relied heavily on its sugar exports to the United States.

The breakdown in the US–Cuba relationship came in July 1960, when Castro demanded that Soviet oil be refined in Cuban-based, American-owned refineries. When Shell, Texaco and Esso refused, the Cuban government seized their facilities. Eisenhower retaliated by 'suspending the sugar quota, some 80 per cent of Cuban exports to the United States'.<sup>9</sup> The Soviet Union agreed to purchase the sugar and also, in the wake of a US trade embargo, supply all of Cuba's fuel needs. Castro had wrested Cuba's economy from the grasp of the United States but, as historian Donald Kagan notes, by turning to the Soviet Union 'they had only traded one [form of] subordination for another.'<sup>10</sup>



Dwight Eisenhower, US President 1953–1961.

## MISSILES TO CUBA

**NIKITA KHRUSHCHEV:** 'What about putting one of our hedgehogs down the Americans' trousers?'<sup>11</sup>

Having a communist nation with close ties to the Soviet Union so close to home was an unpleasant experience for the United States. Ever since the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, Americans had considered Central and South America, including the Caribbean, to be within their exclusive sphere of influence. In his address to Congress on 2 December 1823, President James Monroe maintained that America would 'consider any attempt on their [Europe's] part to extend their [political or economic] system to any portion of this hemisphere as dangerous to our peace and security.'<sup>12</sup> In line with this, in 1960 Eisenhower emphatically stated that the United States would not 'permit the establishment of a regime dominated by international communism in the Western hemisphere.'<sup>13</sup>

### THE BAY OF PIGS

When President Kennedy was inaugurated in January 1961, he inherited a variety of schemes designed to depose Castro. Perhaps the most ambitious was a CIA plan to support an invasion of Cuba by 1400 anti-Castro Cuban exiles. Kennedy supported the idea but did not want any evidence of US involvement. On 17 April, an invasion was launched from Guatemala, which landed at the Bay of Pigs on the southern coast of Cuba. The invasion was a disaster. Kennedy withdrew US air support at the last minute and refused to let the US Navy protect the invasion with gunfire. Castro's tanks and artillery pounded the exiles on the landing beach and easily defeated them. Of the invaders, some 114 were killed and over 1100 were taken prisoner. In December 1962, a prisoner exchange was arranged. Over 1100 prisoners were released and returned to the United States in exchange for basic necessities including food and medical supplies.<sup>14</sup>

If the invasion was a catastrophe for the exiles, it was a political disaster for Kennedy. He felt personally responsible for the failure of the landing and admitted US involvement at a media conference on 20 April. Kennedy stated that the invasion was not 'the final episode in the eternal struggle of liberty against tyranny,



#### DID YOU KNOW?

The name 'Bay of Pigs' might be the result of a mistranslation. In Spanish, this area is called *Bahía de Cochinos*. *Cochinos* means 'pigs' in Spanish, but it is also the name of a variety of fish found in waters of the bay.



THE BAY OF PIGS  
INVASION

#### SOURCE 4.06

Members of the Cuban militia celebrate after defeating the CIA backed invasion force of anti-Castro exiles at the Bay of Pigs, 17 April 1961.

anywhere on the face of the globe, including Cuba itself ...'<sup>15</sup> In spite of his resolve and promises of future action, Kennedy felt humiliated and reasoned that he had appeared weak and indecisive on the world stage. Eisenhower told Kennedy that 'the failure of the Bay of Pigs will embolden the Soviets to do something that they would not otherwise do.'<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately for Kennedy, Eisenhower was right.

#### SKILLS: HISTORICAL INQUIRY

The Bay of Pigs invasion was not the only event in 1961 that made Kennedy seem weak and indecisive in the eyes of the Russians. At the Vienna summit in June 1961, and during the erection of the Berlin Wall in August 1961, Kennedy appeared unable or unwilling to stand up to Soviet aggression. For either or both of these historical events, research and report on the following questions:

1. What were the origins of the event?
2. Why did Kennedy appear weak and indecisive?
3. What were the consequences of the event for the leaders involved, and for relations between the USA and the USSR?

#### DID YOU KNOW?

April was not a good month for President Kennedy. On 12 April, Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became the first man in space. This was seen as a significant technological achievement for the USSR and another blow for the Kennedy administration.

#### ACTIVITY

### OPERATION MONGOOSE



#### SOURCE 4.07

Castro laughing in the face of danger.



OPERATION  
MONGOOSE

#### Objective: Assassinate Castro!

Before the Bay of Pigs invasion and Kennedy's presidency, the CIA hatched an array of schemes designed to either oust the Castro regime or assassinate Castro. In September 1960, the CIA met with members of the Mafia to organise a 'hit' on the Cuban leader.<sup>17</sup> The Mafia despised Castro as he had shut down their lucrative night clubs and casinos in Havana. When this came to nothing, the CIA concocted other schemes. One involved coating a cigar in poison (as Castro was a prolific smoker), while another suggested placing exploding seashells in locations where Castro (a keen scuba diver) was known to swim.<sup>18</sup> In January 1962, Attorney-General Robert Kennedy initiated Operation Mongoose. The goal of this CIA-run scheme was to clandestinely send US agents and anti-Castro Cubans to Cuba to engage in acts of sabotage against targets like docks, crops, shipping and oil refineries. President Kennedy hoped that Operation Mongoose would eventually lead to an uprising by the Cuban people that would topple the Castro regime. In spite of a lavish budget and large numbers of agents and equipment, Operation Mongoose had achieved very little by the start of the Cuban Missile Crisis.<sup>19</sup>

## CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. Which country controlled Cuba prior to 1898?
2. What was the central idea of the Monroe Doctrine?
3. What were the outcomes of the Bay of Pigs invasion?

## DISCUSSION

1. With a partner, debate the following topic: 'America pushed Fidel Castro into the arms of the Soviet Union.' Share your ideas and opinions with the rest of the class.
2. Read the information contained in the textbox and weblink on the previous page, and then consider the following premise: 'For a liberal, democratic nation such as the United States, Operation Mongoose and the schemes to assassinate Castro were morally indefensible.' Share your opinion with the class.

## DIAGRAM

Make a flow chart explaining the key events from the Spanish-American War to the Bay of Pigs invasion.

## A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY

By 1962, Cold War tensions had reached their height. The US and USSR were competing in several fields to demonstrate their dominance to the rest of the world. In a way, each success seemed to vindicate the political and economic systems of each side and 'prove' that their way of life was intrinsically superior. Just prior to the Cuban Missile Crisis, it appeared that the Soviet Union was winning. They appeared to be in front of the US in a number of important areas.

## SOURCE 4.08

## A TIMELINE OF KEY COLD WAR EVENTS

DATE	EVENT
16 July 1945	The US detonates the world's first atomic bomb
August 1945	The US drops atomic bombs on Hiroshima (6 August) and Nagasaki (9 August)
29 August 1949	The USSR detonates their first atomic bomb
1 November 1952	The US detonates the first hydrogen bomb
12 August 1953	The USSR detonates its first hydrogen bomb
21 August 1957	The USSR tests the R-7, the world's first ICBM
4 October 1957	The USSR sends the world's first satellite into space, <i>Sputnik 1</i> . The delivery rocket is an R-7
3 November 1957	The USSR sends <i>Sputnik 2</i> into orbit; it carries the first animal launched into space, a dog named Laika
28 November 1958	The US tests its first successful ICBM, the Atlas missile
1 September 1959	The US deploys the first Atlas missile with a nuclear warhead
1 May 1960	An American U-2 spy plane is shot down over the USSR. The pilot, Gary Powers, is captured
20 July 1960	The US tests the first submarine-launched ICBM
10 September 1960	The USSR tests its own submarine-launched ICBM
12 April 1961	Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin becomes the first man in space
17–19 April 1961	The Bay of Pigs invasion
5 May 1961	First American, Alan Shepard, in space
June 1961	Kennedy and Khrushchev meet in Vienna; Kennedy felt he had been bullied by Khrushchev
13 August 1961	The USSR erects the Berlin Wall
30 October 1961	The USSR detonates the Tsar Bomba, the most powerful weapon ever devised

## SOURCE ANALYSIS

1. Draw up and complete a table like the one below and put each event from Source 4.08 in the most appropriate column.

Space Race	Military	Political

Discuss your decisions with a partner, then share your thoughts with the rest of the class.

2. In your opinion, which side was 'winning' the Cold War by the end of 1961? Justify your response.
3. By referring to the key events in the timeline, explain how advances in military technology contributed to the growing tension between the US and USSR.
4. Evaluate the usefulness of this table in understanding the balance of power between the USA and USSR up to and including 1961. Refer to other events and opinions in your response.
5. How useful is the table in explaining the origins of the Cuban Missile Crisis?

By 1960, the United States believed that the Soviet Union was far ahead of them in a number of important fields—and Soviet leader Premier Khrushchev was keen to perpetuate this notion. In 1957, the CIA released the Gaither Report, which expressed deep concerns over a 'missile gap' with the Soviets possessing 100 ICBMs to America's thirty.<sup>20</sup> Khrushchev played up to American fears. In November 1959 he boasted that Russian factories 'were turning out missiles like sausages.'<sup>21</sup> However, photographs taken during U-2 spy plane flights over Soviet territory revealed that while a missile gap did exist, it was greatly in favour of the United States.<sup>22</sup> US Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara announced this at a press conference in February 1961. In September, the CIA assessed the number of Soviet ICBMs as ten to twenty-five.<sup>23</sup> The Americans led the Soviet Union in terms of deliverable nuclear warheads by a factor of seventeen to one.<sup>24</sup> The following month, Kennedy ordered Deputy Secretary of Defense, Roswell Gilpatric, to make a statement declaring America's nuclear superiority:

## DEPUTY SECRETARY GILPATRIC ON THE ARMS RACE

The total number of our delivery vehicles [ICBMs, aircraft and submarines] ... is in the tens of thousands, and, of course, we have more than one warhead for each vehicle ... The destructive power which the United States could bring to bear even after a Soviet surprise attack upon our forces would be as great as, perhaps even greater than, the total undamaged force which the enemy can threaten to launch against the United States in a first strike.



## DID YOU KNOW?

The Tsar Bomba had a yield of 50 megatons, making it roughly 1500 times more powerful than the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined.

## SOURCE 4.09

Cited in Kagan, *On the Origins of War*, 491.

## SOURCE 4.10

## A U-2 SPY PLANE

The U-2 flew at over 20 000 metres and could take incredibly detailed photographs.

Through this announcement, Kennedy was communicating to the world—and to the USSR specifically—that even if America were attacked first in a nuclear war, they possessed enough nuclear weapons to deliver a devastating counter-strike. This was an enormous blow to Khrushchev’s personal prestige as the leader of the socialist world. He knew that the Soviet Union did not have the resources to keep up with the United States in an arms race and it would take too long for the USSR to develop and deploy enough ICBMs to catch up. Khrushchev responded in the short term, in October 1961, by authorising the detonation of the Tsar Bomba (see Source 4.08). Despite its power, the Tsar Bomba was not a practical weapon—regardless of where it was dropped, the nuclear fallout would eventually reach the USSR. Khrushchev needed a more realistic means of establishing a balance of power with the United States. Castro’s revolution in Cuba provided Khrushchev with the perfect opportunity.

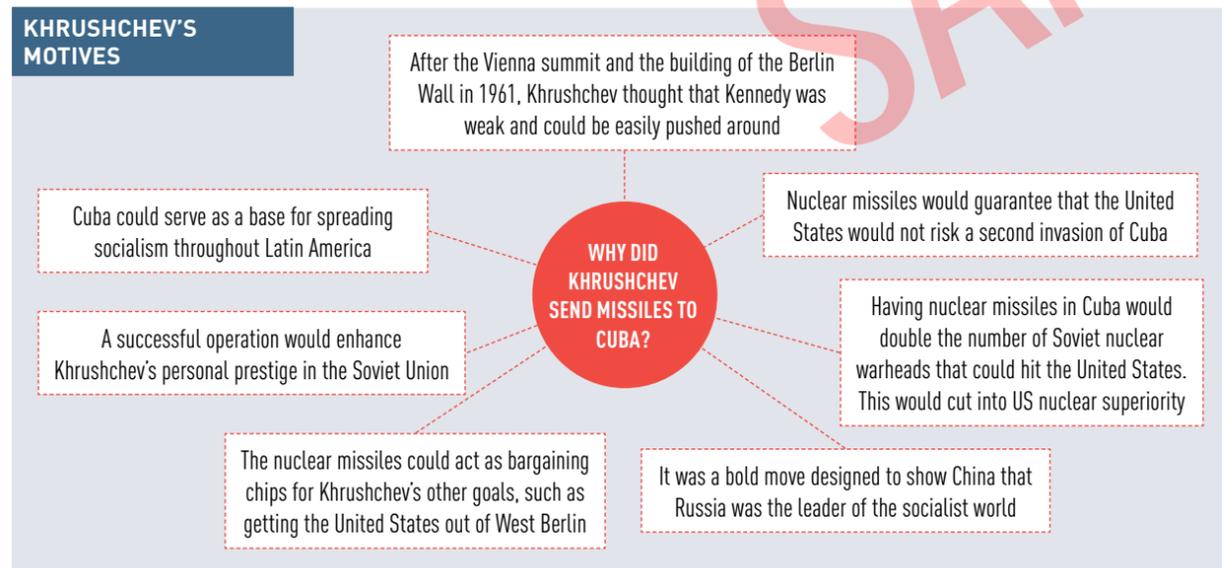


NIKITA KHRUSHCHEV

Fearing a repeat of the Bay of Pigs invasion with more direct involvement from the United States, in September 1961 Castro requested that Khrushchev send military equipment and soldiers to help defend Cuba. Khrushchev initially agreed to the request but soon decided to give Castro more than he had requested. On a state visit to Bulgaria in May 1962, Khrushchev looked across the Black Sea to Turkey where the United States had installed seventeen Jupiter missiles—each carrying a 1.4 megaton warhead—that were aimed at targets in the Soviet Union. The United States had established a precedent for using nuclear missiles to defend geographically vulnerable allies. ‘Now they would learn,’ Khrushchev wrote in his memoir, ‘just what it feels like to have enemy missiles pointed at you.’<sup>25</sup> On 30 May 1962, Castro gratefully accepted Khrushchev’s offer.<sup>26</sup> The stage was now set for the deadliest showdown of the Cold War.

**KHRUSHCHEV’S MOTIVES**

It wasn’t just the presence of US nuclear missiles in Turkey that convinced Khrushchev to consider placing Soviet missiles in Cuba. A number of Khrushchev’s concerns, desires and fears intersected in mid-1962, prompting him to embark upon a strategy that risked destabilising the extraordinarily delicate relationship between the USA and the USSR.



**OPERATION ANADYR**

**Defending socialism in the New World**

The Soviet nuclear missiles, along with other military equipment, were shipped to Cuba under the codename ‘Operation Anadyr’. Overall, the Soviet Union sent:

- four motorised regiments, with 2500 men each
- two tank battalions equipped with new T-55 tanks
- a MiG-21 fighter squadron
- forty-two Il-28 bombers (each of which could carry six nuclear bombs with eight to twelve kiloton warheads)
- anti-aircraft guns
- 144 SA-2 anti-aircraft missile launchers
- Twelve short range ‘Luna’ missiles (with a range of forty-five kilometres and a two-kiloton warhead)
- Eighty R-11m (FKR) cruise missiles (with a twelve-kiloton warheads)
- Twenty-four R-12 missiles (a medium-range ballistic missile, or MRBM, with a range of 1600 kilometres)
- Twenty-four R-14 missiles (an intermediate-range ballistic missile, or IRBM, with a range of 3200 kilometres).

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Anadyr is the name of a river in far eastern Siberia. A Russian bomber base was located nearby. The Soviets used this codename in an attempt to mislead any Western spies about the ultimate destination of the missiles.



OPERATION ANADYR

**SOURCE 4.11**

An R-12 missile on display in Moscow in the early 1960s.

The Il-28 bomber, called ‘Beagle’ by NATO, flew at over 900km/h and had a range of over 2000km. Thus it could easily attack US military bases in Florida.

Each R-12 and R-14 missile carried a one-megaton warhead, equivalent to one million tons of TNT. The bomb that destroyed Nagasaki had a yield of twenty kilotons (equivalent to twenty thousand tons of TNT). The Luna rockets (codenamed ‘Frogs’ by the US military) would be used against a US invasion force on the beaches. This equipment represented a serious commitment to defend Cuba from any future American invasion.<sup>27</sup>



**DISCUSSION**

Carefully review Khrushchev’s motives for placing missiles in Cuba and answer the following questions:

1. With a partner, rank Khrushchev’s motives from 1 to 7, from most likely (1) to least likely (7). Discuss your reasoning for each decision.
2. Share your thoughts with the rest of the class and compare your responses with other groups.

**ACTIVITY**



## DECEPTION AND DISCOVERY

**NIKITA KHRUSHCHEV:** 'This may end in a big war.'<sup>28</sup>

Khrushchev was well aware that placing missiles in Cuba was a provocative act. He hoped—with misplaced optimism—that the United States would not notice the Soviet military build-up in Cuba. Once the missiles were in place and fully operational, Khrushchev's plan was to announce their existence during a speech at the United Nations. Kennedy would find it extremely difficult to dislodge the missiles once they were in place—he would just have to learn to live with them, as Khrushchev was forced to live with US missiles in Turkey.

Unfortunately, from Khrushchev's perspective, the United States was keeping a close eye on Cuba. US Intelligence sources detected the arrival of the MiGs, the Il-28s and SA-2s in August 1962. The CIA suspected that the Soviets were also sending nuclear missiles to Cuba and urged Kennedy to act. President Kennedy ordered U-2 flights over Cuba to get more information. Deeply concerned by the Soviet military build-up on an island only 140 kilometres off the coast of Florida, on 13 September Kennedy sent a clear warning to the Soviet Union in a speech at a press conference:

### 📍 SOURCE 4.12

Khrushchev and Castro met for the first time, 1960.

### 📍 SOURCE 4.13

'The President's News Conference of September 13, 1962,' JFK Link, [http://www.jfklink.com/speeches/jfk/publicpapers/1962/jfk378\\_62.html](http://www.jfklink.com/speeches/jfk/publicpapers/1962/jfk378_62.html)

### 📌 DID YOU KNOW?

One Soviet freighter, the *Indigirka*, was tasked with carrying the warheads for the nuclear missiles to be based on Cuba. It has been estimated that the total TNT equivalent on board that one ship was twenty times greater than all the bombs dropped by Allied aircraft on Germany during World War II.

### KENNEDY'S SPEECH OF 13 SEPTEMBER 1962

Ever since communism moved into Cuba ... Soviet technical and military personnel have moved steadily onto the island in increasing numbers at the invitation of the Cuban Government. Now that movement has been increased. It is under our most careful surveillance. But I will repeat the conclusion that I reported last week: that these new shipments do not constitute a serious threat to any other part of this hemisphere ... But let me make this clear once again: If at any time the Communist buildup were to endanger or interfere with our security in any way ... or the lives of American citizens in this country, or if Cuba should ... become an offensive military base of significant capacity for the Soviet Union, then this country will do whatever must be done to protect its own security and that of its allies.

### ACTIVITY

#### SOURCE ANALYSIS

1. What do you think Kennedy means by the phrase 'an offensive military base of significant capacity'?
2. What might Kennedy mean when he states 'this country will do whatever must be done'?
3. By referring to the document, and using your own knowledge, explain why Khrushchev decided to send nuclear missiles to Cuba.
4. Evaluate the usefulness of this source in accounting for the extent of military support sent to Cuba by the Soviet Union. Refer to other views in your response.

## THE MISSILES DISCOVERED

On 14 October a U-2 aircraft flew over the western end of Cuba and took a series of photographs. Developed and analysed by the CIA the next day, the photos revealed the presence of two Soviet nuclear missiles. On the morning of Tuesday 16 October, the presidential advisor on national security matters, McGeorge Bundy, informed President Kennedy. President Kennedy immediately alerted his brother, Attorney-General Robert Kennedy, at 9.30 am. This meeting was kept brief, so that the public would not be alerted to a problem, but an 'off the record' meeting was held later that evening. Kennedy had an advantage, as Khrushchev didn't know that the Americans knew about the missiles in Cuba. The question for Kennedy was what to do about them.



## THIRTEEN DAYS

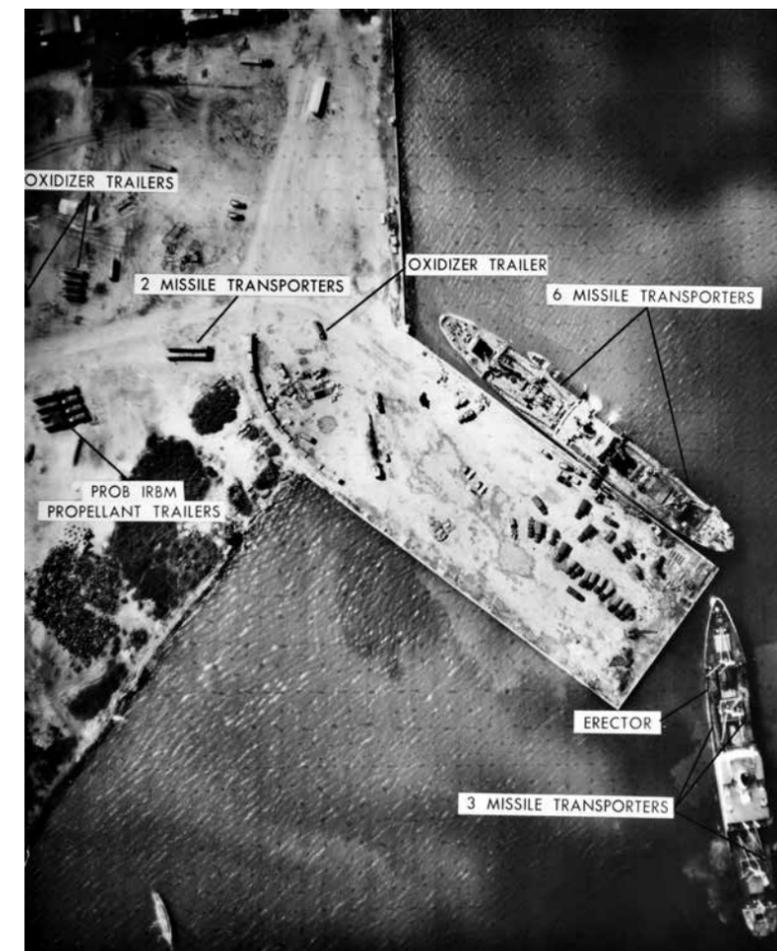
**DEAN RUSK, SECRETARY OF STATE:** 'We are eyeball to eyeball and the other fellow just blinked.'<sup>29</sup>

One of Kennedy's options was to do nothing about the missiles. As Secretary of Defense McNamara noted, the missiles did not meaningfully reduce America's lead in the nuclear missile race. However, they did double or even triple the number of Soviet warheads that could hit targets in the United States. In addition, it was estimated that approximately 80 million people would be killed within six minutes of the rockets being launched. Several US strategic bomber and ICBM bases were also within range of the missiles in Cuba. The Soviet Union could now initiate a devastating first strike against the United States (see Source 4.15). While the United States possessed enough nuclear weapons to obliterate the Soviet Union in a counterstrike, the prospect of living under the threat of nuclear destruction was not one that Kennedy could consider. In the wake of the Bay of Pigs fiasco, the meeting with Khrushchev in Vienna (which Kennedy admitted was the 'roughest thing in my life.'<sup>30</sup>) and the erection of the Berlin Wall, Kennedy felt the need to appear tough in front of the Russians. As Attorney-General Robert Kennedy noted, 'The US could not accept what the Russians had done.'<sup>31</sup> There were also mid-term Congressional elections coming up in November, and Kennedy knew that backing down in front of the Soviets would be disastrous for the Democratic Party and for his own chances of re-election in 1964.

Almost immediately President Kennedy set up a special group called ExComm (short for 'Executive Committee of the National Security Council'). The composition of the group changed over the

### 📍 SOURCE 4.14

One of the U-2 aerial reconnaissance photos shown to President Kennedy by the CIA on 16 October 1962.



**DID YOU KNOW?**

On 15 October 1962, the CIA told McGeorge Bundy about their discovery of Soviet missiles. Bundy opted not to tell President Kennedy until the next day, reasoning that Kennedy should be given one more good night's sleep. It was the last sleep anybody in the White House would have for two weeks.

thirteen days of the crisis, but its key members included Robert Kennedy, Robert McNamara, Dean Rusk, Director of the CIA John McCone, McGeorge Bundy, presidential counsel Ted Sorensen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Maxwell Taylor, and Vice President Lyndon Johnson. The members of ExComm represented very different personalities and ideas on how to deal with the Soviet Union. President Kennedy rarely sat in ExComm's meetings, as it was felt that his presence might make its participants reluctant to speak their minds. This was a well-considered move by JFK, as ExComm needed to come up with a plan that would resolve the looming showdown with the USSR without destroying the world. The Cuban Missile Crisis had begun.

**THE PRESIDENT'S CHOICES**

By mid-afternoon on 16 October, ExComm presented Kennedy with a number of options, ranging from aggressive to diplomatic. In the end it would be up to the president to decide on the course of action that he hoped would get the missiles removed without resorting to a nuclear war.

**KENNEDY'S OPTIONS**



Do nothing. McNamara argued that the missiles in Cuba did not significantly reduce America's lead in the missile race



Full air strikes, followed by an invasion of Cuba designed to get rid of Castro and his regime



A blockade, or quarantine, of Cuba to prevent more missiles from arriving



Work through the United Nations to arrive at a negotiated solution to the crisis



A limited air strike targeting only the nuclear missiles and their launch sites



Trade the missiles in Cuba for the US missiles in Turkey



A larger air strike targeting the missiles, sites of anti-aircraft weapons and other military targets

**DID YOU KNOW?**

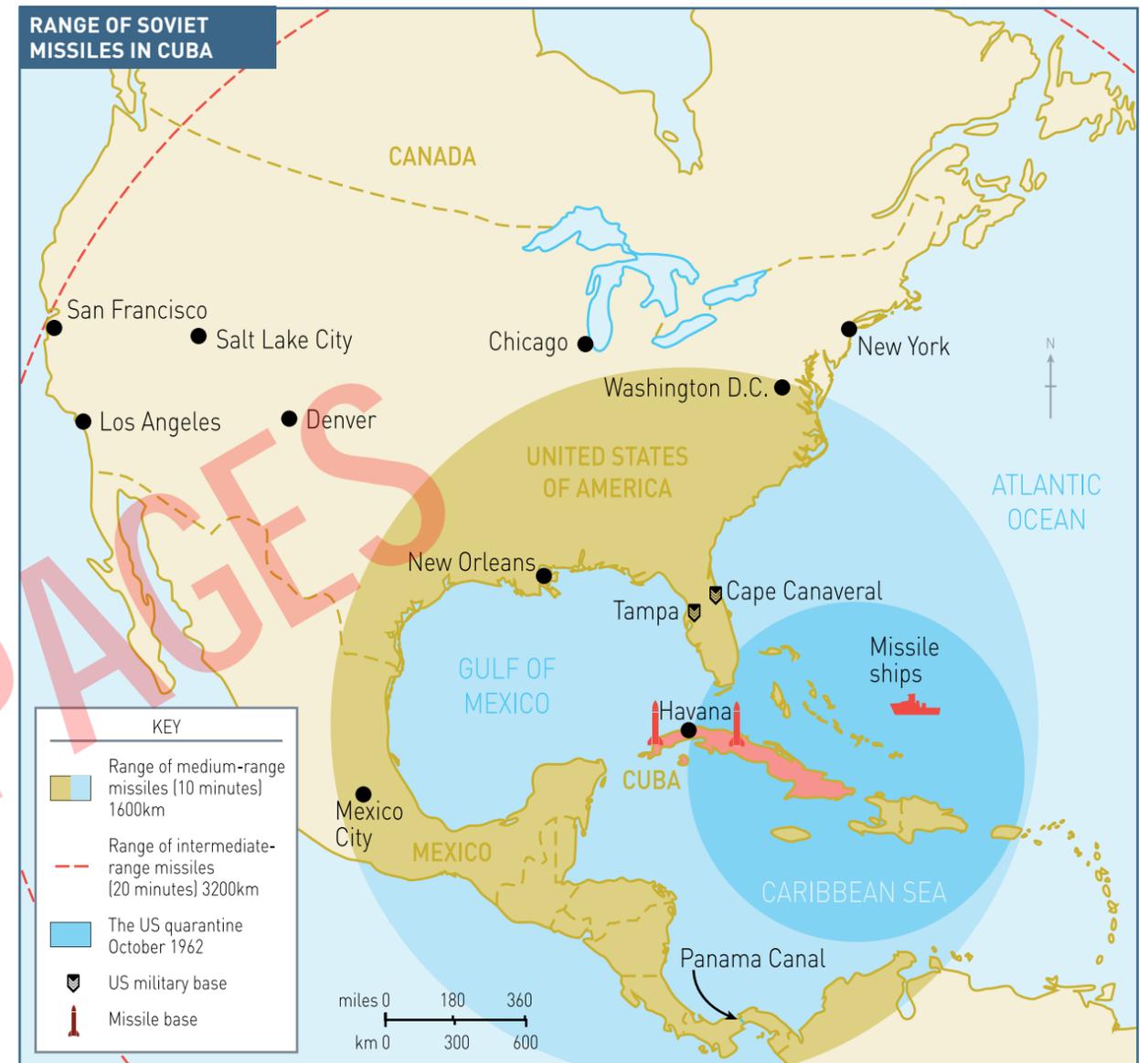
Throughout the Cold War, those in the US Government who called for an aggressive attitude when dealing with the Soviet Union were called 'hawks', while those who advocated diplomacy and discussion to avoid crises were called 'doves'.

**ACTIVITY**

**CLASS DISCUSSION**

Look over the information presented on Kennedy's options during the crisis. With a partner, discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each option. Write down your ideas in a table like that below and share them with the rest of the class.

Option	Advantages	Disadvantages
Nothing		
Blockade Cuba with US warships to prevent more missiles arriving		
Limited air strike		
Full air strike		
Full air strike with invasion		
Negotiate through the UN		
Trade 'missiles for missiles'		



**SOURCE 4.15**

**THE RANGE OF THE SOVIET NUCLEAR MISSILES ON CUBA**

The two types of missiles stationed on Cuba ensured that almost every part of the continental United States could come under nuclear attack.

**ACTIVITY**

**SOURCE ANALYSIS**

1. Identify two cities in the United States that the Soviet missiles in Cuba could reach.
2. Identify two other important targets, not in the US, that the Soviet missiles could reach.
3. By referring to the map, and using your own knowledge, explain why President Kennedy felt that he had to force the Soviets to withdraw their missiles from Cuba.
4. Evaluate the extent to which this map helps you understand why Khrushchev decided to place nuclear missiles in Cuba. Refer to other ideas and information in your response.

# THE THIRTEEN DAYS

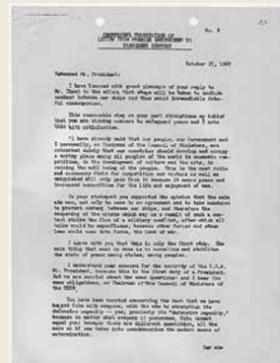
## The key events of the critical days in October

<p><b>DAY 1</b> TUESDAY 16 OCTOBER</p>	<p>Early morning: President Kennedy is informed that the Soviet Union is constructing nuclear missile bases on the island of Cuba.</p> <p>11.45 am: ExComm meets for the first time to discuss how the US Government should respond. Kennedy concludes the meeting by stating that 'we're going to take out these missiles.'<sup>32</sup></p> <p>6.30 pm: ExComm meets again. No decision is reached on how to respond, but a rapid air strike is the most favoured option at this stage; Robert McNamara presents the idea of a blockade.</p>	 <p><b>SOURCE 4.16</b></p> <p>Examining a reconnaissance photo at a US State Department discussion about Cuba.</p>
<p><b>DAY 2</b> WEDNESDAY 17 OCTOBER</p>	<p>ExComm meets throughout the day to consider the best response; the air strike option still has the most support.</p>	
<p><b>DAY 3</b> THURSDAY 18 OCTOBER</p>	<p>New U-2 reconnaissance photographs now show that there are at least thirty-two nuclear missiles on Cuba (including IRBMs with a range of over 3200 kilometres) that are capable of striking most cities in the United States (see Source 4.15).</p>	<p>5.00 pm: Kennedy meets with Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko. Kennedy does not mention that he is aware of the missiles. Gromyko reiterates the Soviet Government's statement that no missiles are, or will be, installed on Cuba.</p> <p>9.15 pm: ExComm gives its recommendations to President Kennedy. Dissatisfied with the lack of consensus within the group, Kennedy tells them to reconvene and present a response they all agree with.</p>
<p><b>DAY 4</b> FRIDAY 19 OCTOBER</p>	<p>Morning: Kennedy meets with top military officers and they exert considerable pressure on him to launch air strikes in preparation for an invasion of Cuba to destroy the missiles and oust Castro.</p> <p>Late morning: Kennedy leaves Washington for a scheduled congressional election campaign trip to Chicago.</p> <p>ExComm meets throughout the day and into the evening. Robert Kennedy pushes hard for the blockade option but the group remains divided.</p>	
<p><b>DAY 5</b> SATURDAY 20 OCTOBER</p>	<p>US armed forces around the world are put on high alert.</p> <p>ExComm meetings continue throughout the morning.</p> <p>Kennedy cuts short his trip to Chicago and returns to Washington.</p> <p>The CIA informs Kennedy that the missiles are probably now operational and can be launched at a few minutes' notice; this makes an air strike extremely risky.</p> <p>2.30 pm: After a meeting in the Oval Office, Kennedy decides in favour of a blockade of Cuba to prevent more missiles arriving; the word 'quarantine' is used to reduce the military connotations of the action.</p>	

<p><b>DAY 6</b> SUNDAY 21 OCTOBER</p>	<p>The Soviet Government receives reports of the US military build-up in Florida and the Caribbean; Russian military forces in Cuba are put on a state of high alert.</p>	<p><b>DID YOU KNOW?</b></p> <p>On 20 October President Kennedy falsely informed the press that he had a cold, so that his return to Washington on Saturday would not seem too suspicious. However, many journalists were not fooled, and suspected that something big was brewing in Washington DC.</p>
<p><b>DAY 7</b> MONDAY 22 OCTOBER</p>	<p>6.00 pm: Kennedy meets the leaders of Congress to inform them of the crisis and his decision to initiate a quarantine of Cuba; Congress demands a tougher military response.</p> <p>7.00 pm: Kennedy announces to the American people the presence of Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba, and his intention to quarantine the island, via a live, televised speech; Khrushchev receives a copy of the speech soon afterwards (see Source 4.18).</p>	
<p><b>DAY 8</b> TUESDAY 23 OCTOBER</p>	<p>Kennedy authorises low-level reconnaissance flights over the missile sites in Cuba; the chance that one or more flights might be shot down (thus sparking a war) is high.</p> <p>3.00 pm: The Organisation of American States (OAS) votes unanimously to condemn the placement of missiles in Cuba and approves of the quarantine.</p>	 <p><b>SOURCE 4.17</b></p> <p>Photographers and film cameramen swarm around President Kennedy at his desk in the Oval Office upon signing the Cuba Quarantine order, 23 October 1962.</p>
<p><b>DAY 9</b> WEDNESDAY 24 OCTOBER</p>	<p>Reconnaissance photographs reveal that the missiles will be operational within a few days.</p> <p>10.00 am: The US quarantine of Cuba comes into effect; two Russian ships, the <i>Gagarin</i> and the <i>Komiles</i>, are very close to the quarantine line.</p> <p>10.30–11.00 am: ExComm learns that twenty Russian ships have either stopped short of the quarantine line or are turning around; Dean Rusk makes his 'eyeball to eyeball' remark.<sup>33</sup></p> <p>10.00 pm: Strategic Air Command (SAC) is placed at DEFCON 2; US bombers are ready to launch a full nuclear attack on the Soviet Union.</p>	
<p><b>DAY 10</b> THURSDAY 25 OCTOBER</p>	<p>Reconnaissance photographs reveal that the Il-28s are being rapidly assembled in Cuba.</p> <p>US Ambassador to the United Nations Adlai Stevenson confronts Soviet Ambassador Valerian Zorin over the presence of missiles in Cuba during a televised session of the General Assembly.</p>	

FEATURE

<p><b>DAY 11</b> FRIDAY 26 OCTOBER</p>	<p>8.00 am: The first ship, the <i>Marucla</i>, is stopped by US navy vessels and boarded; the ship is carrying no weapons and is allowed to continue its journey.</p> <p>10.00 am: ExComm discusses a possible military response if the quarantine fails; air strikes and invasion are offered as likely options.</p> <p>9.00 pm: The White House receives a letter composed personally by Khrushchev that opens up the possibility of withdrawing the missiles in return for an American promise not to invade Cuba (see Source 4.19).</p>
<p><b>DAY 12</b> SATURDAY 27 OCTOBER</p>	<p>10.00 am: Kennedy receives Khrushchev's second, much sterner letter, which demands that the United States also remove the Jupiter missiles stationed in Turkey in return for a withdrawal of the Russian missiles in Cuba (see Source 4.20).</p> <p>4.00 pm: ExComm meets to discuss their response to Khrushchev's second letter; they learn during the meeting that a U-2 has been shot down over Cuba and that the pilot, Major Rudolf Anderson, has been killed. The question now is whether the United States should retaliate by bombing anti-aircraft sites in Cuba; Kennedy delays his decision until the following morning.</p> <p>Late afternoon: ExComm ignores the demand to remove the Jupiter missiles from Turkey and responds to Khrushchev's first letter, agreeing not to invade Cuba in return for the withdrawal of the Soviet missiles.</p> <p>7.45 pm: Robert Kennedy meets Dobrynin and reiterates the US Government's acceptance of the terms of Khrushchev's first letter; he also indicates that the missiles in Turkey would be removed in four to five months, but that this must be kept absolutely secret; Robert Kennedy hints at the possibility of military action to take out the missiles if Khrushchev does not respond quickly.</p>
<p><b>DAY 13</b> SUNDAY 28 OCTOBER</p>	<p>Preparations for a US invasion of Cuba continue; ExComm expects that it will take place on either Monday or Tuesday if Khrushchev does not agree to withdraw the missiles.</p> <p>10.00 am: The US Government receives a message from Khrushchev indicating that he accepts the US Government's terms; the missiles be removed from Cuba in return for a public US guarantee not to invade and the eventual, albeit secret, withdrawal of the Jupiter missiles from Turkey.</p> <p>A potential third world war has been averted by less than twenty-four hours.</p>



↑ Khrushchev's second letter.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Jupiter missiles in Turkey were obsolete by October 1962 and had already been scheduled for removal. They would be replaced by US submarines armed with nuclear missiles, which would patrol the eastern Mediterranean Ocean. However, the United States demanded that the removal of the Jupiters be kept secret to avoid giving the impression that they traded missiles under duress. The Jupiter missiles were finally removed in March 1963.

-  THIRTEEN DAYS IN OCTOBER
-  THIRTEEN DAYS: FILM TASK
-  LEVELS OF TENSION: GRAPHING EXERCISE

ACTIVITY

SKILLS: PERSPECTIVES

With a partner, script and present a conversation between two ordinary Americans at the height of the crisis, one supporting an invasion of Cuba and the other opposed. Make reference to some of the key events of the crisis (such as Kennedy's Address to the Nation or the shooting down of the U-2 spy plane).

CLOSER THAN ANYONE KNEW



↑ An Il-28 bomber on display at an aviation museum.

There were many more nuclear-tipped weapons in Cuba and the Caribbean than the US Government realised. While ExComm was aware of the ballistic missiles and Il-28 bombers, they knew nothing of the R-11m cruise missiles and the Lunas. More importantly, they had no idea that the Soviet commander in charge of all the Russian forces in Cuba, General Pliyev, had been given permission to use these relatively 'small' nuclear devices in the event of a US invasion. One of the cruise missiles could take out a US aircraft carrier and its support vessels. The Lunas were so powerful that, hypothetically, only ten of them would have been needed to completely destroy all the Allied forces landing on the Normandy beaches on D-Day, 6 June 1944.<sup>34</sup> In addition, the four Soviet Foxtrot submarines guarding the freighter ships en route to Cuba each carried one nuclear-tipped torpedo. Like the cruise missiles, each torpedo was capable of destroying an aircraft carrier.<sup>35</sup> If

the US had invaded Cuba, it is highly likely these tactical nuclear weapons would have been fired. Kennedy would have felt compelled to respond with a full nuclear attack on the Soviet Union. The MRBMs and IRBMs on Cuba would have been fired at their targets in the US, along with the ICBMs based in Russia. Tens of millions of people would have died within a few hours. This was the essence of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD).



As the Crisis intensified and a nuclear war, starting with a US invasion of Cuba, seemed increasingly likely, Khrushchev began to wonder if he had pushed Kennedy too far. The quarantine around Cuba, Kennedy's address to the nation on 22 October (see Source 4.18) and reports of a huge US troop deployment to Florida suggested to Khrushchev that the United States was prepared to spark a third world war.<sup>36</sup> He now sought to resolve the matter diplomatically. Khrushchev sent two letters to President Kennedy, one on 26 October (see Source 4.19) and another the next day (see Source 4.20). In the first letter, Khrushchev promised to withdraw the Russian missiles from Cuba in return for a US guarantee that they would not attempt to invade Cuba again. However, the second letter was more demanding. Khrushchev insisted that the United States must also withdraw its nuclear missiles from Turkey. The reasoning behind Khrushchev's harsher stance in the second letter can only be guessed at. It may have been the result of an article by journalist Walter Lippmann, which suggested that a missile trade-off was one way of ending the Crisis. Khrushchev was known to think that Lippmann's views reflected the views of the White House. That Kennedy failed to publically reject Lippmann's proposal might have suggested to Khrushchev that the US Government was prepared to trade. In addition, Robert Kennedy met with the Soviet Ambassador to the United States, Anatoly Dobrynin, on the night of 26 October and suggested that the United States was prepared to trade missiles in Turkey for those in Cuba.<sup>37</sup> Khrushchev had raised the stakes of the game considerably and the Kennedys were now in an extremely awkward position. If the US offer—along with Khrushchev's demand—to remove the missiles from Turkey was made public, it would seem as though the United States had relented under pressure while the Soviets had scored a great diplomatic triumph.

DID YOU KNOW?

CIA reconnaissance photo analysts became expert at deciphering the type of Soviet military equipment being shipped by studying the dimensions of the crates the equipment was in. This technique was dubbed 'cratology.'

# KEY DOCUMENTS FROM THE CRISIS

## → SOURCE 4.18

*Cited in Kennedy, Thirteen Days, 149–53.*



KENNEDY'S ADDRESS TO THE NATION

### ACTIVITY

#### SPEECH WRITING

Imagine you are a secondary school principal at the time of this crisis. You are aware of student fear about the Crisis and decide to address the matter in your weekly assembly address. Prepare a 300–500 word speech in which you attempt to tell the truth without raising student anxiety.

## → SOURCE 4.19

*'Letter from Chairman Khrushchev to President Kennedy,' JFK Library, <http://microsites.jfklibrary.org/cm/oct26/doc4.html>*



FULL TEXT OF THE FIRST LETTER

### EXTRACT FROM KENNEDY'S ADDRESS TO THE NATION, MONDAY 22 OCTOBER 1962

Good evening, my fellow citizens. This government, as promised, has maintained the closest surveillance of the Soviet military build-up on the island of Cuba. Within the past week unmistakable evidence has established the fact that a series of offensive missile sites is now in preparation on that imprisoned island. The purposes of these bases can be none other than to provide a nuclear strike capacity against the Western hemisphere ... Our unswerving objective, therefore, must be to prevent the use of these missiles against this or any other country and to secure their withdrawal or elimination from the Western hemisphere ... To halt this offensive build-up, a strict quarantine on all offensive military equipment under shipment to Cuba is being initiated ... It shall be the policy of this nation to regard any nuclear missile launched from Cuba against any nation in the Western hemisphere as an attack by the Soviet Union on the United States, requiring a full retaliatory response upon the Soviet Union.

### ACTIVITY

#### SOURCE ANALYSIS

1. According to President Kennedy, what is the purpose of the Soviet missile bases in Cuba?
2. What will be his government's response?
3. What do you think Kennedy means when he refers to 'a full retaliatory response'?

### EXTRACT FROM KHRUSHCHEV'S FIRST LETTER TO KENNEDY, FRIDAY 26 OCTOBER 1962

If people do not show wisdom, then in the final analysis they will come to a clash, like blind moles, and then reciprocal extermination will begin. Let us therefore show statesmanlike wisdom. I propose: We, for our part, will declare that our ships, bound for Cuba, will not carry any kind of armaments. You would declare that the United States will not invade Cuba with its forces ... Then the necessity for the presence of our military specialists in Cuba would disappear ... [W]e and you ought not now pull on the ends of the rope in which you have tied the knots of war, because the more the two of us pull, the tighter the knot will be tied.

### ACTIVITY

#### SOURCE ANALYSIS

1. Outline the details of Khrushchev's proposal to Kennedy.
2. What might Khrushchev be referring to when he notes that 'the necessity for the presence of our military specialists in Cuba would disappear'?
3. What do you think Khrushchev means by the phrase 'the knots of war'?
4. Who does Khrushchev blame for precipitating the crisis? How does he come to this conclusion? Is this a reasonable evaluation of the causes of the Crisis? Explain your answer.

### EXTRACT FROM KHRUSHCHEV'S SECOND LETTER TO KENNEDY, SATURDAY 27 OCTOBER 1962

We agree to remove those weapons from Cuba which you regard as offensive weapons. We agree to do this and to state this commitment in the United Nations. Your representatives will make a statement to the effect that the United States, on its part, bearing in mind the anxiety and concern of the Soviet state, will evacuate its analogous [equivalent] weapons from Turkey... the United States will [also] respect the integrity of the frontiers of Cuba, its sovereignty, [and] undertake not to invade...

## ← SOURCE 4.20

*Cited in Kennedy, Thirteen Days, 159–60.*



FULL TEXT OF THE SECOND LETTER

### ACTIVITY

#### SOURCE ANALYSIS

1. Compare the tone used in this letter with that of the first letter. Is it different? If so, how? What would account for any difference?
2. What demands does the Soviet Government make in the second letter?
3. Using your own knowledge, explain why it would be so difficult for the United States to meet the new demands.

On Saturday 27 October, a U-2 spy plane on a photographic reconnaissance mission over Cuba was shot down by Soviet anti-aircraft missiles. Some members of ExComm demanded that President Kennedy respond by bombing all anti-aircraft sites on the island on Monday morning, along with other military targets such as the nuclear missiles. As the Crisis escalated, Kennedy found it harder to withstand ExComm's demands for decisive military action. Not wanting to spark World War III, that night Kennedy called a small group of his advisors into the Oval Office to discuss their options. They decided that Robert Kennedy would meet with Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin and respond to Khrushchev's first letter: a promise not to invade if the Russian missiles were removed. In addition to this, Robert Kennedy indicated that the United States would withdraw their missiles from Turkey after the Crisis was over—but that this had to remain strictly confidential. Dobrynin passed this message onto Khrushchev, and the Soviet leader accepted the US offer the following morning.<sup>38</sup> A possible nuclear war had possibly been averted by less than twenty-four hours.

President Kennedy's offer to remove the missiles from Turkey was kept from the public for over twenty-five years. Robert Kennedy did not mention it in his own account of the Crisis. Even though the Jupiter missiles in Turkey were obsolete and scheduled for removal anyway, the Kennedys could not risk giving the impression that they had been removed under pressure from the Soviets. In his memoir, Khrushchev claimed that he had won a great victory as the Soviet Union had 'forced the United States to demobilize and to recognize Cuba.'<sup>39</sup> However, he had been forced to remove his missiles from Cuba and tacitly accept that his gamble had not paid off. While President Kennedy had been compelled to promise that Cuba would not be invaded again, he was seen as a tough yet calm leader who could defend the 'free world' from communist aggression.

### DID YOU KNOW?

The hotline was not a phone line, as is often suggested in popular culture. Initially the link was between two teletype machines, and from 1986 a fax machine was used. As of 2008, a secure email connection is used when the leaders of Russia and the United States need to communicate quickly.

## DÉTENTE, DISMISSAL AND DEATH

**PRESIDENT KENNEDY:** 'We are all mortal.'

During the Cuban Missile Crisis, humanity came closer than any other point in history to destroying itself. It forced the leaders of the US and the USSR to abandon their game of brinkmanship. They realised the importance of communicating clearly and establishing a shared agreement on peaceful coexistence. The years after the Crisis saw a significant relaxation in the tension between the two superpowers. The French word 'détente' is used to describe this period that lasted, largely uninterrupted, until the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

President Kennedy summed up the new spirit of détente in a speech he delivered during the Commencement Ceremony at the American University on 10 July 1963. Kennedy, and his speechwriters, had a gift for producing memorable lines, which is evident in this extract.

### SOURCE 4.21

'Commencement Week at American University, June 10 1963,' JFK Library, <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/BWC714C9QUmLG9J6I8oy8w.aspx>



KENNEDY'S  
'AMERICAN  
UNIVERSITY' SPEECH

### KENNEDY'S 'AMERICAN UNIVERSITY' SPEECH

What kind of peace do I mean? What kind of peace do we seek? Not a Pax Americana enforced on the world by American weapons of war. Not the peace of the grave or the security of the slave. I am talking about genuine peace, the kind that enables men and nations to grow and to hope and to build a better life for their children ... Let us not be blind to our differences—but let us also direct attention to our common interests and the means by which those differences can be resolved ... For, in the final analysis, our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this same small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's future. And we are all mortal.

### SOURCE 4.22

'Over the garden wall'  
by Norman Mansbridge,  
from *Punch* magazine, 17  
October 1963.

### ACTIVITY

#### SOURCE ANALYSIS

1. Identify the two individuals depicted in this cartoon.
2. Explain the meaning of the phrase 'Hints on pruning.'
3. By referring directly to the cartoon, and using your own knowledge, explain the role played by Attorney-General Robert Kennedy in defusing the stand-off over the Cuban missiles.
4. Evaluate the usefulness of this cartoon in helping us understand the causes of the tension between the US and USSR in 1962. Refer to other views and ideas in your response.



OVER THE GARDEN WALL

### OUTCOMES OF THE CRISIS

A general period of détente between the two superpowers

A hotline was established between the Pentagon and the Kremlin

A nuclear test ban treaty was signed, which prohibited testing nuclear weapons above the ground or under water

Khrushchev withdrew nuclear missiles from Cuba

Khrushchev discouraged Castro from exporting socialism to other Latin American countries

Kennedy promised not to invade Cuba

In a secret deal, Kennedy agreed that the Jupiter missiles will be withdrawn from Turkey

## THE FATE OF LEADERS

### KENNEDY

After the events of October, Kennedy turned his mind to other pressing issues such as civil rights, the looming crisis in Vietnam and his own presidential re-election campaign. Kennedy's full potential as a world leader, however, would never be realised. On 22 November 1963 Kennedy was in Dallas, Texas, on a political trip to shore up support in the southern states (where his civil rights bill was deeply unpopular) for his re-election campaign in 1964. He was killed by an assassin while riding in a limousine in the presidential motorcade. There has been a great deal of controversy about who killed Kennedy, and how many assassins were involved, ever since.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Robert Kennedy was also killed by an assassin. On 6 June 1968, while campaigning for his own bid to become president, Kennedy was shot and killed as he left a hotel in Los Angeles.

### KHRUSHCHEV

Khrushchev remained leader of the Soviet Union until he was ousted by the Presidium (the ruling council of the Soviet Communist Party) in October 1964. His political opponents criticised the state of the economy, agriculture and education under Khrushchev's rule. They also accused him of increasingly directing policy without input from the Presidium. The inherent riskiness of Operation Anadyr—and his decision to back down in the face of US firmness during the Cuban Missile Crisis—also fatally wounded Khrushchev's political and personal reputation.<sup>40</sup> Khrushchev offered his resignation and pointed out just how much the USSR had changed under his leadership: 'Could anyone have dreamed of telling Stalin that he didn't suit us anymore and suggesting he retire?' Khrushchev asked a colleague, 'Not even a wet spot would have remained where we had been standing.'<sup>41</sup> Khrushchev lived in quiet retirement until his death from a heart attack in 1971.

### CASTRO

Castro had not been part of the negotiations to remove the missiles and he felt deeply betrayed by Khrushchev's decision. The Cuban leader also thought that they had missed the perfect opportunity to force the United States out of their military base at Guantánamo Bay. For Castro, the nuclear missiles had been placed in Cuba to defend it from another US invasion. Without a nuclear deterrent, Castro believed that his country was vulnerable. No attack materialised but the US trade embargo of Cuba continued. Castro remained President of Cuba until poor health forced him to step down in 2008. He was succeeded by his brother Raúl.



HISTORICAL INQUIRY:  
GUANTÁNAMO BAY

## CONCLUSION

All national revolutions have repercussions beyond their own borders. Only one, however, almost resulted in the end of human civilisation. Castro's revolution in Cuba, his subsequent adoption of socialism and his appeals to the Soviet Union for economic and military assistance took place within the broader context of the Cold War. The United States was unwilling to accept that a foreign power had such influence over a nation in what America considered it to be its own backyard. Socialism now had a bridgehead in Latin America and the United States feared that Cuba would be used as a base to foment revolution in other nations in the Western hemisphere. Even worse, Cuba could be used as base for the installation of Soviet nuclear

weapons that could directly threaten the security of the United States.

This is exactly what a U-2 spy plane discovered on 14 October 1962. Two days later President Kennedy was informed—and the Cuba Missile Crisis began. For thirteen days the world held its breath as the leaders of the two superpowers tested the limits of their courage. Courage during the crisis took two forms: the courage to stand firm and the courage to concede. Fortunately, the US and USSR put reason and compassion before fear and aggression. They came to an agreement at the last minute that prevented the outbreak of a third world war and ushered in a period of détente between the two superpowers.

## CHAPTER REVIEW

The year is 1963 and you are a journalist in either the US or USSR. Your editor has tasked you with writing a feature-length article on the causes and consequences of the Crisis. Write from the perspective of a journalist from your chosen nation in a report of about 500 words.

## EXAM PRACTICE

Using three to four points:

1. explain why President Kennedy reacted so swiftly and forcefully to remove the Soviet missiles from Cuba.
2. critically analyse how Kennedy and the members of ExComm dealt with the problem of Soviet missiles in Cuba.
3. explain how the outcomes of the Cuban Missile Crisis contributed to the general climate of détente that existed between the US and USSR during the 1960s and 70s.

## ESSAY

Write an essay on one of the topics below, using evidence.

- Historian Donald Kagan argues that Kennedy's inability to demonstrate America's strength during the early 1960s encouraged Khrushchev to place nuclear missiles in Cuba. To what extent do you agree with this argument? Use evidence to support your answer.
- Historian John Lewis Gaddis argues that the reason behind Khrushchev's decision to place nuclear missiles in Cuba was to extend socialism throughout Latin America. To what extent do you agree with this argument? Use evidence to support your answer.
- 'Kennedy only made the risky decision to force the Russian missiles out of Cuba in an effort to protect his own political reputation in the United States.' Do you think this is a fair assessment of Kennedy's actions during the Crisis? Use evidence to support your answer.

## TEST



QUIZ – CHAPTER 4

TEST YOUR  
LEARNING

## FURTHER READING

*Fog of War*. Directed by Errol Morris. New York: Sony Pictures Classics, 2003

This brilliant documentary focuses on the life of Robert McNamara, a man who, as US Secretary of Defense, was at the heart of the Cold War for seven years. His comments and revelations carry the weight of someone who was a key participant in the Cuban Missile Crisis.

*Thirteen Days*. Directed by Roger Donaldson. Los Angeles: New Line Cinema, 2000

This gripping film tells the story of the Cuban Missile Crisis from the perspective of the White House. While it goes to great lengths to get the 'look and feel' of the early 1960s right, it does sacrifice some historical accuracy for the purposes of drama and entertainment.

Attorney General Robert Kennedy consults with brother President John Kennedy at the White House in 1962.

Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble: The Secret History of the Cuban Missile Crisis*, New York, 1997

These two authors had access to never-before-seen Soviet and Cuban documents. This makes their book one of the most original and insightful on the topic, particularly when covering events in Moscow and Havana.

Donald Kagan, *On the Origins of War*, London, 1995.

One long chapter in this fascinating book is dedicated to the Cuban Missile Crisis. Kagan argues that wars break out when powerful nations are unwilling to stand up to aggression and provocation.

Robert F. Kennedy, *Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis*, New York, 1999.

A must-read for anyone learning about the Crisis. While we now know more about these events than Robert Kennedy presents in his book, this is an invaluable resource written by one of the key participants. Analytical essays and key documents are also included.

Ernest May and Philip Zelikow, *The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House during the Cuban Missile Crisis*, New York, 2002.

We know so much about what happened during the Crisis because President Kennedy ordered the installation of recording devices in the White House early in his presidency. The transcripts of many discussions and meetings have been edited and presented in this highly useful resource.