

# Cuban Crisis 1962

## Causes of the crisis

In October 1962, the **existence** of the world was threatened. Experts examining photographs of Cuba taken by U2 spy planes saw what they believed to be evidence that the Russians were building **nuclear missile sites** in Cuba.

It was the beginning of a **confrontation** that took the world to the brink of a nuclear holocaust.

1. Causes of the Cuban crisis
2. Kennedy versus Khrushchev

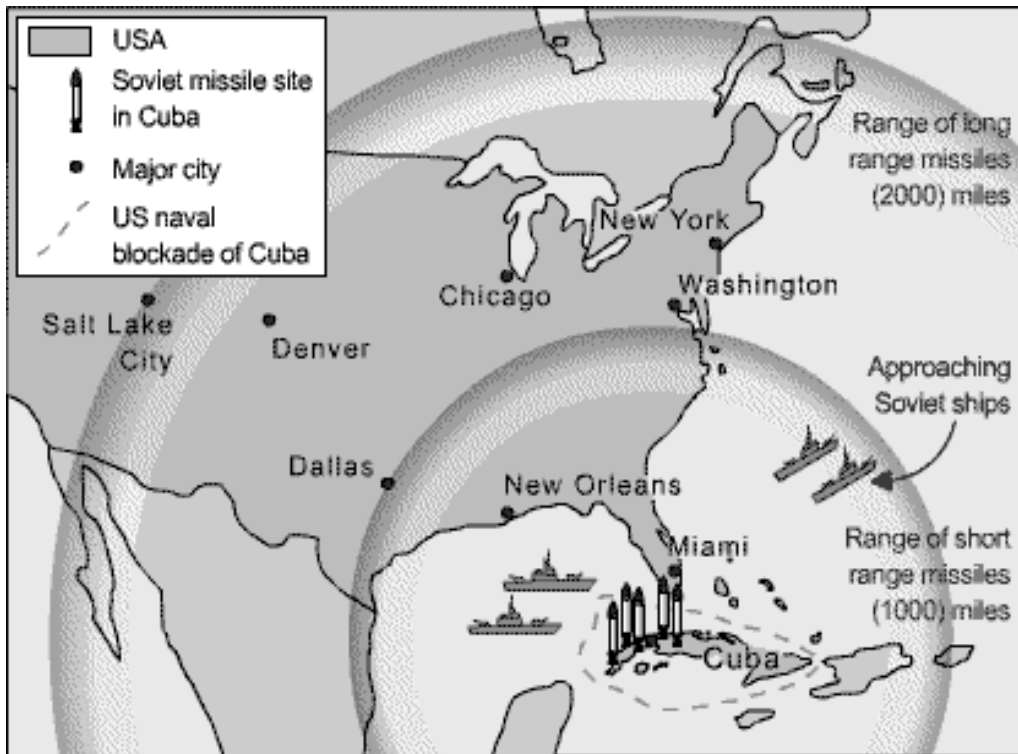
## *Causes of the Cuban crisis*

In 1962, the Cold War was at its coldest. The Russians had built the **Berlin Wall** the previous year. Kennedy who had been elected because he promised to get tough with the Communists felt that Khrushchev had got one over on him at the **Vienna Summit** in 1961. In April 1962, the Americans put nuclear missiles in Turkey.

Also, in 1959, a rebel named **Fidel Castro** took power in Cuba, an island just 90 miles away from Florida. Before Castro took over, the government - led by Colonel Batista - had been a corrupt and right-wing military dictatorship, but the Americans had many business interests in Cuba.

When Castro came to power, however, he **nationalised American companies** in Cuba. In retaliation, the Americans **stopped all aid** to Cuba, and **all imports** of Cuban sugar. This was a blow to Castro as sugar was the **mainstay** of the Cuban economy. Castro was forced to look to the USSR for help, and, in 1960, the USSR signed an **agreement** to buy 1 million tonnes of Cuban sugar every year. Castro, who had not been a Communist when he took power, became a Communist.

America was **alarmed**. In April 1961, with Kennedy's knowledge, the CIA funded, trained, armed and transported 1,300 Cuban exiles to **invade Cuba**. They landed at the **Bay of Pigs** and made an attempt to overthrow Castro. The invasion was a **disaster**, and President Kennedy was humiliated.



In September 1961, Castro asked for - and Russia publicly promised - **weapons** to defend Cuba against America. Which is why on 14 October 1962, the Americans discovered the **missile sites** in Cuba. These sites brought every town in the US within **range** of Soviet nuclear missiles. President Kennedy called a meeting of the National Security Council and on 22 October went on TV to tell the American people that they were under threat.

The crisis had begun.

# Events of the crisis

The Cold War was the coldest it had ever been. The **threat** of nuclear war became increasingly apparent because Cuba is just 90 miles away from the US state of Florida. It was vital that Kennedy and Khrushchev came to some sort of **agreement** - the future of the world depended on it.

Read on to find out what happened...

1. [Events of the crisis](#)
2. [One week in October 1962](#)

## *Events of the crisis*

President Kennedy did not dare to invade Cuba, because that action could have started a world war - yet he could **not** let the missile sites be completed. With his advisers, he decided on a **naval blockade** to prevent Russian ships delivering the missiles for the Cuban sites.

Khrushchev warned that Russia would see the blockade as an **act of war**. Russian forces were put on **alert**; US bombers were put in the air carrying **nuclear bombs**; preparations were made to **invade** Cuba. There was **massive tension** in both Washington and Moscow. Everybody thought the world was going to come to an end. Secretly, the Americans suggested a **trade-off** of missile bases - US bases in Turkey for Russian bases in Cuba.

The Russians made the first public move. The ships heading for Cuba **turned back**, and Khrushchev sent a telegram offering to **dismantle** the Cuban bases if Kennedy lifted the blockade and promised not to invade Cuba. Then, as though having second thoughts, he sent a second letter **demanding** the dismantling of the Turkish bases. At the vital moment, a US U2 spy plane was shot down.

However, Kennedy ignored the U2 attack and **agreed** publicly to the first letter, and secretly to the second. The crisis was over.

## ***One week in October 1962***

<b>Monday 22 October:</b>	Kennedy announces a naval blockade of Cuba. B52 nuclear bombers are deployed, so that one-eighth of them are airborne all the time. Kennedy warns of a full retaliatory response, if any missile is launched from Cuba.
<b>Tuesday 23 October:</b>	Khrushchev explains that the missile sites are "solely to defend Cuba against the attack of an aggressor".
<b>Wednesday 24 October:</b>	Twenty Russian ships head for Cuba. Khrushchev tells the captains to ignore the blockade. Khrushchev warns that Russia will have "a fitting reply to the aggressor".
<b>Thursday, 25 October:</b>	The first Russian ship reaches the naval blockade. It is an oil ship and is allowed through. The other Russian ships turn back. Secretly, the US government floats the idea of removing the missiles in Turkey in exchange for those in Cuba.
<b>Friday 26 October:</b>	Russia is still building the missile bases. In the morning, Kennedy considers an invasion of Cuba. It seems that war is about to break out. But at 6pm, Kennedy gets a telegram from Khrushchev offering to dismantle the sites if Kennedy lifts the blockade and promises not to invade Cuba.
<b>Saturday 27 October:</b>	However, at 11am Khrushchev sends a second letter, demanding that Kennedy also dismantles American missile bases in Turkey. At noon on the same day, a U2 plane is shot down over Cuba. It looks as if a war is about to start after all. At 8.05pm, Kennedy sends a letter to Khrushchev, offering that if Khrushchev dismantles the missile bases in Cuba, America will lift the blockade and promise not to invade Cuba - and also dismantle the Turkish missile bases (as long as this is kept a secret).
<b>Sunday 28 October:</b>	Khrushchev agrees to Kennedy's proposals. The crisis is over.
<b>Tuesday 20 November:</b>	Russian bombers leave Cuba, and Kennedy lifts the naval blockade.

# Who won the Cuban missile crisis?

A nuclear war had been averted, but the crisis had **lasting effects** on both leaders and future relations.

Did one superpower emerge from the crisis in a more positive light than the other? How did other countries react? Read on to find out the answers to these questions...

1. Who won the Cuban missile crisis?
2. Lasting effects of the crisis

## ***Who won the Cuban missile crisis?***

Speaking many years later, Khrushchev claimed that he had **won** the Cuban missile crisis. He had **achieved** both his aims - America **never bothered Cuba again** (which is still a Communist country) and the **US missile sites in Turkey were dismantled** in November 1962.

The world did not see it that way at the time, because the Turkey deal was kept secret, the West saw Kennedy as the **hero** who had faced down Communism.

Meanwhile, Khrushchev **lost prestige**. China broke off relations with Russia and, in 1964, he was forced to **resign** as Soviet leader.

## ***Lasting effects of the crisis***



'OK Mr President, let's talk'

On 29 October 1962, this cartoon was published in the 'Daily Mail'. The caption read: 'OK Mr President, let's talk'.

The message of the cartoon was clear - the world had avoided a nuclear war, but it was time for reason. In fact, both leaders had frightened themselves. Soon afterwards:

- In 1963, a telephone hotline was set up to give instant contact between the two leaders if there was a crisis.
- In 1963, a Nuclear Test Ban Treaty was signed.
- In 1968, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty was signed - the superpowers promised not to supply nuclear technology to other countries.