

# GCSE History: The Cold War flashcards

## -The Cuban Missile Crisis-





## Why was Cuba important to the USA?



## How did the US try to apply pressure on Castro?



## Why was Cuba important to the USA?

### Strategic reasons:

Cuba was seen by the USA to be in her 'sphere of influence' and it was important to have a friendly government in place. They also had a Naval base at Guantanamo bay.

### Economic reasons:

The US had considerable financial interests in Cuba including railways [50%], electricity companies [90%] and sugar industries [40%]. Plus 75% of arable land.

**Summary:** Walter Kronkite, a famous American tv commentator said of Cuba *"considered it part of the United States practically, just a wonderful little country over there was of no danger to anybody; as a matter of fact it was quite an important economic asset"*.

## How did the USA try to apply pressure on Cuba?

**Background:** Castro had nationalised land owned by US businesses and taken control of oil refineries and declared himself a 'Marxist'.

The main method was **economic** Pressure:

Cuba relied heavily on one crop – sugar – and the US reduced their import of sugar and denied Castro 'aid' and equipment. [The Soviets step in]. After Castro seized the Texaco & Esso Oil refineries the US placed a complete trade embargo on Cuba & Kennedy referred to Castro as 'a communist menace'

**Counter-insurgency** - CIA operatives were also disrupting the Cuban economy by damaging sugar plantations and US companies still in Cuba refused to co-operate with Cuban businesses that had received aid or assistance from the USSR.

...more radically Eisenhower had authorized the CIA to investigate ways of overthrowing Castro, including assassination!

Word check – NATIONALISED: to convert from private to Government control / ownership.

## What happened at the Bay of Pigs?



## Why did the USSR place missile sites on Cuba?



## What happened at the Bay of Pigs?

**Background:** When Kennedy became President he was informed of a CIA plan to overthrow Castro and, against his better judgement, let the plan go ahead!

**17<sup>th</sup> April 1961** c 1400 Cuban exiles [people that had left Cuba after Castro came to power], landed at Cochin Bay [Bay of Pigs] on the Southern coast – trained and equipped by the CIA.

These rebels were convinced the Cuban army & people would side with them. The landing was a debacle –

out of date maps, poor intelligence and outnumbered 300-1 with no internal rising! They were met by 20,000 troops with modern equipment and tanks – all were caught & imprisoned, with 100 killed within days of landing.

**Why didn't the US provide air support and more ground troops?** There was no US support as Kennedy had stated he wanted '*minimum visibility*' – in other words he didn't want the World to know the USA were behind it.

## Why did the USSR place missiles on Cuba?

- **Personal considerations:** It was an opportunity not to be missed, for Khrushchev to be able to apply pressure on a young and inexperienced President. Khrushchev potentially had a lot to gain, and he needed a personal victory as he had been embarrassed over the Berlin Wall.
- **Defence of Cuba:** This was always the official line from the USSR. The Soviet Union need to provided backing for a friendly Communist state and to show other 'potential communist states' that they would be supported by them.
- **Strategic reasons:** In the context of international diplomacy, the USSR was behind in the 'arms race'. There was a missile gap and Khrushchev seized upon an opportunity to restore a 'balance of power' [IRBMs were also cheaper and easier to develop than ICBMs] The US also had Jupiter missiles in Turkey.
- *Khrushchev: "In addition to protecting Cuba, our missiles would have equalized what the West likes to call the 'balance of power'. The Americans had surrounded our country with military bases and threatened us with nuclear weapons, and now they would learn just what it feels like to have enemy missiles pointing at them..."*

## What options were available to Kennedy?



## How did Kennedy respond to the crisis?



(How was it resolved?)

Kennedy on why he responded as he did

*“ offensive missiles in Cuba have a very different psychological and political effect in this hemisphere than missiles in the USSR pointed at us ”*

## What options were available to Kennedy?

Within the Whitehouse were two groups of people – Hawks & Doves. The Hawks wanted an immediate air strike, but the Doves were more cautious.

Kennedy had a number of options available to him;

**Do nothing** – but this would have made him look weak & would probably be unacceptable to the US public.

**Air Strike** – a popular option, and one held in ‘reserve’ – but it did not guarantee all sites would be hit.

**Invasion of Cuba by sea & air** – A solution that might lead to a tit –for- tat response with the Soviets occupying West Berlin. Would the US be prepared to fight for Berlin?

**A quarantine of Soviet Ships** – it was less aggressive and put the ball back into Khrushchev’s court.  
[Air strike as a secondary measure]

## How did Kennedy respond to the Crisis? (How was it resolved?)

- Upon confirmation from photographs taken by U2 spy planes, Kennedy established ExComm [a think tank / crisis management team, to discuss options] This began what became known as the **13 days**.
- First Kennedy rejected an immediate air strike followed by invasion [resisting the Hawks]
- Called for a quarantine and went on TV to inform the US public. [Purpose of the quarantine was to prevent the delivery on more missiles]...a wait and see policy...
- Khrushchev initially ordered Soviet ships to continue their course – but on 24<sup>th</sup> October 6 ships turned round.
- On **26<sup>th</sup> October** Kennedy received a telegram from Khrushchev stating the USSR would withdraw missiles if the US promised not to attack/invade Cuba. Then on 27<sup>th</sup> another telegram was sent demanding also, the withdrawal of US missiles from Turkey.
- Kennedy responded to the first telegram – giving his assurance Cuba would remain untouched. Behind the scene [back channels were opened] the US made it known they would remove missiles from Turkey.
- 28<sup>th</sup> October – Khrushchev cabled Kennedy and agreed to remove missiles from Cuba.



## Who won the Cuban Missile Crisis?



## What were the main results of the Cuban crisis?



### Who won the Cuban Missile Crisis?

- Some argue **Kennedy** won the crisis. He responded in a firm but reasonable manner and used brinkmanship to force the Soviet Union to back down and to preserve world peace. A quarantine was the right measure as it exerted pressure while incurring the minimum risk of war. Kennedy also remained calm and resisted pressure from the Hawks within his government who wanted direct action.
- However – some argue Kennedy escalated the Cuban issue unnecessarily. The missiles did not constitute a change in the ‘balance of power’ The US was still far ahead of the USSR and what if the Soviets had not backed down?
- Khrushchev is sometimes seen as the ‘winner’ – he now had an assurance from the US that Cuba would not be invaded [esp. important if you believe Khrushchev’s motive for putting them there in the first place was to defend Cuba from a US invasion]
- Khrushchev also showed statesmanlike qualities in being prepared to ‘back-down’.
- However, Khrushchev, was criticized by the politburo for not getting the removal of missiles from Turkey made public and Castro was unhappy with Khrushchev . Khrushchev was removed from power in ’64.

### What were the main results of the Cuban crisis?

- Missiles were withdrawn from Cuba, assurances given that Cuba would not be invaded and missiles removed from Turkey.
- A hotline was established between the USSR & the USA to make immediate telephone communication easier.
- Both sides realized the dangers of nuclear war and the need for international controls of nuclear weapons. In 1963 they agreed a test-ban treaty, fording nuclear tests in the atmosphere, space or underwater and in 68 the non-proliferation treaty, preventing the signatories from sharing weapons or knowledge to non-nuclear powers.
- ***Pause for thought.....Although a crisis was averted - the experience of being so close to nuclear war did nothing to prevent the continuation of the arms race!***

## **Key words**

ICBM

Quarantine

Hotline

First Strike Capability

Brinksmanship

Excomm

## **Additional Notes**

**What's in a word?**

**ICBM** – Intercontinental Ballistic Missile. [A missile capable of travelling from the Soviet Union to deliver nuclear warheads in the United States]

**Quarantine** – Kennedy's term for the naval blockade place around Cuba to 'prevent' the Soviet ships from delivering anymore nuclear warhead & missiles to Cuba.

**Hotline** – The telephone line established between the Kremlin [Moscow] & the Whitehouse [Washington] to provide more immediate communication between the two superpowers to try and avert future crises.

**First Strike Capability** – The ability to launch a preemptive 'surprise' attack using overwhelming force to destroy as much of an enemies military capabilities as possible. The USA believed missiles on Cuba would give the Soviet Union this opportunity.

**Brinkmanship** - the practice of pushing a dangerous situation to the verge of disaster in order to achieve the most advantageous outcome. A game of 'nerves'.