COLD WAR CASE STUDY: THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

The Cuban Missile Crisis occurred in 1962 when the Soviet Union began to install nuclear missiles in [Cuba](https://www.ducksters.com/geography/country/cuba.php). The United States refused to allow this and, after thirteen tense days and many secret negotiations, the Soviet Union agreed to remove the missiles.

This is perhaps the closest that the United States and the Soviet Union came to nuclear war during the Cold war.


*President Kennedy during crisis*
Source: Harvard Film Archive

**Leading up to the Crisis**

Prior to the crisis the United States had attempted to overthrow [Fidel Castro](https://www.ducksters.com/biography/world_leaders/fidel_castro.php) and the current government of Cuba with the Bay of Pigs invasion. The invasion failed, but it served as a warning to Fidel Castro. Also, the United States had installed several nuclear missile sites in [Turkey](https://www.ducksters.com/geography/country/turkey_history_timeline.php) and Italy with the range to strike Moscow, the capital of the Soviet Union.

As a result, the Soviet Union felt they needed missile sites that could strike at the United States. At the same time the Cuban government wanted protection from the United States. They decided to work together and have the Soviet Union put nuclear missiles in Cuba that could strike most any portion of the USA.

**How the Crisis Began**

On October 14, 1962 an American U-2 spy plane flying over Cuba captured pictures of long range Soviet missiles in Cuba. This was a crisis like never before. These missiles could reach any point of the United States with nuclear warheads causing mass destruction.

[President Kennedy](https://www.ducksters.com/biography/uspresidents/johnfkennedy.php) called a meeting with his main security advisors. They considered a number of options from diplomacy to a full scale attack and invasion on Cuba. The Joint Chiefs of Staff voted to invade. They felt this was the only viable option. However, Kennedy was concerned that this would start World War III between the US and the Soviet Union. He opted to set up a naval blockade.

**Blockade**

Kennedy announced his plan on October 22, 1962. He showed the world the missile bases and said that the United States would be putting Cuba under "quarantine". This meant that no offensive weapons would be allowed to enter Cuba. He also said that any attack on the US from Cuba would be considered an act of war from the Soviet Union.

Over the next several days the crisis became more intense. The Soviet Union said they would not back down. By the 24th, Kennedy believed the US would have to invade Cuba.

**Negotiations**

Although the Soviet Union was publicly saying they would never back down, they were secretly negotiating with the United States. Eventually the two sides reached an agreement. The Soviet Union would remove the missiles from Cuba as long as the United States agreed to never invade Cuba again. In secret, the US also had to agree to remove their nuclear missiles from Turkey and Italy. The crisis was over.

**QUESTIONS**

1.1 Define the following terms

1.1.1 Cold war

1.1.2 Communism

1.1.3 Capitalism

1.1.4 Superpower

1.2 Study the following sources and answer the questions that follow.

Source A



Source B

The threat of nuclear war was obvious in the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. This excerpt, from president John F. Kennedy's speech to the American people, explains the US position.

 

Source C



1.2. Refer to source A.

1.2.1 Who is the man on the left? (1x2)

1.2.2 Who are the people on the right? (2x2)

1.2.3 Why has the cartoonist represented them as cowboys? (2x2)

1.2.4 Is this cartoon biased in favour of anyone (biased)? Give reasons for your answer. (2x2)

1.3 Refer to source B

1.3.1 According to Kennedy, why were missiles placed on Cuba? (1x2)

1.3.2 What is he asking Khrushchev to do? (1x2)

1.3.3 How does Kennedy portray Khrushchev to the rest of the world? (2x2)

1.4Refer to source C

1.4.1 According to Khrushchev, why were missiles placed on Cuba? (2x2)

1.4.2 Do you think Khrushchev was being honest with regards to the reasons he placed missiles on Cuba? Give reasons for your answer. (2x2)

1.4.2 According to this source, why did Khruschev agree to remove the missiles? (1x2)

1.5 Write a paragraph of 8 lines in which you describe the Cuban missile crisis. (8)