

The Cuban Missile Crisis for GCSE
Modern World History with OCR and
AQA Exam Boards

Introduction

- The **Cuban Missile Crisis** was a confrontation during the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States regarding the deployment of nuclear missiles in Cuba.
- The missiles had been placed to protect Cuba from further planned attacks after the failed **Bay of Pigs** invasion.
- The Cuban Missile Crisis began on October 16, 1962.
- The crisis ended twelve days later on October 28, 1962.

For OCR this is A971 History B (Modern World) paper and from 2015 this becomes AO11 Section A: The Cold War 1945-1975.

For AQA this is History Specification B 40451 Unit 1 International Relations: Conflict and Peace in the 20th Century, Topic 5 Crisis of the Cold War 1955-1970.

This resource pack has been selected to meet the demands of the OCR and AQA examination boards for GCSE Modern World History

Exam style question:

Who won the Cuban Missile Crisis? (OCR Exam Board)

Focus Points:

- How did the USA react to the Cuban Revolution?
- Why did Khrushchev put missiles into Cuba?
- Why did Kennedy react as he did?
- Who won the Cuban Missile Crisis?

The Bay of Pigs invasion 1961

In 1961, the new US President, J.F. Kennedy supported an invasion of Cuba by anti-Castro supporters.

The Bay of Pigs invasion consisted of fewer than 1,500 Cuban exiles, supported by the CIA.

This invasion was a complete disaster and the invaders did not get further than the beach.

From Castro's view point this invasion was evidence that the USA was working actively to overthrow his Government.

Exam style question:

What happened in the Bay of Pigs invasion of 1961? [4 marks] (OCR Exam Board)

This is a describe type question and to answer it well you need to either describe four separate points or develop two points.

Quick tip – if you develop two points and identify a third one you should get maximum marks.

Museum task – find the Cuban Missile Crisis Hot Spot and watch the presentation



Answer the following questions:

1. Describe why the American people were so frightened at this time.
2. What impression do you get of Khrushchev the Soviet leader?
3. How well did President Kennedy respond to the discovery of Soviet missiles on Cuba? Explain your answer.
4. How close to war did the two sides come in 1962?

Extension tasks:

- How important was the United Nations in pressurising the USSR to remove its missiles?
- Were the secret negotiations and letters a help or a hindrance at this time?

Crisis in the Cold War

- For many people the twelve days of the Cuban missile crisis was the most frightening of their lives.
- The Berlin Wall had been built by the USSR the previous year.
- Kennedy had been elected as United States President by promising to get tough with the communists.
- In 1959, Fidel Castro had taken power in Cuba.
- In 1961, Cuban exiles trained by the U.S. staged an invasion of Cuban territory at the Bay of Pigs, although the invasion was quickly repulsed.
- In April 1962, America had placed nuclear missiles in Turkey.
- Shortly after the failed Bay of Pigs invasion, Castro declared Cuba as a socialist republic, entering into close ties with the Soviet Union.

AQA Unit 1 Topic 5: Crisis in the Cold War 1955-70.

Which of these events brought greater success for the USSR in the Cold War; bringing Castro and Cuba into the Soviet sphere of influence by 1962 or the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961? [10 marks] (In the style of AQA Exam Board)

Quick tip – you must refer to both events and reach a supported judgement for the full 10 marks.

U.S. Advantage

- The United States had a dramatic advantage in nuclear weapons.
- Few in Washington, D.C. seriously believed that the Soviets ballistic missiles in Cuba could change the strategic balance of power.
- In 1961, the U.S. started deploying 15 Jupiter intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBM) in Turkey, these directly threatened cities in the western parts of the Soviet Union.
- Khrushchev publicly expressed his anger of the missiles deployed in Turkey. He regarded the missiles as a personal affront.
- Therefore the deployment of missiles in Cuba; the first time missiles had been moved outside the USSR, can be seen as Khrushchev's direct response to the U.S. missiles in Turkey.
- Having medium range ballistic missiles on Cuban land meant that the Soviet Union had the capacity to threaten Washington D.C.

Exam style question:

Why did Khrushchev send missiles to Cuba in 1962? Explain your answer. [6 marks] (OCR Exam Board)

Quick tip – this is a (b) type knowledge question where you need to explain an issue, so you need to develop at least two separate points.

The Deployment of Soviet Missiles to Cuba

- Khrushchev planned the deployment in May 1962, by late July over sixty Soviet ships were on their way to Cuba.
- On September 4, 1962 Kennedy told congress that there were no offensive missiles in Cuba.
- September 8, 1962 saw the first consignment of SS-4 MRBMs unloaded in Havana, with a second shipment arriving on September 16.
- The missiles were not discovered by the U.S. until photographs were shown to Kennedy on October 16, 1962.
- Kennedy announced the discovery of the installations in a televised address on October 22. He proclaimed that any nuclear attack from Cuba would be regarded as an attack by the Soviet Union, and they would respond accordingly.
- Kennedy placed a naval *quarantine* on Cuba to prevent further Soviet shipments arriving there.

Exam style question: Qb Explain President Kennedy's options once the missiles had been discovered on Cuba. [6 marks] (OCR Exam Board)

Response by U.S.

- After the photographic evidence showing Soviet missiles deployed in Cuba had been confirmed, President Kennedy organised a secret meeting of senior advisors at the White House.
- Kennedy spoke to the American public, and to the Soviet government, in a televised address on October 22.
- Khrushchev sent letters to Kennedy on October 23 and 24. In these he claimed the nature of the missiles in Cuba and the Soviet Union had peaceful intentions.
- On October 26, they offered to withdraw the missiles if the U.S. could guarantee they would not invade Cuba or support any invasion.
- Following this the next day October 27, they broadcast on public radio the calling for the withdrawal of U.S. missiles in Turkey in addition to the demands of October 26.
- Kennedy responded by publicly agreeing to the first deal and sending Robert F. Kennedy to the Soviet embassy to privately agree to the removal of missiles in Turkey. Kennedy requested that Khrushchev keep this second compromise out of the public domain.
- The soviet ships turned back, and on October 28 Khrushchev announced he had ordered the removal of the Soviet missiles in Cuba.
- Satisfied that the Soviets had removed the missiles, President Kennedy ended the quarantine on November 20 1962.

After the Crisis

- The compromise reached satisfied no one, it was a particular embarrassment for Khrushchev and the Soviet Union who had not made public the withdrawal of the missiles in Turkey.
- U.S. military commanders were also not happy with the result. General LeMay told the president that it was “the greatest defeat in our history” and that the U.S. should invade immediately.
- Cuba felt they had been betrayed by the Soviets whom they had trusted, with all the decisions being made exclusively by Kennedy and Khrushchev.
- The Cuban Missile Crisis spurred the creation of the Hot Line. This was a direct communications link between Moscow and Washington D.C. The purpose was to enable both leaders to communicate directly to ensure future crisis’ did not evolve.

Evaluating the Crisis

Exam style question:

The outcomes of the Cuban Missile Crisis were equally successful for:

- (i) the USA;
- (ii) the USSR;
- (iii) Cuba.

How far do you agree with this statement?

Explain your answer referring only to (i), (ii) and (iii) (OCR Exam Board)

Top tip – to gain top marks here you must provide a developed explanation for all three countries. This means describing an evidence point and explaining its significance in relation to other points. You must also **assess ‘how far you agree with this assertion’**. So the question is a viewpoint or opinion, how valid is this view?

Evaluating the Crisis

Question in the style of AQA Exam Board:

Who gained more from the Cuban Missile Crisis, Premier Krushchev or President Kennedy?

You must refer to both sides when explaining your answer.

Top tip – to gain full marks here you must provide a developed explanation for both leaders and countries. This means describing an evidence point and explaining its significance in relation to other points. You must not just describe and explain, but also reach a clear judgement. Neither leader would be in power one year on, President Kennedy was assassinated in 1963 and Premier Khrushchev was replaced as the Soviet leader as people were clearly unhappy with his handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis.