

HISTORY POWER NOTES

Chapter 3: The Cuban Missile Crisis



3.1: How did tensions between the USA and Cuba become part of the Cold War?

3.2: Why did the USA and the Soviet Union go to the brink of a nuclear war in 1962?

3.3: How did the Superpowers resolve the crisis?

3.4: What was the impact of the Cuban Missile Crisis?

3.1: How did tensions between the USA and Cuba become part of the Cold War?

Cuba's significance to USA

1. Strategic importance

- Cuba is the largest and most populous of the Caribbean Islands. It was the gateway to the Caribbean Islands, was therefore seen to be extremely important to the security of USA.
- Cuba was the major producer of sugar and tobacco which were in high demand in Europe and later in the USA.
- USA created the Monroe Doctrine in 1823: The Americas should not be colonised by any other European powers or it would be viewed as 'acts of aggression' against the American government.
- Thus, the American government viewed the Americas as its own sphere of influence.
- Cuba, being very near the USA and being the gateway to the Caribbean Islands, was therefore seen to be extremely important to the security of the USA.

2. Economic importance

- American companies heavily invested in Cuba's sugar and tobacco industries. They set up plantations, buy land and even invested in the infrastructure of Cuba.
- By 1926, American companies owned 60% of the Cuban Sugar industry.
- However, majority of the Cubans were generally unhappy over its economy being largely reliant on that of the USA. Cubans resented the economic dominance of USA over Cuba.
- Huge income gap as the investments were made mostly between rich Cubans and the Americans → neglecting the economic welfare of the lower middle class and the poor.

3. Tensions between the USA and Cuba

- USA often intervened in Cuban politics and made changes to the officials within the government that suited their needs.

- This angered Cubans as the Americans installed a series of 'puppet President' to guard their needs.
- They hated Batista the most, as he was corrupt and dictatorial.
- He used the secret police to repress the people and his opponents.
- Americans supported Batista as they feared the communists taking over.

4. The Cuban Revolution

- Castro, returned to Cuba with armed rebels and conducted guerrilla warfare against Batista's government.
- His popularity grew and he had many supporters.
- By January 1959, Castro led his armed rebels into Havana and established a new government.
- Castro did not immediately align himself with the Communists
- USA was still highly suspicious, but still agreed to recognise the new Cuban government on the conditions that elections were held soon to establish a new democratic government.

3.2: Why did the USA and the Soviet Union go to the brink if a nuclear war in 1962?

Why Khrushchev installed the missiles in Cuba

a) Military and Strategic gains:

- Turkey allowed USA to place 15 nuclear missiles in Western Turkey.
- It was only 1490 miles away from the border of Russia.
- Russians felt threatened by the missiles due to the possibility of a nuclear war with the USA.
- By placing the missiles in Cuba, greater numbers of missiles could reach the USA as most Soviet missiles would not be able to reach the USA from the launching sites in the Soviet Union.
- Saw it as a DEFENSIVE MOVE.

b) Political gains:

- Could be used as a leverage to demand further concessions regarding the status of West Berlin which he wanted to integrate with the East Germany.
- Increase the prestige of the Soviet Union in the communist bloc due to its worsening relations with China.
- Secretly deployed the missiles to Cuba
- Arrived on 4th October 1962 and the construction of launch sites and military bases began.
- It was legal as it was an agreement with the Cuban government.

American response

a) American discovery of the missiles

Date	American Actions	Soviet Action
14 Oct 1962	American Spy Plane took a photograph of missile launch site in Cuba	
16 Oct 1962	Kennedy received the report that the missiles in Cuba were capable of reaching the USA.	Soviet ambassador in Washington continued to assure Kennedy that the deployment was purely for defensive purposes.
	American Response <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kennedy felt betrayed by Khrushchev as the Soviet Ambassadors had assured him that the missiles were for defensive purposes, not offensive.• Kennedy saw the missiles as offensive weapons because of the closeness to the USA and their ability to reach the USA. He thought the Soviet Union may be planning a first strike nuclear attack against the USA.	Soviet Response to USA <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Khrushchev saw the weapons as countering the presence of missiles in Turkey.

b) American response to the missiles

- Kennedy met with his ex-com to discuss what they should do.
- They thought of many possibilities: air strike and nuclear warfare.
- Air strike: USA did not want to be seen as overly aggressive at the initial stages, when missiles were just discovered. Retaliation from the Soviet Union may not make them withdraw the missiles.
- Nuclear warfare: They did not want to bear the consequences of another nuclear war.
- Decided to implement a Naval Blockade

c) American Naval Blockade

- Naval Blockade → prevent the Soviets from landing any further shipments.
- Kennedy announced the Naval Blockade to the world on 22 October 1962. He spoke about the discovery of the missiles and demanded that the Soviets remove them.
- Meanwhile, US military forces went to DEFCON3 and they were mobilised in Florida.
- In the Caribbean, the US Navy deployed 180 ships to blockade Cuba and went into effect on the 24 October 1962 (start of naval blockade)

- Tensions increased!

d) Soviet response to the Naval Blockade

- Soviets condemned the blockage as an illegal act of war against Cuba and insisted that the Soviet Union would ignore it.
- Khrushchev ordered the recently-departed Soviet ships to return to the port.
- Soviet ships in Cuba were forbidden to use the Cuba missiles but were allowed to use in case the Americans invaded Cuba.
- The Soviet Defence Minister was the one who delayed the order to allow the use of missiles in Cuba in the event of an American attack.
- He saw Khrushchev as unnecessarily reckless.
- Castro mobilised his forces and were ready to fight.

3.3: How did the Superpowers resolve the crisis?

Khrushchev's First and Second letter to Kennedy (Letter of Appeal of Peace)

26 October 1962: First letter

- Khrushchev realised that Kennedy overreacted to the discovery of the missiles, but was relieved that USA did not invade Cuba.
- Proposal for first letter: the Soviets would remove the missiles in Cuba in exchange for the USA's promise not to attack Cuba.
- But US intelligence reports still showed that the Cuban forces were mobilised and the construction of missiles were still going on.
- Castro still seemed to be moving aggressively:
 - He declared that he would shoot down the US Spy plane down.
 - The Soviet General decided to take the initiative to move the nuclear war heads to the missile sites to be ready for loading.

27 October 1962: Second Letter

- Proposal for second letter: Americans to remove the missiles in Turkey in exchange for removing the missiles in Cuba.
- BUT BEFORE USA COULD RESPOND
 - Castro began to make preparations for war, thinking war with USA was unavoidable.
 - BUT a Soviet General acted on his own authority and fired at and shot down an American U-2 Spy Plane and captured the pilot.
 - Leaders realized the lack of control over its own commanders
 - Leaders realised that they needed to solve the crisis as soon as possible.

Kennedy's willingness to adhere to Khrushchev's demands

- Kennedy was willing to make a deal with Khrushchev that included removing the missiles from Turkey and promising not to invade Cuba.
- He allowed his brother, Robert Kennedy to verbally propose a deal to the Soviet ambassador, that the missiles in Turkey would be removed in due course but it was to be kept as a secret.

- While negotiations were ongoing, Castro sent a letter to Khrushchev on 26th October, arguing for first strike against the USA.
- Khrushchev quickly accepted Kennedy's deal on 28 October 1962 for fear of Castro jeopardizing their peace efforts and his acceptance was read over Radio Moscow.
- The Soviet Union would withdraw missiles from Cuba that the USA deemed as offensive and the USA pledged to not attack Cuba and also secretly remove the missiles in Turkey.
- Without Castro's knowledge or the Soviet Union's allies, Khrushchev only accepted the deal.

Castro's reaction to the removal of the Soviet's missiles

- Castro felt betrayed as Khrushchev did not involve him in the negotiations and he only knew about the news through the radio.
- He was unwilling to cooperate in the inspection of the Soviet missiles that were to be removed.
- He threatened to report to the UN that Cuba still possessed tactical nuclear missiles that Soviet Union was not willing to initially remove the tactical missiles that were in Cuba and USA had not known about its existence.
- Fearing full-fledged confrontation with the USA, the Soviet Union eventually told Castro to remove the tactical missiles as well.

Why were Kennedy and Khrushchev willing to work together?

- Both were unwilling to turn it into a global nuclear war.
- They both had vested interest in ensuring it will not turn into a nuclear war.
- Kennedy was facing elections again and he had ensured he was not seen as bowing pressure to the Soviets, when he agreed to remove the missiles in Turkey, thus it was kept a secret.
- Khrushchev was facing hardliners in his own communist party, who wanted to overthrow him if he made the Soviet Union weak. He was also facing immense pressure from Mao and Castro to attack USA.
- Both leaders understood each other's decision

How did public opinion influence the decisions taken by the leaders?

- American public were alarmed at the prospect of nuclear war and therefore held demonstrations urging Kennedy to be careful in handling the crisis.
- UN leaders and the Pope John XXII also acted as mediators and thus influenced Kennedy and Khrushchev to act rationally and peacefully.

3.4: What was the impact of the Cuban Missile Crisis?

Implications for the Parties involved

USA	Kennedy was positively seen as a leader who was rationale and stood up to the communists but some of the allies and NATO opposed his agreements with Soviets. Hard for them to accept communist Cuba.
Soviet Union	Khrushchev lost prestige within Soviet Union and many saw him compromising too much with the Americans. Made USSR appear weak. Cuba believed that that USSR betrayed him. Worsened relations with the Chinese as they accused USSR of backing down in the crisis.
Cuba	Castro was seen as a national hero who stood up against the Americans. Continued to be a Soviet Ally, lost a potential deterrent and still remained armed in case the Americans were to attack them again.

Establishment of the Washington-Moscow Hotline

- Kennedy and Khrushchev realised the lack of direct and confidential communication between the superpowers and led to the escalation of the conflict.
- Communicating using letters and news medium is unreliable and the leader's needed to know each other's intentions quickly rather than making it based on assumptions.
- Washington-Moscow Hotline was set up as a form of direct communication.
- They signed the Limited Test Ban Treaty on 5th August 1963.