

The Cold War

Postwar United States
(1945–1975)



Two superpowers

A global battlefield

The war heats up

Thematic Icons



Economics and business



Geography and environment



Historical concepts and questions



Politics, government and citizenship



Society and culture



War, diplomacy and foreign policy

Icons: For more detailed instructions, see the *User Guide*



Flash activity (these activities are not editable)



Teacher notes included in the Notes page



By the end of this section, you will learn about how the Cold War began to heat up and the different conflicts that caused it do so:

- The Bay of Pigs invasion
- The Berlin Wall
- The Cuban Missile Crisis
- The Vietnam War.



In the late 1950s and early 1960s, tensions between the East and West were strained by a series of confrontations across the world. This caused the Cold War to heat up:

Latin America:

Cuban Revolution
1953–59; Cuban
Missile Crisis
1962

Middle East:

Suez Crisis
1956



Southeast Asia:

Vietnam War
1955–75

Europe:

Berlin Crisis
1958–61

Why did the U.S. get involved in so many conflicts?



In 1961, Democrat **John F. Kennedy** became the youngest president ever elected to office. He wanted to avoid Republican charges that he was soft on communism. Kennedy believed massive retaliation was inflexible and he would not risk using nuclear weapons over a minor conflict.

Instead, his Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, developed a policy of **flexible response**, building up conventional forces to avoid relying solely on nuclear weapons.



Although he was in office for only a short time, Kennedy's presidency oversaw several significant foreign policy events.

The **Cuban Revolution** began in 1953 with a failed rebel attack against the corrupt Cuban President, **Fulgencio Batista**. Among the attackers was **Fidel Castro**, who was imprisoned, exiled and returned in 1956 to lead the revolution.



The rebels overthrew Batista in January 1959 and Castro became Prime Minister of Cuba a month later. By 1960, Castro had formed close ties with the Soviet Union and was accepting aid.

In 1961 he declared himself a **Marxist** and Cuba a communist state. The U.S immediately withdrew diplomatic recognition and imposed an **embargo** in 1962.

 **Why was Castro's victory a problem for the U.S.?** 



The Bay of Pigs invasion

The U.S. **CIA** immediately began to plan the assassination and overthrow of Castro. It began to recruit and train Cuban exiles. On April 17, 1961, about 1,400 CIA-trained Cubans landed at the **Bay of Pigs**, hoping to spark an uprising. Castro was forewarned and easily crushed the invasion.

Critics said Kennedy should have supported the invasion of Cuba with air power, which may have helped it succeed.



He accepted full responsibility for the embarrassing episode and vowed never to be seen as weak on communism again.





Even after the Berlin Airlift, the city remained the main focal point of the Cold War in Europe. A second crisis in Berlin in 1961 led to the construction of the **Berlin Wall**, physically dividing the city in two.

Watch this animation to find out about the causes and construction of the Berlin Wall.

Press **start** to begin.

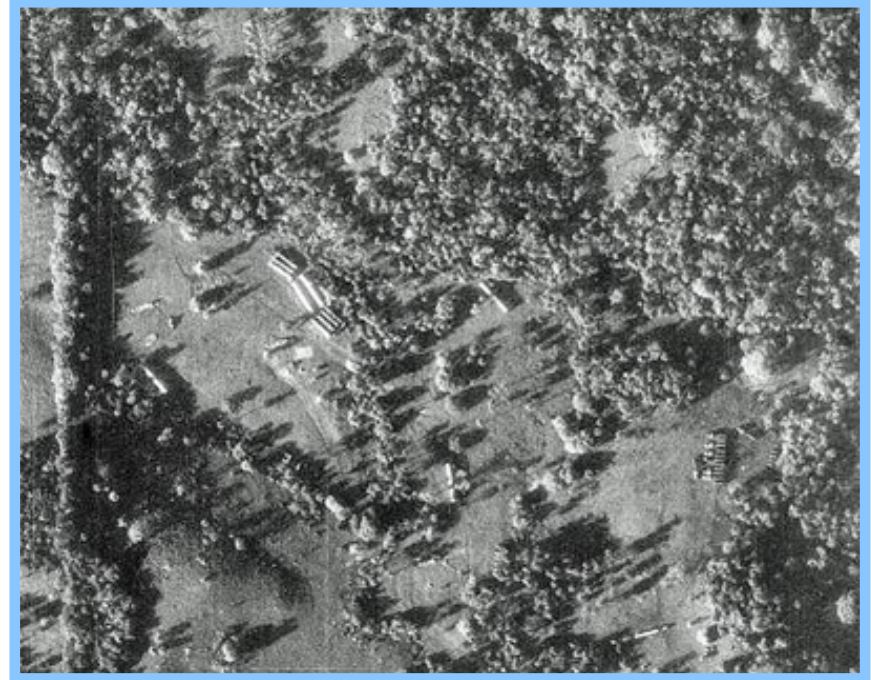
start





On October 14, 1962, a U.S. spy plane photographed the construction of Russian medium-range missiles in Cuba.

The presence of these missiles only 90 miles from Florida seriously destabilized the relationship between the U.S. and Soviet Union and almost led to nuclear war.



The discovery of the missiles and the response of both sides is known as the **Cuban Missile Crisis**.

Why were the missiles considered such a threat?



President Kennedy immediately formed **EXCOMM**, a body of government officials to advise him during the Cuban Missile Crisis. The U.S. had to respond to the situation and had several possible options.

Can you match each option to the correct description?

Press **start** to begin.

start



Do you know what Kennedy decided to do?



Following the U.S. quarantine of Cuba, the world was poised on the brink of nuclear war for a few days. The crisis was eventually resolved diplomatically, with the removal of the missiles in return for the U.S. guaranteeing not to invade Cuba, but it was an extremely tense situation. Can you drag the events into chronological order?

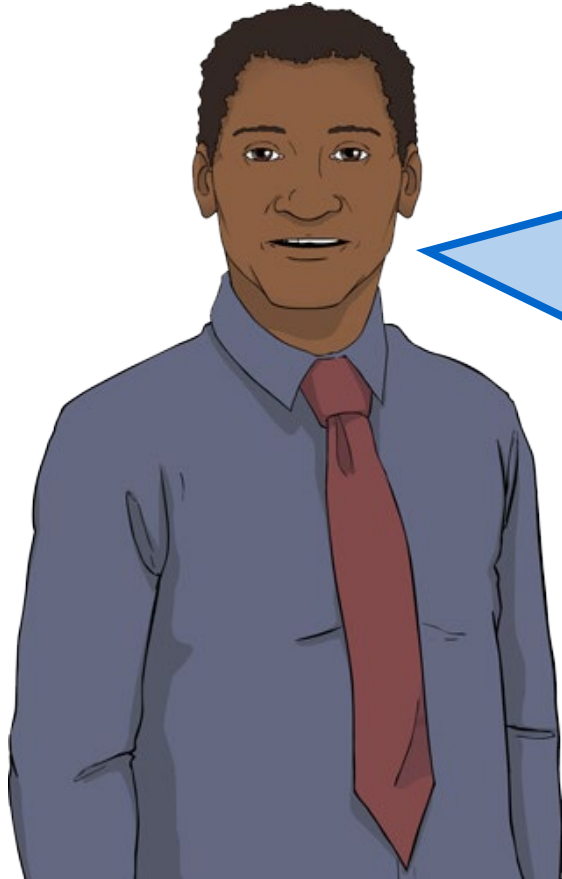
Press **start** to begin.

start





The Cuban Missile Crisis was the closest the world has come to nuclear war and had a profound psychological impact.



The Cold War never became as serious again. Despite future tensions, there was a major change in attitude on both sides. A direct phone line was set up between the **White House** and the **Kremlin**. The **Partial Test Ban Treaty** to limit nuclear weapon testing was also signed in 1963.

How well did the two leaders come out of the crisis?



The Vietnam War



The **Vietnam War** was a major Cold War conflict. Although it did not directly oppose the Soviet Union, the U.S. became heavily involved in an effort to prevent the spread of communism. Press the buttons to find out what happened in Vietnam in each year. Press **start** to begin.

start





The Cold War was a very complex issue and there are many possible viewpoints. Read these students' opinions on the Cold War and decide how much you agree with them. You should justify your answers.

Press **start** to begin.

start





Test your understanding of the Cold War
by recapping key terms and important
people using this glossary.
Press on the tabs and then each term to
see a definition.
Press **start** to begin.

start

