

# On the Brink: From the Bay of Pigs to the Cuban Missile Crisis

Essential Question: Who was to blame for “the most dangerous moment in human history”?

## Key Terms

**Capitalism:** an economic system characterized by private or corporate ownership, by investments that are determined by private decision, and by prices, production, and the distribution of goods that are determined mainly by competition in a free market.

**Communism:** a system of government in which the state plans and controls the economy and a single, often authoritarian, party holds power. Communist states claim to be making progress toward a higher social order in which all goods are, theoretically, shared by the people.

**Corporation:** an organization that is granted a charter (by a state) recognizing it as a separate legal entity having its own rights, privileges, and liabilities distinct from those of its members.

**Dictatorship:** a government in which political power is exercised by a single individual who gains power and governs outside the normal means for doing so, often during a time of war or during an economic or social crisis.

**Exile:** one who lives away from one's native country, whether because of expulsion or voluntary absence.

**Nationalize:** to convert from private to governmental ownership and control.

**Quarantine:** a condition of enforced isolation.

**Regime:** a form of government (this term is generally understood to have negative connotations of repression and authoritarian rule).

**Revolution:** a drastic change that happens in a short period of time, effecting political or social institutions, or the culture or economy of a country or region.

## Timeline

**January 1, 1959:** Fidel Castro overthrows the U.S.-backed regime of General Fulgencio Batista.

**April 1961:** Failure of the U.S.-backed Bay of Pigs invasion.

**October 16, 1962:** President Kennedy is shown photographs of offensive missile installations on the island of Cuba.

**October 22, 1962:** Kennedy announces the naval “quarantine” (blockade) of Cuba.

**October 24, 1962:** Soviet ships reach the quarantine line, but receive radio orders from Moscow to hold their positions.

**October 26, 1962:** Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev sends President John F. Kennedy a letter stating that the Soviets will remove their missiles if Kennedy publicly guarantees the U.S. will not invade Cuba.

**October 28, 1962:** Khrushchev announces the dismantling of Soviet missiles in Cuba.

**November 20, 1962:** Kennedy orders an end to the quarantine of Cuba.

Assignment: Work through this packet about the Bay of Pigs. Read the short readings and answer the questions. For the Primary Source Analysis Worksheet that goes with the political cartoon, you will have to write your answers on another sheet of paper. For everything else, you can write your answers in the packet.

## HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION




In the years after the Second World War, many small nations throughout the world (especially newly independent nations throughout Asia, Africa, and Latin America) were caught up in the Cold War struggle between the two global superpowers: the United States and the Soviet Union (U.S.S.R.). The United States sought to spread its economic system, **capitalism**, to these smaller nations, while the Soviet Union wanted to extend its system, **communism**, throughout the world. There was often great conflict within these smaller nations over the question of whether they should be friendly to the United States and its capitalist system or to the Soviet Union and its communist system.



**IMAGE 1:** Herbert Block, "Let's Get A Lock for This Thing." From *Herblock: A Cartoonist's Life* (Times Books, 1998).

1. How would you characterize the differences between these two systems, capitalism and communism?
2. Try and think of at least one reason each why a person might be attracted to capitalism and one reason why someone might be attracted to communism.

3. List at least one reason each for why someone might hate capitalism, and why someone might hate communism.

Now, take a look at the world map on the next page, which illustrates the state of the global struggle between American-style capitalism and Soviet-style communism in 1960. The countries in  were **aligned** with the United States, and those in  were aligned with the Soviet Union. Those in  were non-aligned.

*Then, answer these questions:*

4. Study the map on the next page. What sorts of trends, or patterns, can you **discern**? Find at least three and write them below.

1)

2)

3)

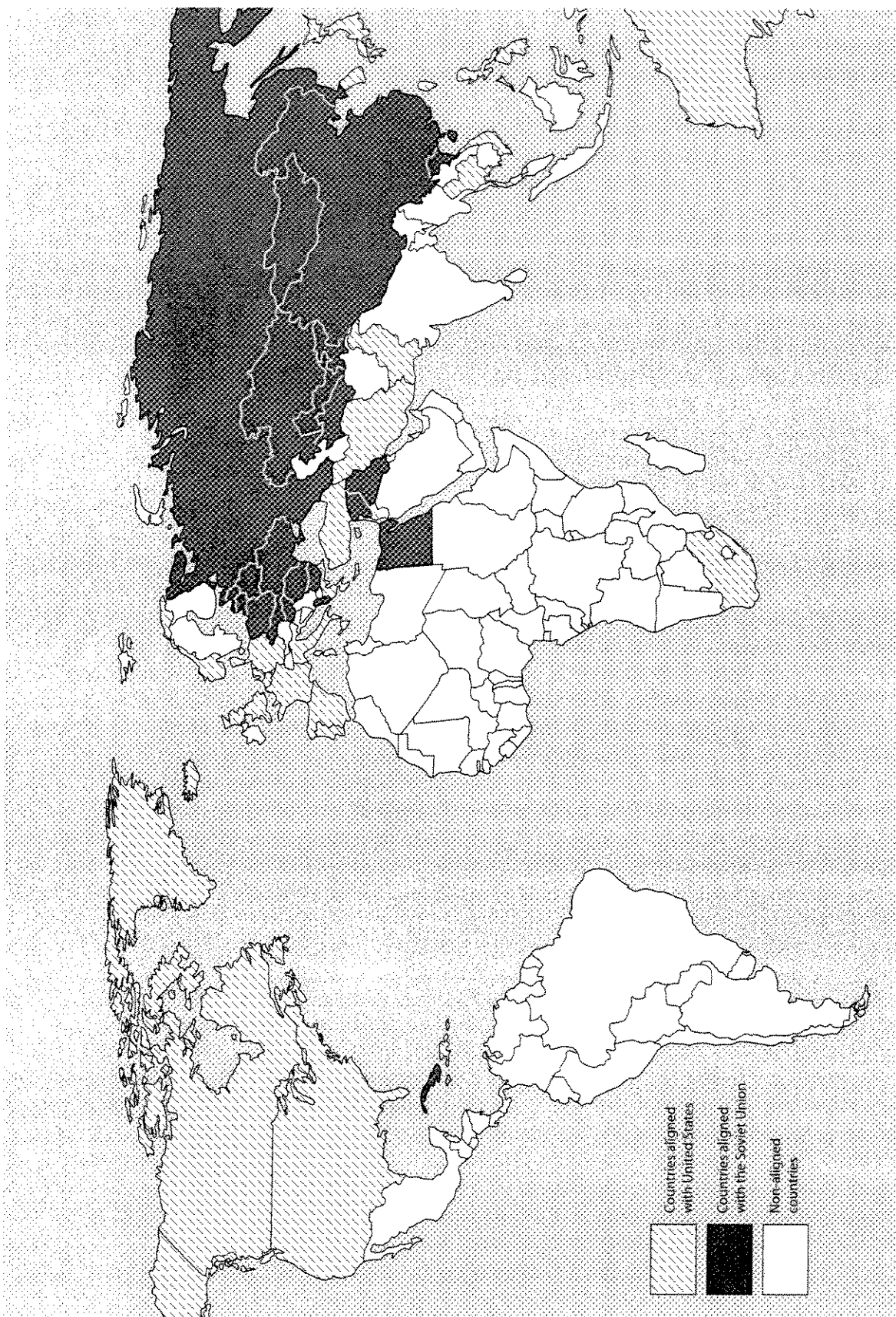
5. Which Soviet-aligned country was located closest to the United States in 1960? Locate this country on the map and write down your answer below.

.....

## Glossary

**align:** to ally (join with) one side of an argument or cause.

**discern:** to recognize or detect with the senses.



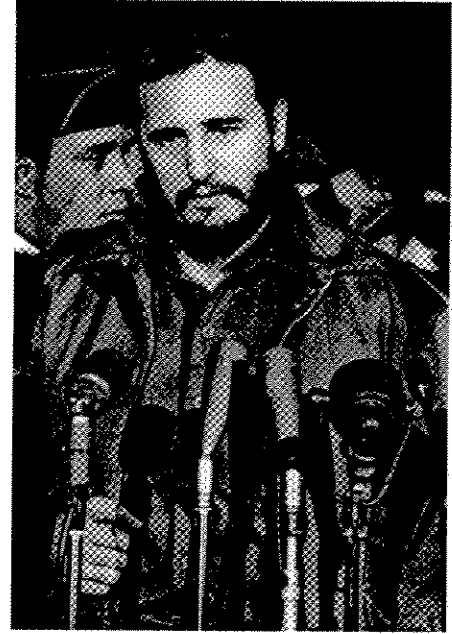
**IMAGE 2:** The Cold War World: 1960s

## REVOLUTION IN CUBA

By 1960, the small island nation of Cuba, only 90 miles from the southeast coast of the United States, had aligned itself with the Soviet Union. In this section, we will take a look at how this happened and at some of the consequences of Cuba's turn to communism.

On New Year's Day, 1959, Cuban revolutionary Fidel Castro overthrew the **dictatorship** of Fulgencio Batista. Batista had been very friendly with the United States and the Americans had supported his **regime** until just before he was forced from power. The United States supported

the Batista regime mainly because it was anti-communist and protected the numerous American business interests (companies) in Cuba that made very good money producing and exporting Cuban sugar and tobacco, among other products, to the United States. Due to Castro's successful **revolution**, however, Batista was forced to **flee** Cuba. The American government was suspicious of Castro's new government and his **left-wing politics**, as well as his harsh treatment of members of the former Batista government. Also, he seriously angered the United States when he began to



**IMAGE 3:** Fidel Castro arrives at MATS Terminal, Washington, D.C., April 15, 1959

**nationalize** some of the American **corporations** located in Cuba.

1. What does it mean to “nationalize” foreign property?

Refer to the key terms at the beginning of this packet.

2. Why might Castro have sought to nationalize American businesses in Cuba?
3. How might you have reacted, if you had been an American business owner, when Castro nationalized your company's assets in Cuba? Who might you have turned to for help?

---

## Glossary

**flee:** to run away, as from trouble or danger.

**left-wing politics:** a term referring to a set of political beliefs in support of the ideology of socialism or communism.



**IMAGE 4:** Herbert Block's October 20, 1960 cartoon, "What happens when they run out of foreigners?" from *Straight Herblock* (Simon & Schuster, 1964).

Examine the political cartoon above, which was created in response to Castro's decision to begin nationalizing foreign assets in Cuba. Answer the questions on the Primary Source Analysis Worksheet on the next page as you carefully analyze the cartoon. Remember to refer to specific aspects of the cartoon when answering the questions.

## **PRIMARY SOURCE ANALYSIS WORKSHEET**

### ***Content:***

1. Who is the author of this cartoon?
2. When was it created?
3. What is the author describing; in other words, what is the author's subject? In answering this question, you will need to explain what the four different pictures within the picture stand for; each of these can be identified by the words or phrases included in the cartoon (Hint: you can come to a good understanding of this cartoon by analyzing the words or phrases and interpreting their relationship to each other).
4. How does the title of the cartoon help you to understand its meaning?

### ***Perspective:***

1. How does the author portray, or picture, the subject of this cartoon? In other words, what is the author's perspective?
2. Does the author seem to have positive or negative feelings about the subject of this cartoon? How can you tell?
3. How might the author have been trying to influence the way that you, the reader, feel about the subject of this cartoon?

### ***Context:***

1. What was happening around the time when this cartoon was created that might have affected its content?

### ***Corroboration and Significance:***

1. Does this cartoon support or challenge what you already know or have learned about its subject? If so, how?
2. What can this cartoon teach us about the past?

### ***Conclusions***

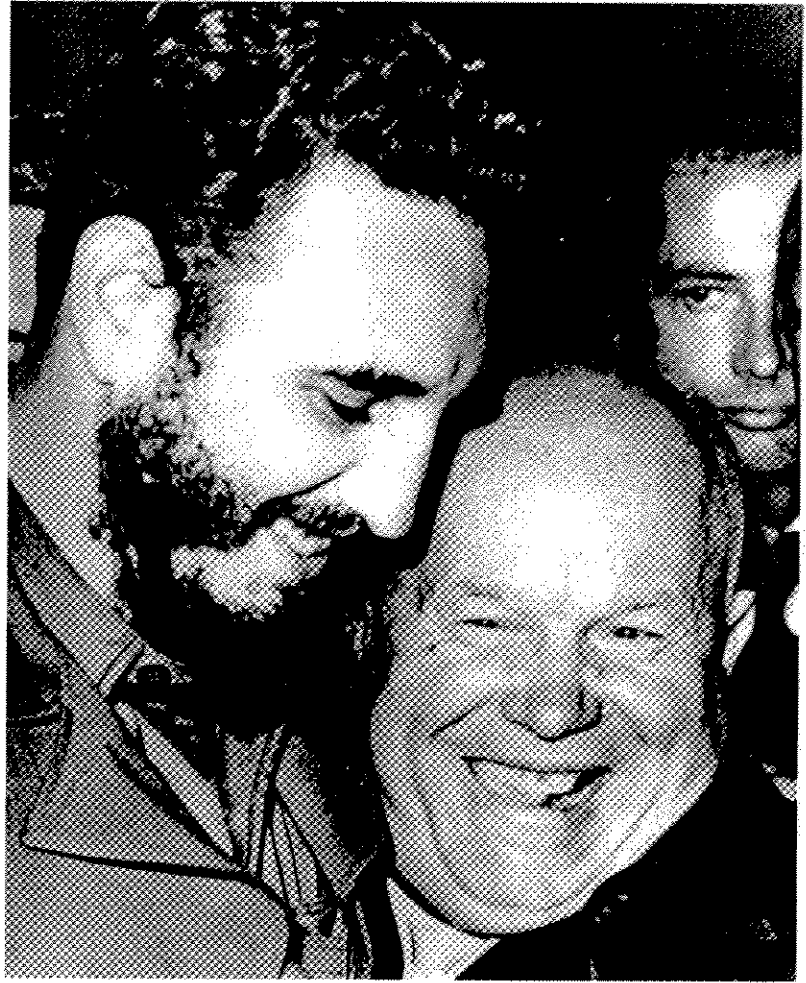
1. From whose perspective, or point of view, was this cartoon created?
2. What is the message, or thesis, that the author is attempting to communicate to the reader?

## The Bay of Pigs

America's growing fury with Castro, and the Cuban Revolution in turn, pushed the Cubans closer to America's great enemy, the Soviet Union. Castro and the Soviet Chairman [leader] Khrushchev became more and more friendly, and as a result, Soviet-style communism came to dominate Cuba.

Castro's growing friendship with the Soviet Union made the United States, unsurprisingly, even more upset. The American government also worried that Communism would spread from Cuba to other Latin American countries, like Mexico.

It is important to recognize how deeply Americans feared the Soviet Union. Although the two countries had fought together to defeat Nazi Germany just fifteen years before, many people in the United States believed that the U.S.S.R. wanted to take over the world and force everyone to embrace communism. By 1960, both the Soviet Union and the United States possessed thousands of nuclear missiles that were so powerful that a full-



**IMAGE 5:** Khrushchev and Castro at the United Nations, 1960

scale nuclear war between the two countries could have destroyed life on this planet. When Cuba, only 90 miles from the U.S., moved towards communism and friendship with the U.S.S.R., Americans were intensely concerned.

The U.S. government decided that Castro had to go. The Americans wanted to

get rid of Castro and replace him with a Cuban leader who would be friendly to the United States and to American companies (as Batista had been). After all, Americans said, Cuba was "right next door" to the United States.



**IMAGE 6:** Cuba's distance from the United States: only 90 miles!

1. In your opinion, did the United States have the right to try and change the government in Cuba by force? Why or why not?

In order to get rid of Castro, the United States began to give money, weapons, and military training to a group of unhappy, anti-Castro Cuban **exiles** who were preparing for an invasion of Cuba. These exiles wanted to **depose** Castro and rid Cuba of communism.

On April 17, 1961 the

United States helped about 1,400 of these anti-Castro Cubans to invade Cuba at a place called *Bahía de Cochinos*, The Bay of Pigs. Although the United States denied actively taking part in the invasion, the world soon found out that this was not exactly true. Many nations, especially the Soviet

Union and its allies, spoke out against American military support for the Bay of Pigs invasion. Soviet Chairman Khrushchev and President of the United States John F. Kennedy exchanged a series of messages during the invasion.

## Glossary

**depose:** to remove from office or power.

Read the messages between Kennedy and Khrushchev. Pay special attention to each man's perspective, or point of view, and what each wanted to achieve in, or for, Cuba.

**Letter from Chairman Khrushchev to President Kennedy (April 18, 1961):**

Mr. President [Kennedy]: I send you this message in an hour of alarm, **fraught with** danger for the peace of the whole world. Armed aggression has begun against Cuba. It is a secret to no one that the armed bands invading this country were trained, equipped and armed in the United States of America. The planes which are bombing Cuban cities belong to the United States of America, the bombs they are dropping are being supplied by the American Government. . . Your statement a few days ago that the USA would not participate in military activities against Cuba created the impression that the top leaders of the United States were taking into account the consequences for general peace and for the USA itself which aggression against Cuba could have. . . As far as the Soviet Union is concerned, there should be no mistake about our position: We will **render** the Cuban people and their government all necessary help to **repel** armed attack on Cuba.

**Reply From President Kennedy to Chairman Khrushchev (April 18, 1961):**

Mr. Chairman [Khrushchev]: You are under a serious **misapprehension** in regard to events in Cuba. For months there has been evident and growing resistance to the Castro dictatorship. More than 100,000 refugees have recently fled from Cuba into neighboring countries. . . It cannot be surprising that, as resistance within Cuba grows, refugees have been using whatever means are available to return and support their countrymen in the continuing struggle for freedom. Where people are denied the right of choice [the ability to choose a different form of government besides Communism], **recourse** to such struggle is the only means of achieving their liberties. . . You should recognize that free peoples in all parts of the world do not accept the claim of historical **inevitability** for Communist revolution. What your government believes is its own business; what it does in the world is the world's business. The great revolution in the history of man, past, present and future, is the revolution of those determined to be free.

.....

## Glossary

**fraught with:** full of.

**render:** to give or make available; provide.

**repel:** to offer resistance to; to fight against.

**misapprehend:** to apprehend incorrectly; to misunderstand.

**recourse:** act of turning to for assistance.

**inevitability:** the quality of being unavoidable.

Kennedy and Khrushchev obviously had very different opinions about the Bay of Pigs invasion. Use the chart below to summarize the two leaders' viewpoints about Castro and the Cuban revolution, as well as their objectives (what they wanted to achieve). Then answer the questions that follow.

	President Kennedy (U.S.A)	Chairman Khrushchev (U.S.S.R.)
<b>Point of view</b> , or perspective, regarding Fidel Castro and the Communist Revolution in Cuba		
<b>Objective</b> (what each leader wanted to achieve in Cuba)		

2. How might Kennedy and Khrushchev's different objectives help explain how both men could look at the same historical event (the Bay of Pigs invasion) and yet come to such opposite conclusions about it?

The American government expected the people of Cuba to rise up in support of the invasion and help the invaders to overthrow

Castro's communist government. The Americans were disappointed. There was no popular uprising in Cuba against Castro, and

the communist government easily defeated the invasion. President Kennedy was angry and humiliated.

3. What might be some of the reasons that people of Cuba failed to rise up against Castro and overthrow his dictatorship?