The Khrushchev Era and the ‘Second Cold War’ 1956–63

POINTS TO CONSIDER
This chapter covers the eventful period when the Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev, was trying to consolidate the USSR's grip on Eastern Europe, while also attempting to ‘destalinise’, or liberalise, conditions within it. It focuses on the following interlinked events and their impact on East–West relations:

- The year of crises: 1956 (Poland, Hungary and the Suez Crisis)
- The legacy of the crises
- The Berlin Crisis 1958–61
- The Cuban Missile Crisis 1962

The chapter then finishes by assessing the question of whether the period 1956–63 can be described as the ‘Second Cold War’.

Key dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>February 25</td>
<td>Khrushchev attacked Stalin at 20th Party Congress</td>
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<td></td>
<td>June</td>
<td>Riots in Poland</td>
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<td></td>
<td>23 October–</td>
<td>Hungarian uprising defeated</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4 November</td>
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<td>1957</td>
<td>March 25</td>
<td>Treaty of Rome signed</td>
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<td>1958</td>
<td>November 27</td>
<td>Khrushchev's Berlin ultimatum</td>
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<td>1959</td>
<td>January</td>
<td>Castro set up a revolutionary government in Cuba</td>
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<td>1960</td>
<td>May 1</td>
<td>US U2 spy plane shot down over USSR</td>
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<td>May 16–17</td>
<td>Paris Summit broke down</td>
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<td>1961</td>
<td>August 13</td>
<td>Frontier between East and West Berlin closed</td>
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<td>1962</td>
<td>September 13–</td>
<td>USA warned USSR on installation of missiles in Cuba</td>
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<td></td>
<td>November</td>
<td>Cuban Missile Crisis</td>
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1 | The Year of Crises 1956

Destalinisation

Destalinisation had a big impact on the relations between the USSR and its satellite states. It appeared to promise a return to the policy of 'different roads to socialism', which Stalin briefly tolerated between 1945 and 1947 (see page 53). The pace of destalinisation accelerated after the fall of Beria (see page 99). His secret police network, which had spies throughout Eastern Europe, was dissolved and politicians such as Gomulka in Poland and Kadar in Hungary were released from prison and returned to public life. This raised expectations in the satellite states that they would be given more independence from Moscow.

Khrushchev's speech at the 20th Party Conference, February 1956

A further wave of destalinisation followed after Khrushchev's famous speech at the 20th Party Conference, February 1956, denouncing Stalin and recognising the rights of the satellite states to find their 'national ways to socialism'. Although the speech was supposed to be secret, the US security service, the CIA, acquired a copy and ensured that it was broadcast to Eastern Europe. By raising hopes of political change this contributed to the unrest in Poland and Hungary later in the year.

Expectations of reform were further increased by the improvement in relations between the USSR and Yugoslavia, which was 're-admitted' to the Socialist bloc after Khrushchev and Bulganin had visited Belgrade in May 1955. The blame for the break in 1948 was attributed fairly and squarely to Stalin (see pages 68–70). Khrushchev was, of course, primarily interested in bringing back Yugoslavia into the Soviet sphere of influence, while Tito, the Yugoslav leader, ambiguously believed that, as a result of his experience in defying Stalin, he was a role model for the new generation of Soviet leaders and would now become a leading figure in the Soviet bloc. In June 1956, after talks in Moscow, Khrushchev and Tito issued a communiqué in which they agreed that:

-the path of socialist development differs in various countries and conditions, that the multiplicity of forms of socialist development tends to strengthen socialism and that any tendency of imposing one's opinions on the ways and forms of socialist development is alien to both.

This was an optimistic doctrine assuming that the satellite states wished to remain within the Soviet bloc. What would happen, however, if one or more of these states decided to take a controversial road to socialism, with which the USSR did not agree? Would it intervene militarily or run the risk of seeing the Soviet bloc disintegrate?
### Profile: Nikita Khrushchev 1894–1971

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>Born in Kursk</td>
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<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Joined the Bolshevik Party</td>
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<td>1935</td>
<td>First Secretary of the Moscow City Committee</td>
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<td>1938</td>
<td>Head of the Ukrainian Communist Party</td>
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<td>1939</td>
<td>Joined the Politburo</td>
</tr>
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<td>1941–5</td>
<td>Served as Political Commissar on various fronts including Stalingrad</td>
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<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>In charge of Soviet agriculture</td>
</tr>
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<td>1953</td>
<td>Elected First Secretary of the Party (Party leader)</td>
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<td>1956</td>
<td>February – Denounced Stalin in a secret speech</td>
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<td>1958</td>
<td>November – Sent troops into Hungary</td>
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<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>November – Became Soviet Prime Minister</td>
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<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>November – Sent Berlin Ultimatum to the Western powers</td>
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<td>1960</td>
<td>– Recalled Soviet specialists from China</td>
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<td>1961</td>
<td>August – Sanctioned the building of the Berlin Wall</td>
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<td>1962</td>
<td>– Erected Soviet rocket firing pads in Cuba</td>
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<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>– Ousted from office</td>
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<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>– Died</td>
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By the time the 20th Party Congress met in February 1956, Khrushchev was already the most powerful figure in the USSR. He was convinced that Communism would eventually win the economic and ideological competition with capitalism. Although this competition was to be peaceful, he did not hesitate to play on the West’s fear of nuclear war to achieve his ends. His opportunism and ‘nuclear sabre rattling’ made the world a much more dangerous place than it had been in Stalin’s time.

Khrushchev was a paradoxical figure. As the British historian Geoffrey Roberts has observed, ‘he emphasised peaceful economic competition between socialism and capitalism, but he projected an equally, if not more competitive policy in the political, ideological and military spheres’.

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### Key term

**Nuclear sabre rattling**

Threatening or hinting at the possibility of nuclear war in order to intimidate the Western powers.

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### Key question

Why did Khrushchev decide against using Soviet troops to restore order in Poland?

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### The Polish Crisis, June–October 1956

The limits to this doctrine of allowing the Eastern European states to develop socialism in their own way were tested first of all in Poland in the autumn of 1956. At the end of June riots broke out in Poznan when the local factory workers protested about the imposition of increased work targets. They were put down with heavy casualties, but to overcome the bitterness this caused, the Polish Communist Party turned again to its popular former leader, Gomulka, who had just been released from prison (see page 68). The Soviet government, fearing that he would seek to restore Polish independence, sent a high-powered delegation to Warsaw on 19–20 October, and ordered the Red Army units
Profile: Władysław Gomułka 1905–1982

1905 – Born in Krosno
1943–8 – Head of the Polish Workers’ Party
1948 – Dismissed under pressure from Stalin and accused of ‘Titoist tendencies’
1951–5 – Imprisoned
1956–70 – First Secretary of the Polish Communist Party
1970 – Replaced as First Secretary by Edward Gierek after failing to suppress strikes in the Gdynia shipyards
1982 – Died

Gomułka was hated by the Stalinists in Poland, but initially in 1956 he was a hero to the Polish people, and in October was the only person who could restore order. As First Secretary of the Polish Communist Party he made considerable reforms:

- he ended collectivisation of agriculture
- he attempted to reform the running of the economy by decentralising decision making (that is, he allowed local managers some say in making the decisions about their factories)
- he developed trade with the West
- he provided some limited freedom of speech.

However, he still preserved the one-party Communist state and did not allow the workers’ councils any real power or influence. For a time, as British historian John Young observed, ‘he basically satisfied the Soviets while supposedly respecting Polish sovereignty’. Yet he increasingly became more authoritarian. In March 1968, for instance, he ruthlessly broke up student protest demonstrations in Warsaw and elsewhere. In December 1970 his attempts to impose price increases on the Polish people caused a wave of strikes and riots in the Polish sea ports. Gomułka attempted unsuccessfully to repress these by shooting the protesters. In December 1970 he was replaced by Edward Gierek, who withdrew the price increases and attempted to pursue a more co-operative policy with the workers.

stationed in Poland to advance on the city in an attempt to stop his election. Gomułka refused to be cowed and his election went ahead. On 24 October Khrushchev told a Central Committee meeting in Moscow that:

the discussions between the delegations ranged from being very warm to rude. Gomułka several times emphasised that they would not permit their independence to be taken away and would not allow anyone to interfere in Poland’s internal affairs. He said that if he were leader of the country he would restore order promptly.
Faced with the prospect of having to fight the Poles at a time when the situation in Hungary was rapidly deteriorating (see below), Khrushchev wisely withdrew the troops and chose to believe Gomulka’s assurances that Poland would remain a loyal member of the Warsaw Pact. As the Soviet leader was to observe, ‘finding a reason for an armed conflict now would be very easy, but finding a way to put an end to such a conflict would be very hard’.

The Hungarian uprising

Just as the worst of the Polish crisis was over, the USSR was faced in Hungary with the most serious challenge to its power since the Second World War. As part of his destalinisation campaign Khrushchev had, with Tito’s backing, put pressure on the Hungarian Communist Party in July to replace its old-style Stalinist leader, Máté Rákosi, with the more liberal Ernő Gerő. Tito had considerable ambitions in Hungary, as he hoped that an independent Communist regime would emerge in Budapest that would look to Belgrade rather than Moscow and so strengthen his overall influence within the Soviet bloc.

In the early autumn the pressures for further change, which Tito encouraged, continued to grow. A turning point was reached on 23 October when a large demonstration in Budapest, called in support of the Polish reformers, escalated out of control. Even before he had received a formal request for help from Gerő, Khrushchev decided to send in 30,000 troops backed with tanks and artillery. A new government under Imre Nagy, who was an independent minded and reforming Communist, supported by Tito, was formed.

Khrushchev at first tried to reconcile his pledges to concede greater independence to the satellite states with Soviet security needs. He issued on 30 October the ‘Declaration on the Principles of Development and a Further Strengthening of Friendship and Co-operation between the USSR and other Socialist Countries’, which attempted to provide a legal and mutually agreed framework for Soviet military bases in Eastern Europe. He also began to pull out the troops from Hungary, but then Nagy threatened the whole foundations of the USSR’s power in Eastern Europe by announcing that he intended to withdraw Hungary from the Warsaw Pact. He was also planning to share power with non-Communist groups.

The Suez Crisis

Soviet policy during the Hungarian uprising cannot be fully understood without also looking at the Suez Crisis. The USSR had been so successful in cultivating good relations with Colonel Nasser, the Egyptian leader, that the Americans decided to bring him to heel by cancelling their loan for building the Aswan dam in July 1956. This merely prompted Nasser to turn to the USSR for finance and to nationalise the Suez Canal, which was owned by an Anglo-French company, so that he could get further revenue from tolls that the ships had to pay when using the canal.
On 16 October the British, French and Israelis worked out a joint plan for invading Egypt. The Israelis were to invade Egypt through the Sinai and advance towards the canal. The British and French would intervene and send troops to ‘protect the canal’.

Israel attacked on 29 October. The British and French immediately sent an ultimatum demanding the withdrawal of both the Israelis and Egyptians from the canal. When the Egyptians refused, British planes began to bomb Egyptian airfields on 31 October, at the very time that the Hungarian crisis was reaching its peak, and on 5 November Anglo-French forces landed in the canal zone. Khrushchev was convinced that Nasser would be quickly removed and that Soviet influence in the Middle East would suffer a disastrous blow. If this was combined with further setbacks in Hungary, Soviet power and prestige might never recover. Consequently that same day he told the Central Committee of the USSR:

We should re-examine our assessment and should not withdraw our troops from Hungary and Budapest. We should take the initiative in restoring order in Hungary. If we depart from Hungary, it will give a great boost to the Americans, English and French – the imperialists. They will perceive it as a weakness on our part and will go on the offensive. We would then be exposing the weakness of our positions. Our party will not accept it if we do this. To Egypt they will then add Hungary. We have no other choice....

On 4 November Soviet troops advanced into Hungary and, after a few days of fierce fighting, a new government loyal to the USSR under János Kádár was installed. Khrushchev had nothing to fear from Western intervention. Eisenhower, suspecting that the USSR
might be willing to risk war rather than lose Hungary, made it absolutely clear to the Soviet leaders that there was no question of US intervention to save Nagy.

However, much to Khrushchev’s surprise, Nasser was saved by the Americans, who viewed the Suez War as an attempt by Britain and France to prop up their disintegrating empires in the Middle East and Africa. The British had assumed they would get US support, but Eisenhower, in the middle of an election campaign, refused to give this. Not only did the Americans condemn the attack in the United Nations, but they also refused a loan to Britain. Through massive diplomatic and financial pressure on London and Paris, Eisenhower managed to halt the fighting on 6 November just at the point where the British and French troops were near to capturing the whole length of the Suez Canal.

Khrushchev cleverly exploited this split in the Western alliance and on 5 November threatened nuclear missile attacks on Britain, France and Israel if they did not stop the war. Although it was known at the time by Western intelligence that the USSR did not yet possess the rockets to propel such missiles, the ceasefire on the following day made it look as if it was the Soviet ultimatum rather than US financial pressure that had saved Egypt. Khrushchev himself was thus able to take the credit in the Middle East and the Communist world for having defeated the British and French 'imperialists'.

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**Summary diagram: The year of crises 1956**

**Polish and Hungarian Crises**

**General causes**
- Destalinisation
- Impact of Khrushchev's speech at 20th Party Conference
- Tito's influence – different routes to Socialism

**Poland**
- Riots of June 1956
- Soviet objection to appointment of Gomulka
- Advance of Red Army averted by Gomulka's promise to resolve order

**Hungary**
- Stalinist leader replaced by Gerö
- Tito encourages a more independent line
- Riots on 28th October triggered Soviet military intervention
- Nagy appointed as compromise leader
- Announcement that Hungary intended to withdraw from Warsaw Pact prompts Soviet military intervention
- Khrushchev convinced that his ally in the Middle East, Colonel Nasser would be toppled by Anglo-French action

**Impact of Suez Crisis on Cold War**
- Fear of Nasser's defeat strengthens Khrushchev's resolve to crush Hungarian revolt
- Khrushchev attempts to exploit Anglo-French/US split by threatening to fire nuclear missiles at London and Paris
- USSR's position in Middle East strengthened
- Khrushchev encouraged to develop policy of nuclear diplomacy
2 | The Legacy of the Crises

Legacy for the USSR
The Polish and Hungarian crises had shown how difficult it was for the Soviet government to encourage the satellite states to reform without creating a demand for their transformation into genuine democratic regimes. They also highlighted the problems the Soviet bloc had in the post-Stalinist era in agreeing on common policies, as there was no framework for regular consultations.

Moscow Conference of international Communist leaders, October 1957
Khrushchev attempted to remedy this at the conference attended by the international Communist leaders at Moscow in October 1957. Although opposed by the Poles and the Yugoslavs, this conference passed a motion recognising the USSR as 'the first and mightiest' of the socialist countries, while still acknowledging the legitimacy of the principle of 'different roads to socialism'. It also made very clear that a Communist leader under pressure could appeal to the Soviet bloc for 'mutual aid', which in effect meant military assistance to counter any major disturbances. An element of diversity was still tolerated and considerable economic help was given to the satellite states by the USSR, but it was understood that they must in all essentials stick to the Soviet political and economic model. Almost inevitably this doctrine led to a fresh break with Tito, who now joined with India and Egypt to form the non-aligned movement of neutral states.

Khrushchev's position strengthened
One of the important legacies of the Hungarian and Suez crises was that Khrushchev's position was greatly strengthened in the USSR. Dulles, the US Secretary of State, had perceptively warned that he was 'the most dangerous person to lead the Soviet Union since the October Revolution'. Dulles felt that, whereas Stalin attempted to calculate carefully the consequences of his actions, Khrushchev was prepared to take dangerous risks to achieve his ends.

After his propaganda success in the Suez Crisis, Khrushchev was convinced that the mere threat of nuclear weapons would enable him to force the West to make concessions in Berlin and elsewhere. His policy of 'nuclear diplomacy' gained more credibility when the USSR launched the world's first intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) (see page 11) in August 1957, and followed it up by sending a satellite, the Sputnik, into orbit in October. Although the overall military balance still favoured the West, Khrushchev deliberately exaggerated the extent of the Soviet successes in order, as he wrote in his memoirs, 'to exert pressure on American militarists – and also influence the minds of more reasonable politicians – so that the United States would start treating us better'.

Key question
What were the consequences of the 1956 crises for the Soviet bloc?

Non-aligned movement
Not allied with either the USSR or the West.

October Revolution
The second Russian Revolution in October 1917, in which the Bolsheviks seized power.

Nuclear diplomacy
Diplomacy backed up by the threat of nuclear weapons.

Sputnik
This satellite weighed 84 kg and was able to orbit the earth. In Russian the word means 'fellow traveller', or supporter of the USSR.

Key question
Why did Dulles think that Khrushchev was such a dangerous Soviet leader?
Legacy for NATO
The immediate damage done to NATO by the Suez Crisis was quickly repaired, as was the Anglo-American special relationship; yet in continental Western Europe as a whole, a certain distrust of US policies lingered. Once the Soviets were in a position to threaten the US East Coast cities with their new ICBM missiles, the European leaders wondered whether the Americans would still defend Western Europe from a possible Soviet attack. Rather than see New York and Washington destroyed would they not do a deal with the Soviets and surrender Western Europe or at least West Germany?

These fears were strengthened by several current developments. The Americans and British were reducing their conventional forces in Europe and equipping those that remained with tactical nuclear weapons. In October 1957 Adam Rapacki, the Polish Foreign Minister, also put forward plans for a nuclear-free zone in Central Europe, which Adenauer, the Chancellor of the FRG, believed was a ‘Russian trap’ leading to the reunification of a neutralised Germany. Adenauer feared that a neutral united Germany could easily be overrun by the USSR. Not surprisingly, therefore, Adenauer became more responsive to French plans in early 1958 for developing a Franco-German-Italian nuclear bomb that would be independent of the British and Americans.

Doubts about the USA’s loyalty to its European allies also influenced Adenauer’s thinking about the future of the new European Economic Community (EEC), and his attitude to General de Gaulle, who returned to power in France in May 1958. The two statesmen had very different plans for its future. Adenauer wanted it to develop into a closely integrated community linked to the USA, while de Gaulle hoped that it would become an association of independent states, completely free from US influence, and under French leadership. If, however, the Americans decided to pull out of Europe or sacrifice West Berlin to the USSR, de Gaulle’s vision of Europe was the only alternative Adenauer could fall back on.

The EEC and EFTA
The European Economic Community (EEC) was set up by the Treaty of Rome, which was signed with general US approval by the FRG, France, Italy and the Benelux states in March 1957. Its aim was to create a common market or customs union within 12 years, while also gradually forming a more integrated political structure. British plans for setting up a much larger free trade zone were turned down by the leaders of the six powers on the grounds that it would not provide an effective basis for European economic and political co-operation. This led to Britain forming the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) with Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Austria and Portugal. Thus, a major economic split in Western Europe developed just at the time that it was about to face renewed pressure from the Soviet bloc.
3 | The Berlin Crisis 1958–61

The first stages
In the autumn of 1956 the GDR had acted, in contrast to Poland and Hungary, as a loyal ally of the USSR. Yet the GDR, despite Soviet recognition in September 1955 (see page 102), remained a fragile and artificial state totally dependent on Moscow and on the presence of 20 divisions of Russian troops stationed within its frontiers. It was confronted by a prosperous West Germany, the miraculous economic recovery of which inevitably attracted many of its youngest and most ambitious citizens.

Through the open frontier in Berlin it was still possible to flee from the drab life of socialist planning and rationing to the bright lights of the FRG, and both Adenauer and the USA did everything to encourage this. Between 1945 and 1961 about one-sixth of the whole East German population had fled westwards. One way of stopping this exodus was dramatically to improve the standard of living in the GDR, but to achieve this, it was essential to stop skilled workers and professionals quitting in large numbers to the FRG. This meant that something had to be done about the status of West Berlin.

Khrushchev’s aims
By the autumn of 1958 Khrushchev was increasingly confident that the USSR could force the USA into making concessions over West Berlin, and indeed perhaps over the whole German question. By grossly exaggerating the extent of Soviet nuclear power and by putting pressure on West Berlin he was sure that he could squeeze concessions from the Western allies without the risk of war. He graphically observed: ‘Berlin is the testicles of the West... every time I want to make the West scream I squeeze on Berlin’. Also, as China pointed out, if the GDR could not be turned into a viable state able to hold its own with the FRG, the whole prestige of international Communism was at stake.

Apart from strengthening the GDR what other aims had Khrushchev in mind? He also hoped to:

- stop or at least delay the decision by NATO to equip the FRG with nuclear weapons
- show his critics within the USSR and the Chinese that he was not ‘soft on the imperialists’
- divide the Western powers
- force them to accept the USSR as a political and military equal and to come to the conference table to draw up a German peace treaty, which would recognise the division of Germany and the GDR’s postwar frontiers with Poland.

In the words of a US historian, Hope Harrison, ‘Khrushchev always saw and used West Berlin... as a lever to compel the West to recognise the post-war status quo and the existence of East Germany’.
The Berlin ultimatum, November 1958

The long and dangerous crisis began on 10 November when Khrushchev called for a peace treaty with the two German states:

The time has obviously arrived for the signatories of the Potsdam Agreement to renounce the remnants of the occupation regime in Berlin, and thereby make it possible to create a normal situation in the capital of the German Democratic Republic. The Soviet Union, for its part, would hand over to the sovereign German Democratic Republic the functions in Berlin that are still exercised by Soviet agencies. This, I think, would be the correct thing to do.

On 27 November he followed this up with a six-month ultimatum demanding the demilitarisation of West Berlin, the withdrawal of Western troops, and its change of status into a free city. If the Western allies refused to sign a peace treaty with the two German states, Khrushchev threatened to conclude a peace agreement just with the GDR and to recognise its sovereignty over East Berlin. This would then enable it to control access to West Berlin and interfere at will with traffic using the land corridors from the FRG. The Western allies would thus be compelled to deal with East German rather than Russian officials and so in effect recognise the sovereignty of the GDR, which would shatter the Hallstein Doctrine (see page 102). He was, however, as we shall see, to have second thoughts about putting quite so much power into the hands of Walter Ulbricht, the leader of the GDR.
The Western reaction 1959–60
Although the Western allies rejected the ultimatum, Khrushchev was successful in forcing them to the conference table to discuss the 'German question'. In February 1959 they agreed that a Foreign Ministers' conference should meet in Geneva in the summer. Khrushchev was also delighted to see splits beginning to appear in the Western alliance. In the preceding months Adenauer viewed with increasing concern statements from London and Washington signalling the desire for compromise and concession, and inevitably drew closer to de Gaulle, who urged a much tougher line against the Soviets. He was particularly alarmed by the decision of British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan to visit Moscow in February and by Eisenhower's invitation to Khrushchev to visit the USA in the coming autumn.

The Geneva Conference, May–August 1959
At the Geneva Conference both sides put forward proposals for German unity, but no agreement was secured. The Western powers came up with their usual demand for free elections, while the USSR suggested that the two Germanies should form a confederation, which would only very slowly evolve into a united state. However, as the Soviets did succeed in persuading the West to discuss the Berlin problem as a separate issue, Khrushchev believed that his threats were paying off, and he continued the pressure, renewing the ultimatum in June.

Summit meetings, September 1959–May 1960
Between 1959 and 1961 there were more summits than at any time since the Second World War. When Khrushchev visited Eisenhower at Camp David, the holiday residence of the US President, in September 1959, the mood was friendly but, to quote the US historian John Gaddis, the two leaders ‘got no further than an agreement to disagree’. Over the next two years Khrushchev alternated periods of détente, when he temporarily allowed the ultimatum to lapse again, with spells of acute crisis during which further threats were devised, to force the West into making concessions over the status of Berlin and the future of Germany.

Khrushchev’s actions were not without success. Behind the scenes in London and Washington, and at times even in Paris, various schemes for creating a nuclear-free zone in Central Europe, recognising Poland’s western frontiers and the GDR, were considered quite seriously. Adenauer meanwhile was desperate to stop any of these plans from reducing the FRG to a neutral second-rate state, but by May 1960 when the Paris Summit was due to open, he had no idea what Eisenhower and Macmillan might be about to propose. Thus, for him at least, it was ‘a gift from heaven’, as the German historian Klessmann has called it, when Khrushchev used the shooting down of an US spy plane over the USSR as an excuse to cancel the Summit, and wait until a new US President was elected in the autumn.
U2 spy planes and the arms race
In 1956 the US airforce bought 53 Lockheed U2 spy planes. Based in Japan, Turkey and Britain, they were able to fly over Soviet territory and photograph military bases, missile factories and launch pads. By 1961 Soviet technology caught up with the U2s, and on 5 May a Soviet anti-aircraft missile shot down a plane that had been sent to see whether there were missile bases in the Urals. These flights established that, for all Khrushchev’s boasting, the Soviets possessed in the spring of 1961 very few ICBMs and no launching platforms for them. Indeed the USSR had only four ICBMs based on a site near Archangel.

The construction of the Berlin Wall
The growing crisis in East Germany
Until the autumn of 1960 Khrushchev determined the course of the Berlin Crisis. Ulbricht, the East German leader, who certainly stood to benefit from a successful outcome, was little more than a spectator. Khrushchev still did not despair of using Berlin as a means to solve the German problem as a whole, and despite his bluster, he acted cautiously. He told Ulbricht in May 1960, for instance, that:

Under present conditions, it is worthwhile to wait a little longer and try to find a solution for the long-since ripe question of a peace treaty with the two German states. This will not escape our hands. We had better wait, and the matter will get more mature.

However, in desperation, as the numbers of refugees to the West dramatically increased during the years 1960–1, Ulbricht pressed Khrushchev to sign a separate peace treaty with the GDR, at one juncture sarcastically observing: ‘You only talk about a peace treaty, but don’t do anything about it’. By this stage Ulbricht increasingly tried to use the very real threat of the collapse of the GDR to force Khrushchev to sign a separate peace treaty with it. Although the Soviet leader had indeed threatened the West with this, he was now reluctant to carry it out, because he feared that if the East Germans were given responsibility for controlling the links between West Berlin and the FRG without the West’s agreement, they might provoke a major crisis, such as another blockade of West Berlin. Khrushchev was only using the threat of a separate peace to squeeze concessions from the West.

Khrushchev’s consents to the Berlin Wall
Khrushchev’s hopes that John Kennedy, the new US President, would make the concessions that Eisenhower had refused, proved unrealistic, but his response to Soviet threats to West Berlin hinted at a possible solution to the Berlin problem. While he dramatically built up US forces in Europe, Kennedy also urged
negotiation on the whole German question and pointedly stressed in a television broadcast on 25 July 1961 that the USA was essentially interested in free access to West Berlin rather than to Berlin as a whole. Kennedy was in fact indicating where the West would draw the line and fight if necessary.

Up to this point Khrushchev had consistently rejected the option of closing off the East Berlin frontier. He had hoped rather to uncouple West Berlin from the FRG than to cut it off from East Germany. However, the growing unrest in the GDR caused by the forced collectivisation of agriculture and the ever increasing number of refugees to West Germany finally persuaded him that something had to be done to prevent an East German collapse. Somewhere between the end of July and the beginning of August Khrushchev decided that the East German border in Berlin would have to be closed. This decision was confirmed at a meeting of the Warsaw Pact states (see page 102) in Moscow on 3–5 August 1961, and in the early morning of 13 August the operation was efficiently and swiftly carried out. At first the border was sealed off with barbed wire, but when no Western countermeasures followed, a more permanent concrete wall was built.
Profile: John Kennedy 1917–63

1917 - Born into a wealthy Irish American family in Massachusetts
1940–3 - Served in the US Navy; his boat was rammed and sunk by a Japanese destroyer
1953 - Elected to the Senate as a Democrat
1960 - Won presidential elections by a narrow margin, and became the first Roman Catholic President in the history of the USA
1961 April - Allowed a disastrous invasion of Cuba by exiles - the Bay of Pigs incident
June - Met Khrushchev in Vienna and was told that the USA was on the 'wrong side of history'
July - Indicated that the USA would protect West Berlin with force if necessary
1962 October - Successfully brought the Cuban Missile Crisis to an end
November -
1963 November 22 - Assassinated in Dallas

After Kennedy had met Khrushchev for the first time in Vienna in June 1961, he remarked: 'He just beat the hell out of me. I've got a terrible problem. If he thinks I'm inexperienced and have no guts, until we remove those ideas, we won't get anywhere with him.' Kennedy was worried about the USA losing the Cold War and believed that the USSR was in a strong position to gain support in the third world. He built up the US armed forces and was determined that the USA should send a man to the moon by 1970.

In the Cuban Missile Crisis historians have traditionally seen him as a hardliner, who in the last resort was ready to risk war, but in fact secret tape recordings of his key advisory body, which were taken with the permission of Kennedy during the crisis, show that he took the lead in pressing for a compromise.

The importance of the Berlin Wall
The first Berlin crisis ended in complete failure for Stalin. Can it be argued that the second crisis was also a failure for Khrushchev? Like Stalin he had failed to force the Western allies to withdraw their troops from West Berlin or to compel them to negotiate peace treaties with the two German states. On the other hand, with the construction of the Berlin Wall he had achieved a limited but important success for Soviet policies. By tolerating it, the Western powers in effect recognised East Germany. The Wall both consolidated the GDR and ensured that the Soviet Union was still responsible for maintaining international access to West Berlin. In
1992 one former high-ranking Soviet official explained to a US historian that:

After the building of the Wall, the signing of a separate treaty with the GDR was not necessary. All issues that needed to be resolved were resolved. Ulbricht saw in a peace treaty a way to receive international recognition. For us, international recognition was important, but not the most important [thing]. We saw this would happen no matter what; it was a question of time. After the borders were closed there would be no other choice than for the West to recognize the GDR. And that is what happened.

Learning to live with the Berlin Wall 1961–3
The prolonged crisis over Berlin effectively ended with the Wall, although this was not immediately obvious at the time. The Soviet Union renewed nuclear testing and on 30 October 1961 exploded an enormous bomb of over 50 megatons, which it was calculated could destroy a US state the size of Maryland. There was also continued tension along the Wall in Berlin. US troops were ostentatiously practising tearing down simulated walls, while on 27 October Soviet and US tanks stood almost muzzle to muzzle for several hours at Checkpoint Charlie. Khrushchev was determined to keep up the pressure on West Berlin. In October, for instance, he told the Soviet Foreign Minister, Gromyko, and the Polish leader, Gomulka, that ‘we should ... exploit the weakness of the enemy. We should strive to remove the official representatives from West Berlin’.

In a series of talks with the Soviet leaders over the next year Kennedy attempted to lower the tension by exploring the possibility of an agreement over Berlin, which would guarantee the rights of the Western allies, while recognising what he called the ‘legitimate interests of others’. By this, of course, he meant the USSR and GDR. Inevitably Adenauer regarded these negotiations with great suspicion and dreaded that Kennedy would end up sacrificing West Berlin. Consequently he drew even closer to Gaullist France, signing in January 1963 the Franco-German Treaty of Friendship and supporting the French veto on Britain’s application to join the EEC (see page 121).

In October 1962 the Cuban Crisis (see below) temporarily forced the Berlin question into second place and rallied the Western powers around Kennedy. After the crisis, discussions on Berlin continued, but the need to find a settlement was no longer so urgent. Having come so close to nuclear war in Cuba, Khrushchev shied away from another confrontation in Berlin and accepted that for the time being the Wall had consolidated the GDR. The Soviet government also began to reassess its policies and priorities in light of the lessons learnt in the Cuban missile Crisis. As far as they affected Europe these policies will be analysed in Chapter 7.
4 | The Cuban Missile Crisis 1962

The US historian John Gaddis wrote in 1997 that the crisis over Cuba was:

the only episode after World War II in which each of the major areas of Soviet–American competition intersected: the nuclear arms race to be sure, but also conflicting ideological aspirations, ‘third world rivalries’, relations with allies, the domestic political implications of foreign policy, the personalities of individual leaders. The crisis was a kind of funnel – a historical singularity if you like – into which everything suddenly tumbled and got mixed together. Fortunately no black hole lured at the other end....

Although the Cuban Missile Crisis was a direct confrontation between the USA and the USSR, involving neither NATO nor the Warsaw Pact, it had a profound impact on the Cold War in Europe. Both sides came to the brink of war but drew back from a nuclear conflict. After the crisis the Cold War changed, and gradually evolved into what some historians call the ‘long peace’.

The causes of the crisis
In the 1950s the Soviets had viewed South America as essentially a US sphere of interest. They had not protested when the CIA intervened in 1954 to topple the allegedly pro-Communist President Arbenz in Guatemala. However, the USA's domination did cause a growing resentment among South American intellectuals and nationalists, and was one of the factors that influenced Fidel Castro to launch a guerrilla war against the government of Fulgencio Batista in Cuba in December 1956. By
January 1959, contrary to expectations, his forces were able to take over the government in Havana.

At this stage Castro was an anti-American nationalist but not a Communist. It was probably growing opposition from the Cuban middle classes to his economic policies and increasing US hostility to his attempt to adopt a policy of non-alignment in the Cold War that drove him into adopting Marxism–Leninism (see page 3). Friction with the USA was also caused by his seizure of property owned by the major US firms, particularly the United Fruit Company.

As relations with the USA deteriorated during the summer of 1959, Castro began to put out feelers towards Moscow, and in February 1960 he invited Anastas Mikoyan, Deputy Chairman of the Soviet Council of Ministers, to visit Havana. Mikoyan returned to Moscow with a glowing account of the Cuban revolution, which reminded him of the heroic early days of the Russian Revolution. In July, Khrushchev threatened the USA with a missile attack if it dared invade Cuba and suggested that Washington declare the end of the Monroe Doctrine.

Profile: Fidel Castro 1926–

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>Born into a wealthy farming family in Cuba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945–50</td>
<td>As a student, he became involved in anti-American nationalist politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>Exiled to Mexico where he founded the 26th July Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>December – Landed in Cuba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>January – Entered Havana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>Became President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>In response to US ban on Cuban sugar, Castro began to nationalise US property and businesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>April – Failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>Declared that he was a Marxist–Leninist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>July – Joint Cuban–Soviet agreement on deployment of missiles on Cuba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>Cuban Missile Crisis came to a head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975–7</td>
<td>Deployed Cuban troops in Angola and Ethiopia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Critical of Gorbachev’s economic reforms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990–</td>
<td>Remains in power despite collapse of Communism and the USSR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Castro’s leadership has remained, to a great extent, unchallenged. His supporters naturally claim that this is because he is improving the living conditions of the population, while his opponents argue that he still in power as a result of repression and the imprisonment of dissidents.
The Bay of Pigs incident

The growing links between Cuba and the USSR persuaded Eisenhower to authorise the CIA to start planning Castro’s removal. In April 1961, four months after Kennedy came to power, a force of about 1400 Cuban exiles landed south of Havana at Playa Giron on the Bay of Pigs. It was hoped that this would spark off a popular uprising against Castro, but Castro in anticipation of such a move imprisoned thousands of suspects. At the last moment Kennedy also cancelled both bombing raids by the US airforce and a landing by US marines. Consequently, Castro had no trouble in defeating the invasion. As John Gaddis has observed, the Bay of Pigs incident was ‘a monumental disaster for the United States ... comparable only to the humiliation the British and French had suffered at Suez five years earlier’ (see pages 117–19).

Although Khrushchev was delighted by this humiliation, he nevertheless saw it as a warning that the Americans would inevitably try again to topple Castro. In his memoirs he later wrote:

We welcomed Castro’s victory of course, but at the same time we were quite certain that the invasion was only the beginning and that the Americans would not let Cuba alone ... There are infinite opportunities for invasion, especially if the invader has naval artillery and air support.

Khrushchev was certainly correct. The CIA continued to plan Castro’s assassination and large-scale military manoeuvres took place in the Caribbean in the spring and summer of 1962.

The Soviet decision to place missiles on Cuba

In August 1962 Khrushchev negotiated the secret Soviet Cuban Accord with Castro. Over the next few weeks the Soviets began secretly to deploy medium-range nuclear missiles on Cuba. These would be defended by 40,000 Soviet troops, anti-aircraft batteries, short-range battlefield rockets and MIG-21 fighter planes.

There were two key reasons for this highly dangerous operation:

- To gain a base from which the USA could be threatened by medium-range Soviet missiles. This would correct the strategic imbalance caused by the construction of US missile bases in Turkey and Western Europe and go some way towards closing the missile gap between the USSR and the USA.
- Castro also wanted to defend the revolution in Cuba. The Soviets saw the revolution as a major success for Marxism–Leninism, and its defeat would, as Mikoyan told Castro, ‘throw back the revolutionary movement in many countries’.
On 4 October the Soviet ship Indigirka arrived at the port of Mariel in Cuba with enough nuclear warheads to equip at least 158 strategic and nuclear weapons.

The crisis comes to a head: 14–28 October 1962
On 14 October a US U2 spy plane discovered the missiles. President Kennedy was informed two days later and initially the news was kept quiet from the US public. The options open to the US government were explored by a small crisis committee, the EXComm:

- Launching a surprise air attack was ruled out as too risky.
- An appeal to the United Nations was ruled out as it would take too long, especially as further reconnaissance flights indicated that the Soviets already had four medium-range missile sites operational.
- Plans were drawn up for a possible invasion of Cuba by US forces.
- An ultimatum was to be sent to Moscow demanding that the missiles be withdrawn.

In the meantime the US navy set up a quarantine zone 800 miles from the Cuban coast. Once they entered this area Soviet ships would be stopped and searched for weapons due to be delivered to Cuba. On the advice of the British Ambassador this was reduced to 500 miles.

On 22 October Kennedy announced on US television the news of the existence of Soviet missiles on Cuba and that he had ordered the naval blockade of the island. He also made clear that if any nuclear missile was fired from Cuba, he would order a massive nuclear attack on the USSR. Khrushchev initially was determined to complete the missile sites in Cuba and ordered the Soviet ships to challenge the blockade. It looked as though a naval confrontation was inevitable.

Nevertheless on 26 October, in response to an appeal for negotiations from U. Thant, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and fearing an imminent US air attack on Cuba, Khrushchev informed the Americans that he would withdraw the missiles. In return he demanded a guarantee that the US would not invade Cuba. However, once he realised that this made him look weak in the eyes of his political rivals, in a second message he insisted that the removal of missiles from Cuba was dependent on the dismantling of US Jupiter missile bases in Turkey. To appease US public opinion Kennedy responded to the first letter officially, but secretly he agreed to remove the 15 Jupiter missiles from Turkey once the Cuban Crisis was over. He stressed, however, that if the Soviets made this offer public, it would be withdrawn.

Effectively this ended the crisis, and all the Soviet missiles and troops were withdrawn from Cuba by 20 November.
The consequences of the crisis

The Cuban Missile Crisis was a mixed success for the USSR:

- Khrushchev had achieved a US guarantee that it would not invade Cuba.
- He also received promises that the Jupiter missiles would be withdrawn from Turkey.
- But his ambition of achieving nuclear parity with the USA had failed.
- The world had witnessed Soviet ships turning back, apparently retreating before US power.

The confrontation emphasised how the Cold War had, for the time being at least, become bipolar. Britain, for instance, had given Washington advice, but otherwise had played no role in the crisis at all. Both the USA and the USSR were determined to avoid the repeat of such a confrontation with its attendant dangers of nuclear war and began to give priority to plans for controlling the proliferation of nuclear weapons and their testing (see page 145). In 1963, a **hotline** was established which linked by **telex** the Kremlin and the White House. The intention behind this was that both leaders could directly contact each other and stop misunderstandings that could lead to nuclear war.

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**Summary diagram: The Cuban Missile Crisis**

**Causes**
- Castro's revolution in Cuba
- Deterioration in US–Cuba relations
- Failure of Bay of Pigs invasion
- August 1962: secret Soviet account signed: (a) medium-range missiles installed and (b) defended by Soviet troops, rockets and planes

**US reaction when U2 plane discovers missile pads on 14 October**
- Kennedy's ultimatum, 22 October
  - quarantine announced
  - massive nuclear retaliation by USA on USSR if missiles are fired from Cuba

**Khrushchev's reaction – two conflicting messages**
- Promises to withdraw from Cuba provided USA does not invade Cuba
- Withdrawal to depend on later dismantling of Jupiter missiles in Turkey

**Consequences**
Kennedy accepted first publicly, but privately agreed to the second message
5 | Assessment: The ‘Second Cold War’

Deterioration in East–West relations

In 1955 it seemed that the Cold War in Europe, if not over, had at least stabilised. The Soviets had pulled out of Austria (see page 102) and there was much talk about the Geneva spirit. Yet over the next six years no progress was made towards détente, as relations between the Warsaw Pact states and the North Atlantic Alliance deteriorated to a level not seen since the Berlin Blockade of 1948–9. Do the reasons for this lie with Khrushchev or were there deeper causes?

A major cause of European instability was the failure of the USSR to set up in Eastern Europe what the Americans managed to create in Western Europe: ‘an empire by invitation’ (see page 105). The destalinisation policies of 1953–6 were attempts to create more popular regimes that did not depend on terror and the Red Army to survive, and to allow the peoples of Eastern Europe some input into influencing their own politics. Yet the Polish riots and the Hungarian revolt of 1956 showed how hard it was to get the balance between liberalisation and the maintenance of essential control. This was to remain one of the main dilemmas facing the Soviet leadership for the next 33 years.

To the brink and back?

Until 1961 the division of Germany and the unsolved problem of Berlin also remained a major destabilising factor in Europe. The root of the problem was the chronic economic weakness of East Germany, which could only be remedied by closing the inner Berlin frontier. This would prevent the flight of desperately needed skilled workers from East to West where they could earn more money. However, this measure would violate the Potsdam Agreement (see pages 40–3) and cause a major crisis involving the USA and its allies. Both German states depended for their existence on their superpower protector. As neither the USA nor the USSR could allow its part of Germany to collapse or be absorbed by the rival bloc, the two German leaders, Ulbricht and Adenauer, had at times immense influence over the foreign policy of Moscow and Washington, respectively. Thus, Adenauer did much to stop Eisenhower from effectively exploring the possibilities of a Berlin settlement in the period 1958–60, while recent research by Hope Harrison has shown that it was pressure from Ulbricht that finally propelled Khrushchev into building the Berlin Wall.

The crises of 1956 and 1958–61 were triggered by instabilities within the Soviet bloc and Central Europe, but they were made far more dangerous by Khrushchev’s high-risk ‘nuclear diplomacy’. In 1956, by threatening to bombard Britain, France and Israel with nuclear missiles, even when in reality the USSR had not yet developed the military capacity to do this, he was able to pose as the saviour of Egypt. He did not hesitate to use the ultimate threat of nuclear weapons as a bargaining counter in both the Berlin and Cuba crises. Yet, as we have seen, much of
this was only ‘bluff and bluster’. In that sense Khrushchev very much presided over a period of acute tension which perhaps could be called a Second Cold War.

In other ways, however, the Khrushchev years set the pattern for the next three decades in Europe. The Berlin Wall, however cruel in that it divided a city and so prevented families and friends from seeing each other, did at last stabilise the GDR and with it Central Europe. It also enabled both superpowers, as Gaddis has put it, to ‘break loose’ from their German allies and explore the possibility of détente in Europe. Paradoxically Khrushchev was also the father of détente. Despite his brinkmanship over Berlin and Cuba he aimed for peaceful economic and ideological competition with the West. After the Cuban crisis, Soviet policy settled down, as we shall see in the next chapter, to a dual policy of achieving détente in Europe and nuclear equality with the USA.
Study Guide: AS Questions
In the Style of AQA
Read the following source and then answer the questions that follow.


When the Cuban exiles landed on Zapeta Beach at Cuba’s Bay of Pigs ... Fidel Castro’s army and militia reacted with impressive speed and military skill and within three days had killed, captured or thrown off the entire landing force. They had seen themselves as liberators, but the expected popular uprising against Castro did not occur.

1. Why did the Cuban exiles see themselves as ‘liberators’ when they landed in the Bay of Pigs in April 1961?
2. Explain why Kennedy supported the invasion.
3. ‘Castro’s success in defeating the invasion made another invasion by American troops more than likely.’ Explain why you agree or disagree with this statement.

Exam tips
The cross-references are intended to take you straight to the material that will help you to answer the questions.

1. Remember that in a question that awards only three marks that you must be brief and to the point. Do not get carried away with writing a long narrative account of the Bay of Pigs incident. Although you will need to show an understanding of context, you are merely asked to explain why the Cuban exiles thought they would be welcomed as ‘liberators’ (page 131).

2. Up to a point the source should help you. Kennedy obviously hoped that Castro could be brought down by his fellow Cubans (page 131). But you do need to mention:
   • Castro’s anti-Americanism (page 130)
   • his forging of closer links with the USSR (page 130)
   • the geographical position of Cuba in relation to the USA (page 131).

3. Here you need to explain the consequences of the failure of the Bay of Pigs:
   • How Khrushchev was convinced that the Americans would stage a second and far better planned invasion (page 131).
   • This appeared to be backed up by large-scale exercises in the Caribbean in the summer of 1961–2 (page 131).
   • This led to Khrushchev offering military support to Castro, which was arguably the key factor in stopping an invasion by the USA (page 131).

This answer should be a mini-essay with an argument leading to a supported conclusion.
In the style of OCR

1. If Khrushchev was really aiming at peaceful competition with the Western powers and destalinisation in Eastern Europe, why was his European policy often so aggressive?
2. Why did the Hungarian uprising of 1956 and the Berlin Crisis of 1958–61 not lead to war?

Exam tips
The cross-references are intended to take you straight to the material that will help you to answer the questions.

These are more wide-ranging essay questions, which require a considerable amount of planning before you write them out. In the introduction you should formulate clearly and briefly your main arguments and then develop each of them in separate paragraphs in the rest of your essay.

1. • First of all show what Khrushchev understood by peaceful competition: he did not want war but believed that the Soviet bloc would eventually overtake the West and also attract overwhelming support from the third world (page 115).
• He was, however, often impulsive and opportunist and would take risks to strengthen the USSR's bargaining position. Here you will need to explain how he used 'nuclear diplomacy' to frighten the Western powers and to try to squeeze concessions from them (page 119).
• The main part of the essay will be an analysis of the crisis of destalinisation in 1956 and the Berlin Crisis of 1958–61, which is essentially what the question means by 'aggressive policies' (pages 114–19 and 123–8).
• You will also need to explain how Khrushchev's attempt to destalinise, win back Tito and reform the structure of control within the Soviet bloc led first to the Poznan riots and then to the Hungarian revolt, which he had little option but to crush (pages 114–19).
• In the much more complicated Berlin Crisis his aims were also to a certain extent defensive, but they were dangerously open ended and pursued in a way that created great tension. He wished to use the status of West Berlin as a lever to gain major concessions from the Western powers, which would go far towards solving the German problem in the interests of the USSR. In the end he achieved little apart from building the Berlin Wall (pages 122–7).
• In your conclusion you could, however, stress that this was a defensive action that stopped the GDR from collapsing (page 126).

2. The next question again refers to the two great crises of the Khrushchev period. It is simply put, but you need to plan your answer carefully before writing it out:
• You need to show that the Western powers had no intention of intervening to help the Hungarians in 1956. It is true that
the Suez Crisis complicated the issue, but Eisenhower was particularly careful not to provoke the Soviets over an issue that might lead to war. He accepted that Hungary and Poland were in the Soviet sphere of influence (pages 118–19).

- Similarly, Britain and the USA had no desire to pull down the Berlin Wall in 1961, and were anxious to negotiate a settlement that would preserve the rights of the Western allies while recognising Soviet and GDR interests (page 128).
- You must again explore how much of Khrushchev's 'nuclear diplomacy' was in fact based on bluff (page 119).

Study Guide: A2 Questions

In the style of Edexcel

Source 1

*From: a speech given to the West German parliament by Konrad Adenauer in September 1955.*

On the occasion of establishing diplomatic relations between the government of the FRG and the government of the USSR, I declare: A settlement of Germany's territorial situation that is binding under international law does not yet exist. Such a settlement can be made only within the scope of a peace treaty to be concluded with a freely elected all-German government. The position of the government of the Federal Republic toward the government of the Soviet zone – as follows from the first reservation – will not be affected by the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and the FRG. The government of the so-called 'GDR' was not formed on the basis of truly free elections and therefore has not received any real authorisation by the people. In fact, it is rejected by the overwhelming majority of the population; there is neither legal protection nor freedom in the Soviet occupied zone, and the constitution exists only on paper.

The FRG therefore remains the only free and legal German government, with sole authorisation to speak for all of Germany. ... Where third nations are concerned, we also maintain our standpoint regarding the so-called 'GDR'. I must clearly and in no uncertain terms declare that the government of the FRG will interpret as an unfriendly act the establishment of diplomatic relations with the 'GDR' by third nations with which it has official relations, as this act would serve to deepen the division of Germany.
Source 2
From: a report by the Soviet Ambassador to West Germany to Moscow in 1959.

The presence in Berlin of an open and, to speak to the point, uncontrolled border between the socialist and capitalist worlds unwittingly prompts the population to make a comparison between both parts of the city, which unfortunately does not always turn out in favour of Democratic Berlin.

Source 3

The Soviet ultimatum on Berlin did not achieve its stated goal of a peace treaty, signed by all four powers with both German states, which would have meant recognition of the GDR. Soviet pressure did, however, lead to a conference of the foreign ministers of the four powers in May and June 1959 in Geneva.

...Almost as though they were following a precise script, both sides submitted draft peace treaties as they had done before... nevertheless there was a change in the script; it dealt primarily with Berlin not Germany as a whole. This occurred primarily because Khrushchev had chosen to launch his offensive on Berlin, but that in itself was symptomatic. In effect since 1954-5, the inner-German situation was stabilised; East and West had its own Germany... Berlin was another matter; it was still legally under four power control and the problem was that the Soviet government unilaterally contended that it had to give control of its sector to the GDR, and was now trying to gain control over the western sectors as well.

Source 4
From: Khrushchev’s memorandum of 4 June 1961 to President Kennedy during their discussions in Vienna.

The USSR proposes to decide right now without any delay on the convocation of a German peace treaty and to solve the problem of West Berlin ... The peace treaty will formally define the status of West Berlin as a free city and the Soviet Union, like the other parties to the treaty, will of course strictly observe it; measures will also be taken to ensure that it is observed by other countries. At the same time this will mean putting an end to the occupation regime in West Berlin with all its implications. Notably all questions of communications by land, or air through the German Democratic Republic will be settled only by appropriate agreements with the German Democratic Republic. This is but natural since control over such communications is an inalienable right of every sovereign state.
Source 5

To stop hostile activities by revanchist* and militaristic forces in West Germany and West Berlin, a border control will be introduced at the borders to the GDR, including the border with western sectors of Greater Berlin, as is common on the borders of sovereign states. Borders to West Berlin will be sufficiently guarded and effectively controlled in order to prevent subversive activities from the West. Citizens of the GDR will require a special permit to cross these borders. Until West Berlin is transformed into a demilitarised, neutral free city, residents of the capital of the GDR will require a special certificate to cross the border into West Berlin. Peaceful citizens of West Berlin are permitted to visit the capital of the GDR (democratic Berlin) upon presentation of a West Berlin identity card. Revanchist politicians and agents of West German militarism are not permitted to enter the Capital of the GDR (democratic Berlin). For citizens of the West German Federal Republic wishing to visit democratic Berlin, previous control regulations remain in effect. Entry by citizens of other states to the capital of the GDR will not be affected by these regulations.
[* Wanting revenge]

Source 6

The personal tragedy of the Wall cannot be overstated. Many families were divided, and had no prospect of seeing their relatives again. Furthermore, the sealing up of East Berlin meant that the population of the GDR lost their hope of a better life in the West. Escape now became a very dangerous business, and a number of East Germans were killed attempting it.

Source 7
From: John Gaddis We Know Now: Rethinking Cold War History, published in 1997.

The Wall itself was a moral obscenity, as anyone who ever saw it can never forget. But so too were the less visible nuclear weapons and other instruments of mass destruction that were justified at the time, and are widely regarded even now, as having kept the peace... perhaps the Wall in its own blatant way performed a similar function. For not the least of the ironies associated with the conflict was the frequency with which the act of compromising moral principles – at times even corrupting them – became a kind of life preserver. The costs were great; they might have been greater. Foul means do occasionally produce fair results.
Answer both questions 1 and 2.

1. Using the evidence of Sources 1, 3 and 4 and your own knowledge, explain why the Western powers refused to sign a 'German peace treaty'.

2. Using the evidence of Sources 3–7 and your own knowledge, how far do you agree that building the Berlin Wall can in fact be seen as an action that avoided war, even though it was a brutal action that divided families and friends in the same city?

Exam tips

The cross-references are intended to take you straight to the material that will help you to answer the questions.

This question, composed of two parts, assesses the skills of source evaluation in context and the recall, selection and deployment of knowledge, together with an understanding of appropriate concepts and the ability to come to reasoned and well-substantiated conclusions. The examiners stress that their syllabus on the Cold War is a 'synoptic unit'. By that they mean that 'its questions assess the full range of skills and ideas, which candidates will have developed throughout their A level course'. The examiners look carefully at how candidates use the given sources in discussing a point or an issue and in creating and developing an argument. The key to this is that you should use the sources as 'building blocks'.

1. In answering this question you need first to look at the relevant sources and consider how they can be used as 'building blocks'.

You will notice that:

- Source 1 deals with the Hallstein doctrine, which isolated the GDR from the Western world (page 102).
- Source 2 shows why Khrushchev wanted a 'German peace treaty' as it would help to solve the Berlin problem.
- Source 3 indicates that the German situation had been stabilised, but that Berlin remained a problem.

These sources need then to be interpreted in light of the question and supplemented with further relevant evidence. Points to be stressed might, for instance, include:

- The West's arguments that the GDR was a state set up illegally without the consent of its inhabitants (pages 102 and 122).
- The West's long-term commitment to German unity on its own terms – that is a creation of a German state modelled on the FRG (page 109).
- Above all the fear that a premature peace treaty would lead to the loss of West Berlin.
- And that a peace treaty would give much power to a potentially unreliable, even criminal, government in East Berlin.
2. Again before you answer this question you need to look at ‘the building blocks’:

- Source 1 and 3 show the sharp differences between the Western powers and the Eastern bloc about the status of Berlin. You need to consider whether this had the potential for leading to war.
- Source 5 deals with the actual closing of the inner Berlin frontier.
- Source 6 stresses the personal tragedies caused by the closure of the Wall.
- Source 7 is an assessment by John Gaddis posing the question of whether the Wall was one of the reasons why the Cold War never became a ‘hot war’.

Again you must knit together this mosaic of sources, which contains important information, with other relevant material drawn from your own knowledge of the Cold War. An undivided Berlin within a divided Germany was clearly a source of instability because it enabled East Germans to flee westwards. By the summer of 1960 East Germany was near to collapse (page 125). What then would have happened? It is almost certain that Soviet troops would have had to intervene, with the subsequent risk of clashes with Western troops in Berlin. The Wall thus enabled the GDR to survive until 1989, allowed Khrushchev quietly to drop the idea of a separate peace and, in the medium term, forced the West Germans and their allies to come to terms with the existence of the GDR (page 128).