



## Background

### Kennedy and Khrushchev, the USA and the USSR ▼

#### The Bay of Pigs ▼

#### The Berlin Wall ▼

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The confrontation between the USA and the USSR over missiles in Cuba did not come out of nowhere. The two countries were engaged in a Cold War. The two leaders, John F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev, opposed each other in a series of incidents following Kennedy's election.

Kennedy's 1960 presidential election campaign was based on a tough stance on foreign policy. He alleged that a 'missile gap' had developed between the USA and its arch rival, the USSR. In his inaugural address in January 1961, he announced that he would "pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to assure the survival and success of liberty".

Kennedy and Khrushchev came face to face for the first time in June 1961 at the Vienna Summit. Kennedy left that conference feeling that a tough and skilful adversary had mauled him, while Khrushchev formed the impression that Kennedy was young and inexperienced.

### The Bay of Pigs

One of Kennedy's first decisions after he became president was to allow 5,000 Cuban exiles trained in the USA to launch an invasion of Cuba in a bid to get rid of Fidel Castro. This was the Bay of Pigs invasion of April 1961. It was a complete failure. Most of the Cuban exiles were captured. Kennedy refused to send American troops or to help with air attacks. The Cuban people did not support the invasion. Instead, they became more attached to Castro, who in turn drew closer to the USSR.

The failure of the invasion strengthened the view of Nikita Khrushchev that Kennedy was a weak and inexperienced leader. Even so, Khrushchev worried that a further, much larger American invasion of Cuba could follow.

### The Berlin Wall

After World War 2, Germany was divided in half, with West Germany becoming part of the alliance of western powers and East Germany coming under the influence of the USSR. Berlin was situated in the middle of East Germany but was divided between the west (USA, Britain and France) and the USSR. Increasingly, East Germans fled to West Germany to a life they felt would be freer and more prosperous. Barbed wire and machine-gun posts were erected along the border, but Berlin was the weak spot.



# HEROES & VILLAINS

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The communist government in East Germany decided that it had to do something to stop the flow of citizens from East Germany into West Berlin. They built a wall around the western part of the city in August 1961, dividing families and friends in the process.

The building of the wall increased tensions between the west and communist Eastern Europe. Kennedy feared that the USSR would try to take over all of Berlin. However, this fear did not prompt him to go so far as war.