

Activity 6.1

- 1 Why were the United States and the Soviet Union so fearful and suspicious of each other after 1945?
- 2 Explain the commitment made by US President Truman in March 1947.
- 3 Do you think the United States was justified in feeling threatened by the spread of communism after 1945?

HISTORICAL FACT

On only one occasion did the United States invade a nation and remove a communist government: the Caribbean island of Grenada in 1983.

Times gone by ...

In 1962, the Soviet Union placed medium and intermediate nuclear missiles on the island of Cuba, just 145 km from the United States. Some of the missiles had a range of 3218 km. The threat to the United States was clear. President Kennedy decided that the missiles could not be allowed to remain, but to forcibly remove them involved the real possibility of war with the Soviet Union, and global nuclear devastation. On 22 October 1962, Kennedy spoke live on television to the American people.

Good evening, my fellow citizens:

This government, as promised, has maintained the closest surveillance of the Soviet military build-up on the island of Cuba. Within the past week, unmistakable evidence has established the fact that a series of offensive missile sites is now in preparation on that imprisoned island. The

purpose of these bases can be none other than to provide a nuclear strike capability against the western hemisphere.

... This urgent transformation of Cuba into an important strategic base ... contradicts the repeated assurances of Soviet spokesmen, both publicly and privately delivered, that the arms build-up in Cuba would retain its original defensive character, and that the Soviet Union had no need or desire to station strategic missiles on the territory of any other nation ...

... Acting, therefore, in the defence of our own security and of the entire western hemisphere ... It shall be the policy of this nation to regard any nuclear missile launched from Cuba against any nation in the western hemisphere as an attack on the United States, requiring a full retaliatory response upon the Soviet Union ... My fellow citizens: let no one doubt that this is a difficult and dangerous effort on which we have set out. No one can foresee precisely what course it will take or what costs or casualties will be incurred. Many months in which both our patience and our will will be tested – months in which many threats and denunciations will keep us aware of our dangers. But the greatest danger of all would be to do nothing ... Our goal is not the victory of might, but the vindication of right – not peace at the expense of freedom, but both peace and freedom, here in this hemisphere, and we hope, around the world. God willing, that goal will be achieved.

Thank you and good night.

Source 6.11 President Kennedy's speech on television to the American people, 22 October 1962

- 1 Why was Kennedy so concerned about the placement of missiles on Cuba?
- 2 What does he accuse the Soviet Union of?
- 3 What warning does he clearly give the Soviet Union?
- 4 What danger existed if either Kennedy or the Soviet leader, Khrushchev, took rash action?
- 5 Why do you think Kennedy stated all this in public on television?