

Cold War crises

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The Cold War and the era of nuclear deterrence, which had led to a stand-off between the two superpowers since the end of the 1940s, reached its peak in the early 1960s.

In Europe, the status of the city of Berlin remained a major stumbling block for the two superpowers. The construction of the Berlin Wall, in the summer of 1961, closed the last crossing point between West and East.

Elsewhere in the world, the tension surrounding Cuba culminated in a trial of strength played out between John F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev in October 1962 over the stationing of Soviet nuclear missiles on the island. While the Cuban Crisis led to a retreat by the Soviets and represented a boost for the US Administration's prestige, the Czechoslovak crisis of 1968 allowed the Soviets to strengthen their position in Eastern Europe.

Alexander Dubcek's attempt to liberalise the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia was crushed in August 1968 by Warsaw Pact forces. The Western powers did not intervene and merely expressed their condemnation verbally.