

The Cuban Missile Crisis: A Lesson in Decision Making Worksheet

Group Members: _____

October 16, 1962 President John F. Kennedy

- On October 16, 1962, you are informed by your presidential advisors that American U-2 spy planes have just taken aerial photographs showing the construction of missile launch sites in Cuba. When completed, these launch pads will give the Soviets, who are supplying the missiles, the ability to fire nuclear weapons into the U.S. within a range of 1,000 miles and with little warning! These missiles will put the lives of 80 million American at great risk.
- The Premier of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev, had made a promise to the United States that he would not put offensive weapons in Cuba. You do not know why Khrushchev would break his promise and take this action. After all, the Soviet Union already has enough weapons positioned in their own country to destroy the United States. Your advisors speculate that possibly Khrushchev is upset about living under the threat of the U.S. medium-range nuclear weapons in Turkey. The placement of nuclear weapons in Turkey gives the U.S. a distinct advantage. Your advisors are also concerned that Khrushchev might be trying to trade Cuba for West Berlin — that is, the Soviets will remove missiles from Cuba if they can take possession of West Berlin.
- While the United States' arsenal of ICBM weapons is double that of the Soviet Union, the government is very concerned about close proximity of nuclear weapons to the United States. However, at this time, the missile sites are still under construction and not operational.

Brainstorming Session: List some possible options that you as President might consider in responding to the missile threat in Cuba.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Days Later... (October 1962) President John F. Kennedy

- The Soviets have continued their missile buildup in Cuba. It is only a short time before the launch sites will become operational. Once they are operational, the United States will have only two to three minutes of warning of a nuclear attack. The missiles installed by the Soviets will be able to reach major cities across the United States. The only major city outside their range will be Seattle.

- The primary goals of the United States are to get the missiles out of Cuba, avoid a nuclear attack, and stand strong against Soviets. The U.S. must also consider that her decision in this crisis will affect other countries.
- Your presidential advisors have offered three possible responses:
 1. A naval blockade of Cuba to prevent ships from bringing more supplies to Cuba
 2. A full-scale invasion of Cuba
 3. A conventional air strike against the missile sites

Brainstorming Session: Use the “Consider Your Options Decision-Making Chart” at Attachment B to evaluate each option, and list your conclusions about each.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

The Final Days of the Crisis President John F. Kennedy

- You have decided to undertake a naval blockade of the island of Cuba. You fear that a more aggressive form of action would put the country in danger of war, or worse, of a nuclear attack. As President, you feel that a surprise attack against Cuba might destroy the moral position of the United States throughout the world.
- On October 22, 1962, you address the American people on television about the circumstances in Cuba. You explain to the American people that a missile launched from Cuba would be considered an act of war. The United States would respond violently to such an attack.
- Now, you and your advisors must wait to see what the Soviet Union will do. There has been an ugly exchange of letters between you and Khrushchev. He has declared that the United States has issued an ultimatum by establishing the blockade. In addition, a United States U-2 spy plane has been shot down over Cuba by a Soviet missile and the pilot was killed.
- You must now consider what you will do if the crisis escalates. What should you do if the following occurs?
 1. The Soviets fire on American vessels enforcing the blockade
 2. The Soviets attempt to run the blockade

Brainstorming Session: Consider some possible scenarios.

1. _____

2. _____