

Cuban Missile Crisis Role Play

President: Okay, what's the problem?

CIA: Mr. President, we have confirmed that the Russians have placed nuclear missiles in Cuba. If you will look at this photograph, I will show you the missile sites. (show photo)

President: It looks like a field. Where are the missiles?

CIA: See this tent and this small depression here? These are missile ready sites. And here and here are fuel trailers for missile launches. These two spots are where missile ready tents were placed in the past.

President: How sure are you about this?

CIA: Absolutely. We have confirmed this on the ground and through other intelligence means as well as the photo.

President: Do we have confirmation from any other departments?

Secretary of Defense: I have reviewed the CIA information and confirm their report, Mr. President.

President: Very well, gentlemen, what are our options?

Military Adviser: I suggest we invade Cuba and get rid of Castro once and for all. We must stamp out communism. I hate to see it gaining a hold in the western hemisphere.

Expert on Latin America: You will not endear yourself to the Latin Americans or even to the Cubans. They love Castro at this point in spite of his breaking promises to them. I submit that we do nothing. Merely placing a bomb is not the same as launching a missile.

CIA: Nothing! Communism will not go away if we do nothing.

Military Adviser: If a full scale invasion is out then we might simply bomb their missile sites without putting a soldier on the ground. Or we could use a nuke against them before they hit us.

Secretary of Defense: I think we must do something. We absolutely can't tolerate this threat to our national security. But our response needs to not create the very threat we're trying to avoid: all out war.

CIA: What if we start with a blockade or negotiations with Russia first. We will be making a statement without precipitating a war none of us wants.

Adviser: I would council caution. Whatever we decide may shift the balance of power not only in the world, but here in Washington as well.

President: Okay, so we can do nothing, invade on the ground and overthrow Cuba, negotiate, blockade, fire nukes, or bomb their missile site. Ideas on the consequences of these actions please.

(Have the kids discuss the possible consequences of each option.)

Military Adviser: As much as I'd like to completely overthrow Castro, I have to say a missile attack on the sites would be the most effective, but restrained action to take.

CIA: Agreed, a missile strike sends a strong message that we won't tolerate nukes off our shores, but still doesn't necessarily mean an all out war.

Expert on Latin America: Reluctantly I have to agree. I think it could be managed with minimal loss of life and it is probable that if the Cubans knew of the nuclear missiles they would disapprove as well.

President: Do you all remember the Bay of Pigs incident? Advisers, anxious to make names for themselves and show a strong front, told me half truths, withheld information, and then made a mess of the whole thing. Before I agree to any military action at all, I will have to think long and hard on this and I suggest that you do as well, gentlemen. This meeting will adjourn. We will meet later tonight after you take time for some reflection.

Later that night . . .

President: Well, have we had more time to think our strategy over?

Military Adviser: I still have to say a bombing raid is in order, Mr. President. We simply cannot allow those missiles to menace our shores for decades to come. We must act.

CIA: Agreed. Either from the air or through a covert operation on the ground, we must destroy those missiles.

Expert on Latin America: I disagree. A less aggressive stance may serve our purpose just as well, without danger of inducing the Russians to respond with force. We didn't discuss it much, but a show of force, such as a naval blockade would perhaps be the best route. It sends the message without casualties and puts the next play in the hands of the communists. It removes us from responsibility.

Adviser: Yes, and with elections coming up, a bold move tempered by common sense will be perfect. We need more Democrats in the congress not an excuse for the Republicans to take over. I vote for a blockade.

Secretary of Defense: A blockade would be wise. It gives the message that we mean business. It isn't weakness or a mere show of words. With our navy destroyers and carriers off Cuba's coast, who could doubt it? But at the same time it gives no legitimate excuse for missile retaliations. The American people are afraid and when this crisis hits the media, as it must soon if we are to act, then they will be more afraid. We do not want to create a panic at the voting booth or on the streets.

Military Adviser: But your plan leaves the missile in place! It only delays the problem without resolving it.

Adviser: It does leave the missiles in place, but it lets the Soviets know we know about them and forces their hand. Are they to be seen as the aggressors? Will they take responsibility of starting a nuclear war into their hands? If we start the war by firing the first shots then we are to blame and we do not have the support of the world or of our own people. If we leave it in the Soviet's hands to make the next move while we quietly prepare for war, then we have the support of the world. I believe the Soviets will back down.

President: Very well, gentlemen. I have made my decision. We will blockade the coast of Cuba with our Navy, prepare our Air Force and Marines, and send a message to Moscow. In the meantime I need a speech explaining the action to all the American people. We will hold a news conference tomorrow. That will be all.

Discussion Questions

Did President Kennedy do the right thing?

What did you think of the reasons for choosing the blockade over other strategies?

Why did the crisis occur in the first place? What were the two sides competing for?

Result

Russia removed the missiles from Cuba. The U.S. removed missiles from Italy and Turkey. The "hot line" was established between the presidents of USA and USSR. A test ban treaty was signed. The USSR increased their nuclear capability to match the United States. China, seeing weakness in Russia, distanced itself from the Soviets. The United States grew bolder and entered wars in Viet Nam, Nicaragua, and Granada. The Bay of Pigs prisoners were ransomed.

MRBM LAUNCH SITE 2
SAN CRISTOBAL
1 NOVEMBER 1962

